

Downtown Area Citizen Advisory Council Comments to the DDA—June 1, 2011

First I want to remind you of the Annual Downtown Potluck Party to be held on Thursday, June 9, starting at 6:30 p.m. This is a Downtown event that last year drew 250 people who are important to the downtown. We hope you will be there this year.

Last night, CAC members recommitted to supporting DDA and AATA efforts to combine improvements in Transportation and Area Planning in the downtown. We also reaffirmed support to the Fuller Road Transit Station—we hope with improved design.

In the downtown, we intend to strongly support broad planning for the area that includes the Library, the top of the underground parking structure, the Blake Transit Center, and the old YMCA site. The members attending our meeting engaged in an in-depth discussion of the various possibilities for the Library Lot location itself. Those present were, once again, unanimous in agreeing that the Library Lot site should be more than a park. Instead, they unanimously supported the idea of a mixed-use development on the Library site that might include office, residential, and retail as well as a plaza--as green as possible-- that connects pedestrians to the existing Liberty Plaza Park on Liberty and Division. That new plaza space should be available, and connected to the future Library Lane site, as a location for future large programmed downtown gatherings. Whatever is approved on the Library Lot site should significantly add to the City's tax base as well as enhancing the ongoing vitality of the downtown area.

We have been suggested that we need to go back to the community to find out what they want downtown. We thought the last six years of Calthorpe and A2D2 had done that.

The A2D2 process has been long and complicated. The initial years of work that went into developing and adopting a community Vision and Policy Framework for Downtown Ann Arbor, a Revised Downtown Plan, and a Downtown Parking Study were not without conflict. Everybody had their say. Community members, city officials, Planning Department staff and consultants all joined in the task. We have been impressed with how original, innovative, and rigorous the thinking has been. It produced results we enthusiastically encouraged the city to adopt—even though, at first, we sometimes disagreed with particular directions. Recognition of the inter-connective importance of transportation and parking, of increased density and improved design, and of private development and historic preservation in shaping the vitality and identity of our downtown has been a comprehensive learning experience for all of us.

A2D2 has reinforced our faith in careful planning. It has replaced a confusing hodge-podge of a dozen zoning districts with two clearly defined areas of greater density in which distinctive character neighborhoods are identified and design guidelines are recommended. It took a year's work for a Council-appointed Design Review Task Force to complete the job of shaping and winning approval for a Design Review Board and a design review process. It was the final and essential part of the process.

Let's follow it.