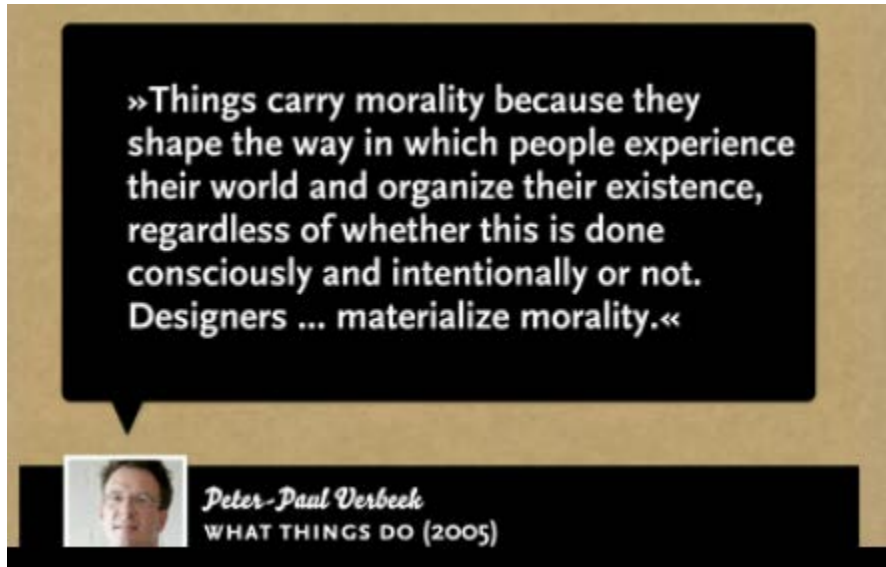


**From:** Julie Ritter [<mailto:ritter.julie@gmail.com>]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 29, 2013 11:27 PM  
**To:** Planning  
**Subject:** You Are Materializing Morality



Dear Planning Commissioners:

All through the process of the rezoning discussions the above quotation has stuck in my mind.

The reality that you are shaping for our City carries ethical and moral values implicit in the physical expressions of the buildings that you approve for construction.

The numerous pressures on the City to increase property tax income probably make it hard to come up with a good argument against the biggest, tallest, densest buildings. These pressures, if followed simply by rational calculation, logically conclude at the doorway of enormous, maximized monstrosities, such as those we have recently suffered being subjected to.

A city, any city, and especially Ann Arbor, is not simply a rational calculation. A city, any city, is a materialization of decades and decades of visions, hopes, dreams and plans. It is an organic, living, system of obligation, mutual benefit, of give and take, from the least influential citizen to the most powerful institution. It is a web of reciprocity if it is to be healthy and alive.

Ann Arbor, especially, is a city that is always looking toward the future. We are always planning for better and hoping for the best. We are not a city that is trapped in the past and we should not be trapped in the present either. What looks like the answer to today's problems (that answer being massive, monolithic apartment buildings crammed tightly together) is conceivably the foundation of tomorrow's problems. Remember Urban Renewal? And how did that work out?

I have even heard that the latest of the huge horrors, 413 East Huron, is going to be built as a shell, and left to sit empty for a couple of years while the developers decide what market they should go after before they complete the interior. It appears that the student housing market is already overbuilt. And they got final approval only a few months ago based largely on student housing!

Please take time to read some of the writings of

Brent Toderian

<http://www.good.is/posts/density-neighborliness-and-the-concentrated-we>

<http://www.planetizen.com/node/61643>

<http://spacing.ca/vancouver/2012/09/11/want-families-downtown-design-for-them/>

and Jane Jacobs:

<http://features.blogs.fortune.cnn.com/2011/09/18/downtown-is-for-people-fortune-classic-1958/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/26/books/26jacobs.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>

Think about the long-term implications of your decisions for the quality of life, the type of lives, the creativity, the kinds of people who are attracted to our city and to our downtown.

Will there be many people attracted to a vibrant, joyful, diverse and creative downtown full of welcoming architecture, good public transportation, a variety of choices for activities and community involvement?

OR

Will there be many people who turn away looking for a more enticing place to live because our downtown has become homogenous and tedious with nothing particularly attractive to recommend it?

Why take our lovely city and make it less lovely?

By requiring quality, forward thinking zoning and design standards, standards that are supported by the community, your work helps to move the construction conversation out of the realms of merely logic and money, into the realms of creative possibility, emergent attractiveness, and well founded pleasure.

Quality, forward thinking zoning and design standards form the basis for the human experience that will become the Ann Arbor of the future. The human experience that is the materialized morality Mr. Verbeek talks about in the opening quotation above.

"To create a downtown in an atmosphere of urbanity and exuberance is not a frivolous aim." - Jane Jacobs

Please give us the thoughtful zoning and quality design standards that will result in the kinds of buildings we are happy to see built, and a city we can rejoice in.

Respectfully,

Julie Ritter

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Clear a path by walking it, boldly. - Tara Sophia Mohr