

From: David Bizot [<mailto:dbizot@yahoo.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2013 12:15 PM
To: Planning
Subject: Shoppes at 3600 Rezoning and Site Plan

Dear commissioners -

Please see the attached letter regarding The Shoppes at 3600 Rezoning and Site Plan (3600 Plymouth Road), file numbers Z12-008 and SP12-024. I ask that it be considered when considering this petition during the January 15, 2013 meeting of the commission.

Regards,
David Bizot

David Bizot
3359 Yellowstone Dr
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
January 15, 2013

The Planning Commissioners
of the City of Ann Arbor
301 East Huron St.
Larcom City Hall
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

**Re: The Shoppes at 3600 Rezoning and Site Plan (3600 Plymouth Road)
Files Nos. Z12-008 & SP12-024**

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to express concerns about the proposed City Planning Commission (CPC) Motion recommending approval of The Shoppes at 3600 Rezoning from R5 (Motel-Hotel District) to C3 (Fringe Commercial District). I ask the CPC to postpone further action on the petition until the issues raised in this letter have been fully considered and addressed.

In addition, I would like to let the CPC know that the Orchard Hills-Maplewood Homeowners Association (OHMHA), of which I am a board member, recently voted to submit comments to the CPC on this project. Due to the late notice that this petition would be on the January 15 CPC agenda, the board, which is comprised of volunteers otherwise having full-time schedules, has not had sufficient time to finish compiling its comments for submission to the commission. For this reason also, I ask the CPC to defer action on this petition until formal comments from the OHMHA have been received. I stress that the views in this letter are mine alone and are not intended to represent those of the OHMHA or its board.

I have the following specific concerns with the petition as currently proposed:

1. Incomplete consideration of increased vehicular traffic

The proposed development is at a location which already suffers from heavy motor vehicle traffic and a confusing traffic pattern, particularly when exiting the parcel in question. This situation is particularly acute during peak traffic hours (morning and evening rush), during which this new development is expected to generate the most activity.

I have reviewed the Traffic Impact Study completed for this project and note the following:

- Site-generated “new” traffic will represent about a 2% increase in traffic on the street system adjacent to this development.
- The Plymouth/Green Road intersection is already operating at Level-of-Service F (the worst rating) and fails during the PM peak hour. Delay at this intersection will increase a further 3% as a result of the project.
- The Green Road Northernmost Access road is already blocked by the traffic queuing up on Green Road during the PM peak hour, which delays exiting traffic. Critically, this road is the most convenient legal method by which to exit the property to go west on Plymouth or either direction on Green.

Taken individually, these increases may appear minor. However, the following impacts of these changes were acknowledged by neither the petitioner nor by the CPC staff:

- A 3% increase in delay at an important neighborhood intersection that already is failing has a real effect - it means more vehicles will be waiting through an additional signal cycle. This will have a meaningful, daily impact to those passing through in the intersection to get to and from work, school, etc. during the evening rush.
- The traffic study only considered this development in a vacuum and did not consider the *cumulative* effects on intersection volumes and delays resulting from other northeast Ann Arbor development (e.g., Plymouth Green Crossing PUD revised site plan, new Plymouth Road Mall outbuilding). Small, individual increases can become significant when considered cumulatively.
- There was no discussion about how to improve traffic flow exiting the Green Road Northernmost Access, which the study acknowledges is blocked at peak hours by queuing vehicles and that will experience increased volume because of this project.

The petitioner does not make any allowance for these impacts, other than proposing to improve the signage to help eliminate the already prohibited left turns onto Plymouth. I agree this improvement would be appropriate, but that does not address all the conclusions found made by the traffic study; in particular, the increased traffic and delay predicted to result. I therefore ask the CPC to postpone further action on this petition until:

- The petitioner and/or CPC staff have provided sufficient explanation as to why this project justifies the increased congestion and delay predicted by the study; in particular, why increasing peak hour delay times is considered acceptable at the Green/Plymouth intersection;
- The cumulative impacts on traffic in this area from other projects have been considered; and
- Mitigations or design changes are made that will reduce or eliminate the delay that already occurs at the Green Road Northernmost Access when queuing vehicles block vehicles exiting the parcel via this access.

2. Impact of this project on the look and feel of the Plymouth Road corridor

In addition, I believe this petition does not take into account the impact on the look and feel of Plymouth Road, considering this roadway is a major gateway to the city and this building would become one of the first things people will encounter. The proposed project will be very visible from Plymouth Road, especially when compared to neighboring development. The location proposed for the new building is currently “green space” containing many mature trees, which provides an esthetically pleasing buffer between nearby roadways and the existing development; in addition, the existing hotel parking lot, largely hidden from the road by foliage, provides a large setback to the hotel and associated retail. The proposed project would substantially change the look and feel of this parcel, resulting in a more commercial look to city’s entrance and giving a significantly different “first impression.” The mitigation trees proposed to be planted are unlikely to make a significant difference in this regard.

I think the CPC would find, even among those who otherwise support commercial development in this area, that there is little neighborhood interest in having Plymouth Road end up looking like Washtenaw Avenue or State Street, where the first things people see upon leaving the highway are dense retail development and fast food restaurants. I further believe that many residents, including myself, appreciate the larger setbacks and ample open space that characterize stretches of Plymouth. I note that the city’s Master Plan (Land Use Element), while generally supportive of commercial activities along Plymouth Road, was not intended to address the question of “What do we want Plymouth Road to look like in the future?” or “What impression do we want to have on those entering the city using Plymouth?” However, I believe it’s very appropriate for the CPC to consider this petition from this perspective, and hope the commission shares the belief that this sort of development, as proposed, may not necessarily be the first thing we want people to see when they enter town. I therefore urge the CPC to postpone further action on this petition until this aspect of the project has been thoroughly debated and accounted for.

3. Limitations of public notification

Finally, the fact that I am submitting comments at this date, rather than earlier in the planning process, highlights limitations of the current city regulations regarding notifications to the community of proposed development.

I acknowledge that the petitioner met, or exceeded, the minimum city requirements by notifying residents within 1000 feet of the project of the proposed petition. Having said that, due to the location of this project, this radius included very few actual residences and missed most of the nearest neighborhoods entirely (including Orchard Hills-Maplewood); therefore, residents of these neighborhoods, myself included, were largely unaware of petition when it was first proposed last year and are just now coming up to speed.

In my experience, residents of these neighborhoods tend to be interested in land use changes near their homes. I have talked to some of my neighbors informally about this petition, and can report that (1) none of them were aware of this proposal at all, and (2) once made aware of it, there are a variety of opinions about if and how it should proceed. This includes some support for this petition, as well as various degrees of concern and opposition. This is unscientific, but gives some sense about the limited awareness of the petition in my neighborhood.

Knowing this, at this time I don't believe the CPC can conclude that all community concerns about this petition have been considered and addressed. Therefore, I urge the petitioner to consider additional outreach to the nearby neighborhoods before proceeding with this project. The OHMHA, as mentioned, has become aware of the project and intends to formally present comments to the CPC; in addition, it is now publicizing this project through its listserv and on the web. I believe additional time is required for residents to become familiar with the petition and voice any concerns they may have, and that a modest additional postponement by the CPC to provide an additional window for this input does not seem unreasonable.

I urge you to postpone action on this petition until the concerns raised in this letter have been addressed. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Bizot". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name "David" and last name "Bizot" clearly visible.

David Bizot