



**City of Ann Arbor**  
**Formal Minutes - Final**  
**Planning Commission, City**

301 E. Huron St.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
[http://a2gov.legistar.com/  
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Tuesday, July 7, 2015

7:00 PM

Larcom City Hall, 301 E Huron St,  
Second floor, City Council Chambers

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**10-a 15-0834**

542-548 North Main Condominiums Site Plan for City Council - A proposal to demolish residential structures at 542 and 544 North Main Street, combine them into a 0.3 acre parcel and construct a 4-unit townhouse building. A single curb cut will provide access to below-building garages on the north side of the site. (Ward 1) Staff Recommendation: Approval

**PUBLIC HEARING:**

*Christina Lirones, said she owns the property directly across the street at 113 Felch Street, Ann Arbor. She said she is concerned about the north and east elevations that lack articulation and architectural features. She said since the building is visible on all four sides, she would be happier to see more detail on the north and east sides that are showing barren, given how visible this property is in the neighborhood. She said this project seems to fit in with the existing uses in the area and the combining of the lots was done in a way that there is not too much mass. She said she wanted to point out that this is a historic area and we need to take care to maintain the historic character of these historic areas so they don't turn into apartments up and down the street.*

*Barbara Barton, 538 N. Main Street, Ann Arbor, said she lives directly adjacent from this proposed project and was present to speak in favor of the project. She said they do believe it will change their landscape dramatically; however, the change from rental to permanent housing will make a change to the feel of the neighborhood and will make those residents take more pride in their neighborhood. She said her husband and her have been living here for more than 30 years and while she usually doesn't like change, she can embrace this change. She said she has seen other projects that were on an enormous scale and didn't fit the character of the neighborhood, but she feels the petitioner has gone out of his way to incorporate architectural features, like the pitched roofs, and other elements that will complement the neighborhood. She applauded the Commission's approval of the project.*

*Tom Fitzsimmons, Huron Development, LLC, 408 North First Street, Ann Arbor, developer of the project, noted that the tree proposed to be*

*removed is a non-landmark tree; however, because they have to remove it they will be planting four new trees in the park. He said discussions with the neighbors and the Park's Department include removing some other invasive trees in the park and replacing them with new trees as well. He said he is excited about this project that has also been designed by architect Lincoln Poley, whose other projects have been well received in the Old Fourth Ward and with the immediate neighbors. He said he lived in this neighborhood, across the park for 11 years and knows it's a great neighborhood. He said he feels that these condominiums fit very well into the scale, character and feel of the neighborhood.*

*Noting no further speakers, the Chair declared the public hearing closed, unless the item is postponed.*

**Moved by Franciscus, seconded by Briere, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Mayor and City Council approve the 542-544 N. Main Street Site Plan, subject to combining both lots before the issuance of building permits, and subject to the planting of 4 trees and restoration of graded areas before issuance of any Certificate of Occupancy.**

**COMMISSION DISCUSSION:**

*Peters asked the petitioner to describe the thought process as to why entrances are facing south, rather than north.*

*Fitzsimmons said they essentially have 3 or even 4 fronts to this building, and when they do small in-fill projects they have to decide where to put cars and how to design driveways and parking. He said their preferred choice is to put it under the buildings, getting it out of sight, which is what they have done here. He said they have the natural grade on the site with a 6 foot cross-slope and an existing curb cut that aligns with Felch Street, which is where MDOT prefers it. He said all of those issues drove their design and where they would locate the parking. He said the park frontage on North Main Street and the other sides, facing the neighbors, will be extensively landscaped. He said one of the things that they couldn't do was put extensive landscaping on the park side given the R4C standards, so instead they have worked with the City's Park Department to help improve landscaping and design in the park. He said they have tried to work with the community, the North Central Neighborhood Association and neighbors, in trying to fit the development into the scale and character of the neighborhood and get the cars out of sight.*

*Peters said he sees the point made by the public speaker regarding*

*elevation plans, for the side facing the park, seeming less articulated with less windows.*

*Fitzsimmons said this specific elevation is designed like their Catherine project, which has a lot of articulation and given all the ins and out of that side, with decks, he felt it was going to be really nice and a great building. He said right now, the garage is at the park property line, with the new building to be located 30 feet away, which will allow for lots of landscaping, and they will be 20 feet away from the house to the north. He said he felt the final project would look better than what it does in the plans, as has been said with the Catherine project.*

*Woods suggested that it would be helpful to include color renderings when the project goes to Council.*

*Briere said it would be nice if the design had included the placement of a front porch-back porch facing Main Street, making it more distinct at that site so that the currently small landing porch was more present on the Main Street facade. She said it would be very pleasant to see an exterior porch, facing the park for that unit as well, on the north, adding that she believed the new condo owners would appreciate those types of amenities that would fit into this front-porch neighborhood.*

*Briere asked how many people are currently living in the existing two buildings.*

*Fitzsimmons said he wasn't sure, noting they were both single-family rentals with possibly 3 to 4 bedrooms in each.*

*Briere asked if the garage was a separate rental.*

*Fitzsimmons said he didn't know.*

*Fitzsimmons said regarding the front porch suggestions, he can provide pictures of other examples that have worked well on other projects. He said regarding the decks, he will have to talk to staff and his designers about the possibility given the current code on roofs and setback requirements.*

*Franciscus said she likes the design and feels that it fits with the neighborhood and is an improvement to the area. She said the landscaping should improve the park and make the area gel really well, noting that it currently doesn't feel that way. She said it was a wise use of*

*space and likes the resulting resident permancy as well as the curb appeal of the project.*

*Clein noted that the east and west elevations are mislabeled. He asked if each unit has an elevator.*

*Fitzsimmons said yes.*

*Clein said that was great given the demographics of Ann Arbor. He asked about the size of the units.*

*Fitzsimmons said they are each 2,200 square feet.*

*Clein said he gets the sense that there is a fair amount of articulation on the elevations that don't come through on the drawings. He agreed with Woods on the suggestion of providing color renderings. He said he is usually not a fan of changing building orientation, but given the busy Main Street, he felt the proposed orientation works well.*

*Peters said he used to live at 544 N. Main Street, which was a 3-bedroom house with a garage that was in 2008, rented separately. He said these are historic homes and it may have been more expensive to fix them up than construct new.*

**On a voice vote, the Chair declared the motion carried.**

**Yeas:** 6 - Wendy Woods, Kenneth Clein, Sabra Briere, Jeremy Peters, Sofia Franciscus, and Alex Milshteyn

**Nays:** 0

**Absent:** 3 - Eleanore Adenekan, Sarah Mills, and Bonnie Bona