

Citizens Advisory Council Meeting January 3, 2012  
Comments to the DDA January 4, 2012

Last night, our first Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council of the year turned out to be something of a classroom session. We had six high school students as guests—three from Skyline and three from Huron. They learned a lot about city government and the downtown.

Our members, along with others were saddened by the loss of Ray Fullerton, one of our most loyal and active members, who passed away three weeks ago. His memorial service will be at the First Baptist Church on East Huron, across the street from his home at Sloan Plaza, this Saturday, January 7, starting at 11:00 a.m. He will be missed—details.

In our discussion of the need for new CAC members, the students were made aware of the way in which city commissions are created. There can be 15 CAC members—all appointed by the Mayor and City Council. The major requirement is that we must all be residents of the Downtown Development Authority area—and we must have an interest in shaping goals and objectives for the Downtown. It's our job to publicly express these views to the City Council, the DDA, the Planning Commission--and to all groups that have an interest in the future of the downtown area. Members came up with names of 10 possibilities, but we urge you spread the word. At this point, the CAC could use at least three new members. Simply contact myself, any member of the CAC, the Mayor, or any member of City Council. We welcome any interested residents of the DDA area.

In our discussion with Susan Pollay of the work of the Midtown Discovery Steering Committee--along with other Downtown Development issues--the students got a lesson on Downtown Streets and the geography of downtown development opportunities. They already knew, however, the importance of locations like the Blake Transit Center and the Ann Arbor District Library—both essential focuses of downtown identity and vitality that are strongly supported by the CAC. We also talked about our commitment to downtown residential development at the Varsity Project on East Washington and at 618 South Main and the importance of the Downtown Design Review Board as a part of the process.

Visiting students were made aware of the CAC's support for DDA parking management plans and parking rates. They also heard about our commitment to the future of the Huron River and the importance of connecting the downtown consciousness to the river's proximity with wayfaring signs. We support the addition of Argo pond, the new Argo park, the canoe millrace, river bicycle paths, and the canoe livery as a part of our downtown directional signage.

Students even got an example of the heated discussions that can take place in a democratic process. That was shown last night in relation to the city's commitment to putting 38 parking spaces on top of the underground parking structure. Some of us are committed to having a portion of a future patio made open space at this time, perhaps with some public art—not just surface parking.

We will continue discussion of this issue at our January 31 meeting.

*We are also including some notes from our December 7th (informal) meeting that we feel are important to our work in 2012.*

Members were generally pleased at the progress Ann Arbor has made over the last year in programs we strongly support. We were very pleased at City Council's Monday night decision to preserve the percentage of art program at 1%. We will continue to work toward making that program a success by helping to identify possible future sites for public art—including a public fountain. We would like to see more beauty in the downtown in every possible form—art, sculpture, murals, fairy doors. We are especially interested in public art as a part of improving the pedestrian passageway from East Liberty to East Washington to the east of Talley Hall. I have placed drawings in front of you that show one possibility of creating an arched arcade in that important space.

We remain committed to providing more permanent downtown residents including senior citizen housing. But we will also work to improve downtown cleanliness and to expand the variety of stores and activities in the area—bookstores, groceries, and general retail. Today is the Grand Opening of Babo, Sava's grocery on S. Division and E. Washington.

There was a lot of praise from CAC members for the increased number of bike paths downtown and throughout the city. In spite of a lot of public criticism, the CAC continues to support the city program of improving the safety of pedestrians at public crossings. We recognize that this is a difficult change for motorists, but it's an educational process that we believe will eventually prove to be successful. Many of our members were loud in their support for the possible development of a rental bike system in Ann Arbor. They know the DDA has this under consideration.

CAC members continue to insist that the Ann Arbor District Library needs to be downtown—hopefully on its present site. We continue to be strong supporters of a major development on the top of the underground parking structure. We want to make that area—a very “special place” that adds to downtown's vitality—with the AADL nearby.

We agree with the new City Administrator in his commitment to expand the city's tax base with projects guided by the values we have incorporated in city plans and policies. In that regard the CAC takes great pride in the establishment of the city's adopted Design Guidelines with mandatory Design Review Board process and voluntary compliance. Although the recently approved Varsity project was not all we wanted it to be, current plans for 618 S. Main have benefited from the process of Design Review. The more our Planning Commission, the City Council and the public are involved in these design discussions and deliberations, the better. The more likely it will be that the thinking that led to the unanimous adoption of the Design Guidelines and Design Review Board process will serve to educate our citizens about the City's Design Guidelines, and will lead to future development that improves the design integrity of our streetscapes.