

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes for 7-10-12 and Comments to the DDA 7-2-12

The Downtown Area CAC meeting has been postponed until July 10. That is in order that our group can be one of the first to provide feedback to the Connecting William Street presentation of the various goals and scenarios for transforming the five city-owned parking areas into uses that will better serve the Ann Arbor Community. We are devoting our entire meeting to that survey. I have sat in on two planning meetings of the DDA and the Connecting William Street group in the last couple of weeks. I want to praise them for their very open approach to developing the possible alternatives for these sites in preparation for the broad public meetings that will eventually take place.

We are particularly pleased that the scenarios for the Library Lot site already include a large public patio, almost the size of Liberty Plaza, the planned use of a large part of the adjoining Library Lane for scheduled gatherings, and a clearly marked pedestrian walkway from these open spaces to what we hope will be an improved Liberty Plaza park in the near future. One scenario even provides for the possibility of even more green space in front of a mixed use development above the underground parking structure.

As you know, the CAC is very pleased with Ann Arbor City Council's approval of the site plan as well as the Brownfield application for the residential development and streetscape improvement at 618 South Main. This development is rare in that it had the strong support of City Planning Staff, Old West Side residential neighbors—as well as the Downtown Area CAC and members of the Downtown Neighborhood Design Review Committee. But it would not have happened without the hard work of the DDA Partnership Committee in shaping a clearly stated Policy Regarding Grant Requests for Brownfield or Other State of Michigan Programs Requiring a Local Match. As a result, some of the sizeable TIF money for this project, combined with the expected help of a Brownfield grant from the State will go to improve the streetscape of South Main all the way to Ashley Mews and the center of town. All of us look forward to joining new residents and neighbors in a much improved gateway walk to and from the urban vitality of our downtown. We also hope for a CAC member from among the new residents.

Finally, we hope that the new owners of the large property on East Huron, just west of Sloan Plaza, will learn something from our experience with 618 S. Main. Right now, we understand, they are planning to build more student housing in a "Character Area" next door to mixed age and income residential housing. They are allowed to build up to 150 feet. We hope the project will benefit from neighborhood input, from the growing wisdom of the design review board and process, and perhaps from the public benefit possibilities of a planned project to construct something that does not have a totally negative impact upon the residents of Sloan Plaza (two of them members of the CAC).

I recently had a long talk with an Ann Arbor realtor who tells me that there is an increasing demand for downtown housing at all levels of age and income. We are all pleased about Barracuda's plans to move hundreds of employees into the former Borders site. We hope the economy and changing demographics may produce less emphasis on student housing and more on mixed level housing in the downtown.