

From: Kirk Westphal <writetokirk@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 12, 2023 6:24 PM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Subject: please deny the UMCU Plymouth Rd. petition

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Please deny the UMCU drive-through proposal because it violates multiple criteria that are required for special exception use approvals. I am writing as a member of UMCU and a neighbor who lives approximately one mile from the proposed location.

I was serving on the planning commission in 2014 when we finally decided to take action on the proliferation of drive-throughs. At the time, it was staff's opinion that we should make them a "special exception" use because this felt more conservative and allowed more discretion than an outright ban. (In hindsight, failing to enact a ban has proven regrettable because several drive-throughs along transit corridors have since been approved—mistakes that preclude housing and walkability—and will be with us for at least a generation.)

The criteria for approving special exception uses: 1) refer to language in the Comprehensive Plan, and 2) rely on your collective judgment about anticipated changes to a proposal's general area.

On page 218 of the UDC, Special Exception Use "Criteria for Approval," #1a states that the proposed use "will be consistent with the general objectives of the City [Comprehensive Plan]," and criteria #1b states that it "will be designed, constructed, operated and maintained in a manner that is compatible with the existing and planned character of the general vicinity." [Emphasis mine.]

What does the Comprehensive Plan say?

- "Locate higher residential densities near mass transit routes and
- in proximity to commercial, employment and activity centers... Encourage residential densities that can sustain bus transit on sites that front mass transit routes... Encourage multiple-family residential uses to locate above commercial uses."

(Goal B, Objective 1, 2009 Land Use Element)

- "Encourage a compact pattern of diverse development that maintains
- our unique sense of place, preserves our natural systems, and strengthens our neighborhoods, corridors, and downtown."
- (One of the three primary goals in "Land Use and Access," 2013 Sustainability Framework)
- "Adopt transit-supportive zoning and site design principles that

- encourage active transportation and transit, particularly along signature transit corridors. Good site design principles could include restricting auto-oriented land uses such as drive-throughs, setting parking maximums...”

(Near-term strategy, 2021 Comprehensive Transportation Plan)

Finally, with regard to being “compatible with the planned character of the general vicinity,” this site is literally "planned" for TC1, which would forbid drive-throughs (and other auto-intensive, low-density uses) altogether.

I believe that any one of these factors alone satisfies a denial according to the special exception use requirements.

In my view, this proposal clearly violates both the letter and spirit of the Comprehensive Plan and should not merit serious discussion.

Sincerely,

Kirk Westphal

PS: I realize I've been saying this for two years, but to prevent something like this from happening again on Plymouth or Washtenaw before completion of TC1 rezonings, I'd like to once again urge the implementation of either: 1) a temporary site plan moratorium on commercial properties in the transit corridors awaiting rezoning, or 2) the carbon neutrality plan's recommendation to implement a citywide parking maximum to stop the development of all new car-dominated uses. I prefer the second option because it's on your near-term work plan and is protective of the entire city, but if the contention is that a citywide parking maximum is too complex (I struggle to find evidence of that assessment), then please issue a moratorium.

(Another possibility is to pass a ban of single-story drive-throughs citywide. This would be fast and prevent the absolute worst-of-the-worst projects, but would continue to leave the city exposed to more strip centers and standalone parking-heavy restaurants.)

PPS: On a personal note, the UMCU board's decision to pursue this project is contrary to my values as a member-owner of the organization. I transferred my family and business banking from a national commercial bank to UMCU because of their non-profit model and relationship with the community. It is mystifying why they would invest members' money in the pursuit of a project like this 1) with knowledge of the community's housing needs and why the zoning is changing and 2) in the face of obvious neighbor opposition (although they did not have a representative at the last meeting when this similar proposal was roundly criticized).