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To: City Council Members

From: Scott E. Munzel *SM*

Re: City Place PUD- Testimony of Urban Planner

Date: January 2, 2009

Alex de Parry retained an urban planner, David Birchler, to assist him on the issues related to the City Place Planned Unit Development. Birchler will not be able to attend the public hearing scheduled for Monday night, January 5, 2009, but has drafted his comments for your review in written form, and he asked that I deliver them to your Council mailboxes. Please contact me if you have any questions, and thanks in advance for your attention to this matter.

Enclosure



Proposed City Place PUD

Report Prepared for Ann Arbor Mayor & City Council
January 2, 2009

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The following discussion points were prepared by David C. Birchler, AICP, PCP President of Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. based upon a review of relevant planning documents of the City of Ann Arbor including: Central Area Plan, Calthorpe Plan, and Downtown Residential Task Force Report to City Council. These points are offered in response to the report prepared by Planning Department Staff and they are intended to present an alternate professional opinion with regard to the application of relevant goals and policies of the City of Ann Arbor.

City Place Location & Neighborhood

- A neighborhood is more than the houses on one side of the street. For purposes of analyzing compatibility, the City Place neighborhood extends a few blocks in all directions, and is not limited to the immediate block, as the Staff Report seems to suggest
- The most important component of any neighborhood is its people, not the structures
- A true urban neighborhood includes a mix of housing types, at a variety of appropriate densities, designed for residents at a range of income levels
- City Place is located in Ann Arbor's South Central Neighborhood, more specifically, north of East Jefferson Street in the sub-neighborhood directly abutting the Downtown District
- The residential component of City Place's sub-neighborhood is zoned multiple family and has virtually all been converted to student rental buildings – it exhibits no mix of housing types, no variety of densities, no range of income levels, nor any affordable housing element

City Place's Proposed Building Form & Character

- ❑ In an urban setting, particularly at the neighborhood edge near downtown, a brownstone-style apartment with underground parking is an appropriate building form that adds character as well as housing opportunity to the neighborhood
- ❑ In that same urban setting, on the edge of downtown, an increase in residential density brings variety into the neighborhood
- ❑ The type and quality of materials proposed for the City Place brownstone echoes the same qualities one finds in many parts of Ann Arbor's downtown, University district, and neighborhoods
- ❑ While its form may be different from several individual multiple family structures, City Place is compatible in character and appearance with its neighborhood
- ❑ It is an established policy of the Central Area Plan to encourage new forms of architecture

City Plans & Policies Relevant to Proposed City Place PUD

- ❑ The 1992 Central Area Plan includes over 40 pages of problem statements, goals, and actions associated with its neighborhoods and housing
- ❑ These 40 pages cannot be applied literally to a single lot, a small grouping of lots, or an individual street
- ❑ Their correct application is in the context of the whole City as a living, evolving organism

- In 1992, the CAP identified density, affordability, and student impacts as problems persistent in its neighborhoods, stating:
 - ✓ The cost of housing is high ... making it more difficult for low and moderate income people and families to purchase or rent housing
 - ✓ Development of new affordable housing opportunities in the Central Area is difficult because there is no consensus regarding ... possible locations or appropriate densities, and
 - ✓ The most common student impacts are parking, along with lifestyle differences between students and other residents

- The goals of the CAP designed to address these issues included:
 - ✓ To encourage the development of new architecture ... that compliments the scale and character of the neighborhood
 - ✓ To protect and maintain the diversity of people and housing by promoting a stable balance
 - ✓ To ... expand the supply of housing to meet the needs of a variety of lifestyles and incomes
 - ✓ To educate the public ... about affordable housing in order to minimize neighborhood resistance
 - ✓ To increase home ownership and rental opportunities for low income persons, and
 - ✓ To facilitate ... private initiatives to develop affordable housing

Downtown Residential Task Force

- ❑ In 2004, City Council charged its Downtown Residential Task Force to develop strategies and recommendations that would **foster** new downtown residential development
- ❑ The Task Force's study area was the Downtown District and everything within ¼ mile
- ❑ City Place directly abuts the Downtown District and is within the first block of the ¼ mile-wider study area
- ❑ The Task Force recommended a goal of 1,000 units of new housing near the downtown
- ❑ City Place provides 9% of this goal in a neighborhood location consistent with the Task Force's recommendations and its study area boundary – City Place is a virtual bullseye for meeting the goals of this City policy
- ❑ Returning City Place's sub-neighborhood to single family homes can only be accomplished by persons at the apex of the income pyramid – not those who require more affordable housing alternatives
- ❑ There are no incentives for student landlords to return lucrative rental properties to single family homes for the sole purpose of saving the existing structures
- ❑ More importantly, returning the City place sub-neighborhood to single family homes would violate the spirit of the CAP and the Task Force recommendations by:
 - ✓ reducing density
 - ✓ preventing a mix of housing types
 - ✓ side-stepping a healthy range of income levels, and

- ✓ avoiding the difficult issue of affordable housing needs in this neighborhood and the City as a whole

Promoting a New History of More Sensitive Neighborhoods

- The City Place PUD provides Ann Arbor with an opportunity to create a new history – one of sensitivity to the needs of lower income residents and those who would choose a less auto-oriented life style
- The City Place PUD addresses many of the City's goals for eliminating wasteful surface parking, encouraging energy efficiency and better storm water management, as well as promoting use of the local transit station opportunities
- The City Place PUD will help Ann Arbor to create a new kind of downtown neighborhood – one that exhibits characteristics of a true community, rather than a mono-culture of student rental housing with all its identified limitations

In conclusion, it is my professional opinion that City Place is compatible with its neighborhood and provides a location for new housing that advances important elements of the Central Area Plan, as well as making significant progress toward achieving success of adopted City policies for new downtown housing as presented to City Council in the Downtown Residential Task Force Report.