



SAC ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020

2017 Annual Report Follow Up

Meeting Structure

Due to scheduling concerns, the members of the 2019-2020 Student Advisory Council elected to meet the second Monday of every month. Meetings were held in the Michigan League or Michigan Union from 6-7 pm. To continue to accommodate the change in schedules of various members, the council adopted a new time every semester. At the start of every meeting, a 5 minute grace period was given to allow late members to come in. The 2020-2021 SAC should continue this structure but strive to elect a meeting time that gives city officials time to participate in the full extent of the discussion. We also recommend extending meeting times by 30 minutes as discussions often run longer than 30 minutes and take away time from other items on the agenda.

Leadership

Following the recommendations of the 2018-2019 SAC, we continued to have the chair, Kenji Yeoh (CSG), who is responsible for leading discussions, facilitating the creation of the annual report, and reaching out to student groups, and elected a new secretary, Zoe Markowitz (CSG), who is responsible for scheduling meetings, meeting reminders, and meeting minutes. For the future SACs, we recommend these positions are elected during the first April meeting of the Student Advisory Council and filled until the end of the next academic year, with each term lasting one year.

Presentations

During this academic year, the Student Advisory Council had the opportunity to hear from the Michigan Dark Skies group, Maize and Blue Cupboard, Climate Action Movement, and Student Tenants Union, in regard to different aspects of issues as they pertain to students in Ann Arbor. Much like the previous year, these presentations were useful in educating SAC members about the relevant focus areas, as well as facilitating discussion, disseminating information, and establishing networking opportunities to lay the foundation for collaboration between student groups. This is in line with the previous years of SAC recommendations, and the 2019-2020 SAC recommends that future councils continue to host presentations from student groups, especially earlier in the academic year. Furthermore, we recommend expanding the range of presenters to include non-students, ranging from government officials to professors and other experts in the field to provide a comprehensive yet deep analysis of issues relevant to student interests.

Outreach

The 2019-2020 SAC continues to recommend that members reach out to student groups through meetings outside of the monthly meeting structure to compensate for the limits of meeting presentations. We recommend selecting one member to lead and coordinate outreach efforts with student groups, surveying the various opinions and conceptions of the student body in regard to the efficacy of the Ann Arbor City Council in regard to the relevant focus areas decided by the SAC. This information should be used to supplement any statements the SAC wishes to make on certain resolutions of City Council and in the Annual Report.

Recommendations to the next SAC

- Future student advisory councils should extend meetings by 30 minutes
- Future student advisory councils should expand the range of presenters to include non-student presenters, especially those who are experts in their respective fields
- Future student advisory councils should have one person from the Michigan Daily attend their meetings, acting as a liaison so that any important announcements SAC makes to the public can be shared through a press release.
- Future student advisory councils should elect a member to facilitate and conduct one-on-one meetings with student organizations to bring about more opportunities for discussion

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This report will be coming to you amid the Coronavirus pandemic, a pandemic that pushes the limits of our healthcare system and strains the economy. Governor Whitmer issues a stay at home order for the entire state while the University of Michigan administration has pushed for students to travel back home. As a result, many university students are either isolated in their homes in Ann Arbor or back at home with their families. Public health is of utmost importance, and most of the student body understands this. We hope that the City Council is taking every measure it can to ensure the health of the city and that COVID-19 does not spread any further and put a strain on our hospitals.

Unfortunately, this has presented a unique and undesirable situation for many of the students that have decided to stay here. Whether it be a lack of resources at home or the risk of transmitting or receiving COVID-19, there is a sizable student population that is still in the city. Many students rely on an income to not only manage tuition but to pay bills regarding their rental leases. Those who work in the service industry and other low skill positions that require a physical presence have either been laid off or are unable to make an income as wages are determined by the hour. Unless deemed essential, some students are now at risk of being unable to pay their bills. This problem is not alleviated by the CARES act, as many students are still considered dependents. While families will receive \$500 for each child, \$500 is only enough for one month at one of the cheapest rental units in Ann Arbor, with some rents surpassing the \$1200 stimulus per independent taxpayer. Governor Whitmore as issued a ban on evictions until April 17th, but that is not enough since the school year does not end until the end of April, and the COVID-19 pandemic does not seem to slow down. With no ability to generate an income, yet

many leasing companies still requiring payment, many students are in jeopardy of losing their homes after the end of this ban. This is an issue that affects not just students, but many residents who cannot work as a result of the pandemic.

Recommendations

Considering the situation we are in, the SAC recommends the city council address this issue to ensure that no one in Ann Arbor loses their home at one of the worst times in American history. While a federal response is needed to address a pandemic of this scale, the response we have seen is not enough, with many state governments directing relief efforts. Action needs to be taken to ensure that everyone is financially stable and able to procure necessary supplies while still being able to live under a roof.

Affordable Housing

Background

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a dwelling is affordable if it can be obtained for 30 percent or less of a person's income. Using the HUD's definition, an affordable dwelling for most Ann Arborites would cost, at most, \$1600 a month. But college students are placed in a unique situation. "I couldn't afford to pay for about half of the city's housing options that are near campus," remarked then-senior Darian Razdar.¹ Darian is not alone in struggling to afford to house. Given that most students gain income through a mixture of family income and/or (generally part-time) work paying from minimum wage (\$9.45 per hour) to at most \$24 per hour, many students, who would only be able to afford between \$500 and \$1500 per month, are priced out or taken advantage of. Zoe, a low-income freshman who receives aid from the university, stated in an interview that it was, "difficult to find a private room below \$800/mo." Once she found a place she and her friends liked, their landlord repeatedly reminded them of the many other students who had expressed interest due to the scarcity in housing. They ended up signing in late September for a lease that wouldn't start until May of the next year.

Housing prices in Ann Arbor also burden many individuals beyond college age. "There's 4,000 people on the list on the waitlist of the Ann Arbor Housing Commission. That's 4,000 people experiencing housing insecurity," stated community-member Michelle Hughes.² The number of individuals struggling to hold on to their homes continues to grow. In the past year,

¹ Kaela Theut. Summer Daily News Editor. "City and Students Share Concerns over Affordability of Housing." *The Michigan Daily*, www.michigandaily.com/section/ann-arbor/affordable-housing-still-top-concern-students-city.

² Rosenfeld, Ben. "Councilmembers Discuss Affordable Housing Development in Ann Arbor."

the average sale price for a single-family home in Ann Arbor climbed 6.9 percent, while the average sales price for a condo rose 14 percent.³ This trend of rising Ann Arbor housing costs, coupled to substantially lower prices for housing in Ypsilanti, threatens to further divide Washtenaw County along socio-economic lines. A 2015 report commissioned by the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development stated that without substantially more affordable housing in Ann Arbor, the city faces a future where any less wealthy individuals, many of whom require the social support more readily provided in Ann Arbor, will be forced to move into more affordable Ypsilanti. This migration of lower-income households, leading to higher crime rates, economic stress, and lower rates of property maintenance in Ypsilanti, would further lower Ypsilanti property rates, plunging the housing market into a downward spiral. Congestion and air pollution would increase, as more individuals commute into Ann Arbor for work.⁴ The forced- movement of impoverished Ann Arbor families to Ypsilanti would also force many vulnerable kids into the substantially underfunded Ypsilanti school system, continuing the cycle of poverty for the youth of the next generation. This scenario, currently playing out across Washtenaw county, divides the cities along racial lines, as to be a person of color in America generally indicates one is less advantaged economically. The growing reality was referenced in comments made by the then- County Commissioner Yousef Rabhi five years ago. “If we don’t work hard and make sure we have our full options on where to live, not only will our student body become less diverse, our community will become less diverse”.⁵

³ Pinho, Kirk. “Ann Arbor Needs More Affordable Housing, but How?” *Crain's Detroit Business*, 23 June 2019, www.craigslist.com/real-estate/ann-arbor-needs-more-affordable-housing-how.

⁴ United States, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development, and Czb. www.washtenaw.org/DocumentCenter/View/2313/Housing-Affordability-and-Economic-Equity-Analysis-PDF?bidId=.

⁵ Kaela Theut Summer Daily News Editor. “City and Students Share Concerns over Affordability of Housing.” *The Michigan Daily* www.michigandaily.com/section/ann-arbor/affordable-housing-still-top-concern-students-city.

Recent history

To combat this disturbing trend, a 2015 report stated that at least 140 new affordable housing units must be built each year until 2035. Despite commitments from the City Council, only roughly 50 units have been built since the report was released.⁶

In the past year, multiple proposals that would have increased the number of affordable housing units in Ann Arbor have been rejected due to questions of “compatibility”.⁷ But that argument does not sit well with many community members. “Any change that would develop affordable housing gets a great deal of scrutiny around here,” mused community-member Michelle Hughes. “But we should also be giving more scrutiny to the status quo”.⁸ Despite calls for more affordable housing, there has been push-back against the selling of city-owned lands to developers. In 2018, a ballot proposal that would prevent the library lot from being sold was passed; instead of the lot being sold to create affordable housing, with the funds raised funnel back into the city’s programs, the land was designated for use as a park.

Despite the University of Michigan has increased its student population by 7,100 since 1990, only 1,080 beds have been added by the University in the past few years. This means that much of the burden to provide housing for these students fall on the private sector, putting further strain on the housing market.⁹ In 2017, the *Michigan Daily* interviewed Mackenzie Lawrence, a senior and one of the roughly 600 students who listed Ypsilanti as their residence. “[My boyfriend] and I can't afford an apartment in downtown Ann Arbor without getting a full-

⁶ Moran, Darcie. “Ann Arbor City Council Rejects Brightdawn Village Rezoning.” *Mlive*, Advance Local, 5 June 2019, www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2019/06/ann-arbor-city-council-rejects-brightdawn-village-rezoning.html.

⁷ Stanton, Ryan. “Ann Arbor Council Rejects Affordable Senior Housing Development.” *Mlive*, 19 Mar. 2019, www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2019/03/ann-arbor-council-rejects-affordable-senior-housing-development.html.

⁸ Rosenfeld, Ben. “Councilmembers Discuss Affordable Housing Development in Ann Arbor.” *The Michigan Daily*, University of Michigan, 18 Nov. 2019, www.michigandaily.com/section/ann-arbor/city-council-6.

⁹ Pinho, Kirk. “Ann Arbor Needs More Affordable Housing, but How?” *Crain's Detroit Business*, 23 June 2019, www.craindetroit.com/real-estate/ann-arbor-needs-more-affordable-h

time job.” Mackenzie, like current Ypsilanti students, had to commute to reach her classes.¹⁰ More students commuting increases congestion and pollution, and as more time is spent in transit, it becomes more of a hassle for these students to participate in the events often seen as integral to a college experience. But for many students, commuting is not an option. In an interview, freshman Zoe Gonzales remarked that she has found buses to be unreliable, and “most students don't have cars.” Though more affordable housing is available outside of downtown Ann Arbor, “students are already paying so much to go to a world-class university”—should they be worried about the commute, too?

Zoe called attention to the fact that many students don't qualify for aid from the university as she does. However, a lot of students are in this “awkward, in-between” economic class which can't afford both the exorbitant tuition price and expensive off-campus housing required to be a Michigan student, but who also don't qualify for university aid. While we recognize the progress that has been made in providing affordable housing units in the city for both families and students, it is nowhere near adequate to address the affordable housing crisis we see today.

Recommendations to City Council

- Establishment of a joint council with Ypsilanti to discuss how the cities can collaborate as they attempt to decrease the stark contrast in the municipalities’ housing markets.
- Providing better public transportation and parking infrastructure to minimize the congestion and pollution caused by commuters.

¹⁰ Kaela Theut Summer Daily News Editor. “City and Students Share Concerns over Affordability of Housing.” *The Michigan Daily*, www.michigandaily.com/section/ann-arbor/affordable-housing-still-top-concern-students-city.

- Educating the Ann Arbor population about issues caused by the lack of affordable housing, as well as readying the public for the sacrifices that will have to be made to build new units. This education could include running a social media campaign to encourage home-owning individuals to rent out extra rooms to college students and/or establish accessory dwellings.
- Putting pressure on the University to aid in the creation of more housing units for students, and specifically reaching out to the Board of Regents to schedule a meeting concerning housing on North Campus.
- Adhering to the commitment of 140 new housing units per year¹¹ by contracting available lands to companies able to create affordable units and allowing companies to build the maximum number of safe units.
- Ensure that new affordable housing units are priced to accommodate low-income families and students from those families.

¹¹ Kaela Theut Summer Daily News Editor. "City and Students Share Concerns over Affordability of Housing." *The Michigan Daily*, www.michigandaily.com/section/ann-arbor/affordable-housing-still-top-concern-students-city.

Climate Action

Background

Climate change is not something new to the United States or Michigan. However, as temperatures and greenhouse emissions continue to increase, there has also been a rise in global climate activism. Naina Agrawal Hardin, an eleventh-grade climate activist recently gave her opinion and perspectives on the climate crisis and its impact on the world. “Climate change will play a massive role in all of our futures... Like I said before, we will see a massive system collapse if we fail to act,” she warns. She believes that climate change will play a massive role in all of our futures, but perhaps her generation most of all.

With Ann Arbor committing to carbon neutrality by 2030¹², many individuals and communities are striving, in their ways, to make a difference. Although students like Naina are excited about the city’s commitment to carbon neutrality, they see much room for improvement. “I want to see Ann Arbor invest in neighboring communities like Ypsi and Detroit, which are more economically and racially diverse. I want to see us stand up to polluters like DTE. I want to see us take a stand against U of M's horrible record,” she says. Her desire for change was demonstrated by the climate walkout that occurred this past September. Naina, also an organizer of the event, is very passionate about, “creating a society that prioritizes people over profit.” That sentiment is reflected across Ann Arbor, where support for sustainability and environmental-friendly clubs in schools is increasing.

¹² Stanton, Ryan. “Ann Arbor Declares Climate Emergency, Sets 2030 Carbon-Neutral Goal.” *Mlive*, 15 Feb. 2020, www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2019/11/ann-arbor-declares-climate-emergency-sets-2030-carbon-neutral-goal.html.

Climate change's effects are highly tangible now and will be far into the future. According to the University of Michigan's Graham Sustainability Institute, Michigan's average air temperature will increase to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2050. By 2100, the average summer temperature is projected to increase by 7-13 degrees¹³. Precipitation is also predicted to increase, leading to increased drought, flooding, and erosion, and decreased soil moisture. These predicted changes would affect many local industries including farming, fishing, transportation, and our city's infrastructure.

This transition encompasses more than what we as a society have already imagined. Naina reminds us that intersectionality plays a large role in carbon neutrality. The city of Ann Arbor, she says, should consider worker's rights and health care, and should invest in the empowerment of communities of color, indigenous groups, and low-income socioeconomic groups when decarbonizing. The NAACP stated, "Environmental injustice, including the proliferation of climate change, has a disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities in the United States and around the world."¹⁴ These groups are also hit the hardest by changes in environmental, and thus economic policies, and require accommodations to prevent further inequalities.

Ann Arbor's fight against climate change will be a long one, and it can't be done without the full help and support of the City Council. Students and adults around the world have a vision for what our communities can be, but to achieve this vision, we must take one step at a time. These steps start in our smaller communities and cities, so making a change in Ann Arbor is essential to fulfilling the global goal. Naina fears that "when we do take action, it will be far too late. Or that

¹³ *Climate Change in Ann Arbor Summary of Projected Changes in Climate and Associated Impacts*. http://graham.umich.edu/media/files/ImpactsSummary_AnnArbor.pdf.

¹⁴ "Environmental & Climate Justice." *NAACP*, www.naacp.org/issues/environmental-justice/.

when we do take action, it won't be intersectional, and will only further the systemic inequities along lines of race and class that allowed the climate crisis to get so bad in the first place.” These fears are reflected in the youth and activists of today. Do not drag this crisis out any longer - take action now.

Recommendations to City Council

Recognizing the advances that have already been made at the direction of the City Council, we recommend that the city continue to take urgent and aggressive action to meet the threat of climate change, while at the same time ensuring a just transition for workers and residents whose lives may be disrupted by such policies. The next steps must be both bold and practical. We believe that the City Council must double down on its commitment to take on the existential threat of climate change. Therefore, we recommend that the City Council adopt the following recommendations:

- Examine every issue, whether it be housing, unemployment, poverty, or something else, through the lens of climate change to provide for an all-hands-on-deck approach to the issue.
- Rigorously abide by the 2030 carbon-neutral target laid out in the November 2019 climate emergency declaration.
- Revise the 2012 Climate Action Plan to focus on the new target of carbon-neutrality by 2030.
- Invest in and expand green public transportation in Ann Arbor (such as busing and electric scooters).

- Weatherize city buildings and perform energy efficiency upgrades to make buildings more energy-efficient and lower energy bills, while running an educational campaign to encourage homes and businesses to do the same.
- Begin taking steps towards decarbonizing public transit and replacing all school and transit buses with electric buses.
- Review whether policies such as a carbon tax or levy on fossil fuel companies that disincentivize fossil fuel production and use are under the purview of City Council and if they are, enact them.
- Ensure that any workers and residents displaced or whose lives are disrupted by a rapid transition to carbon neutrality are provided a robust social safety net to guarantee them a decent standard of living.
- Utilize all available county, state, and federal resources to assist in Ann Arbor's transition to carbon-neutrality.
- Create a Climate Risk Report to fully take note of all the risks and challenges posed by climate change that will need to be met by legislative action.
- Adopt a resolution calling on the federal government to reenter the Paris Agreement.
- Adopt a resolution calling on the University of Michigan to divest from all its fossil fuel investments.
- Continue to hold town halls and other public events to raise public awareness and resident engagement on climate change, as well as to seek further solutions.

Mental Health

Background

In Michigan, 46% of people with anxiety disorders, 53% of people with depressive episodes, and 85% of people with alcohol use disorders go untreated. We are and have been in a mental health crisis. With a low supply of psychiatrists and behavioral health providers and ever-increasing demand, this is not a surprise. For example, currently, there are 11 adolescent child psychiatrists for every 100,000 people. This is extremely low compared to the recommended ratio of having 47 adolescent child psychiatrists for every 100,000 people. While the causes of mental health issues can range from genetic to environmental factors, we see a pervasive miasma of mental illness in most student populations. The average percentages for adolescents who are feeling depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts are substantially greater than the national U.S. percentages. Many students feel depressive symptoms because of stress at school, lack of sleep, conflicts at home, and other distressing environments.

Recommendations to City Council

While expanding the number of mental health resources may be out of the scope of this council, one promising solution is to provide more opportunities for youth involvement, as a feeling of helplessness has been a key contributor to the depression seen among students. Youth involvement in key discussions regarding the development of the city will not only address this but provide unique insight and feedback, shedding light on issues unique to the youth population. Therefore, the SAC recommends that the city council includes or expands the number of youth members in the following boards/commissions:

- Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority Board
- Ann Arbor Public Schools Transportation Safety Committee
- Center of the City Task Force
- City Planning Commission
- Housing affordability and equity task force
- Human Rights Commission
- Independent Community Police Oversight Commission

Furthermore, it is also important to advertise any openings for youth members in any board/commission to all schools. Thus, we also recommend that these openings are advertised to student bodies in all schools in the Ann Arbor area through student organizations, PTAs, and third-party organizations which contain a large percentage of student/youth members.