

Subject: Comments on the Comprehensive Plan

From: Carrie McClintock

Sent: Friday, May 16, 2025 12:00 PM

To: Briggs, Erica <EBriggs@a2gov.org>; Cornell, Jenn <JCornell@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Taylor, Christopher (Mayor) <CTaylor@a2gov.org>

Subject: Comments on the Comprehensive Plan

Dear Erica Briggs, Jenn Cornell, Mayor Taylor, and the Planning Commission,

I've lived in Ann Arbor for 20 years and own three properties in neighborhoods close to the city center. Before coming here, I lived in many towns in eight different states, and what I fell in love with in Ann Arbor are the neighborhoods. The interesting and highly varied architecture, abundance of trees, open spaces for gardens, and people and children on foot and wheels makes for a rare and wonderful high quality life. These type of neighborhoods serve as models for developers across the country, yet in Ann Arbor, they exist organically.

I'm writing today because of my concern about the Comprehensive Plan (CP). I, along with everyone with whom I've spoken, recognize the need for greater density in town. Likewise, many share the goal of increasing sustainability. However, this must be approached with intelligence and sensitivity. Thoughtful densification is what is called for. Because of this, I suggest several modifications to the CP.

In our neighborhoods, natural features are very important. 70% of Ann Arbor's trees exist in the neighborhoods. With climate change, the frequency and severity of storms is going up. Flooding will become even more of an issue. For sustainability reasons, there need to be significant zoning set backs in neighborhoods to preserve natural features, including Tree City's tree canopy, water gardens, and space for wildlife and pollinators. Sunshine is required for solar panels and gardens, two essential aspects of sustainability which Ann Arbor is pursuing in earnest.

Ann Arbor has many neighborhoods with homes of architectural value. We don't have brownstones, but we do have houses representing a great variety of styles and their accompanying gardens, ranging from the late 1800s to the present. Their removal would be irrevocable and a great loss of the flavor of the town. Detached houses have their problems, but also benefits. They allow more places for children to play outdoors and give people breathing room encouraging positive social interaction. I live in a neighborhood with front porch culture, age-appropriate unsupervised childhood play, and tons of foot and wheeled traffic. Part of what makes this scenario happen is balance. Past a certain tipping point, greater congestion makes these things less likely. Our houses are tight, but people are thriving and engaging in more sustainable lifestyles.

If zoning in neighborhoods is limited to 2 stories, there are mandated set backs, transition zones are not allowed in neighborhood historic districts, and neighborhood parks are not removed, then the natural features and unique quality of Ann Arbor's neighborhoods will be preserved and more sustainable lifestyles will be encouraged. With appropriate set backs and height limits, density could still be increased in established neighborhoods by removing the limit on the number of allowable

units. Thoughtful densification would increase density slowly and allow neighborhoods to infill in a way that honors the quality that exists. These restrictions need to be included in the CP.

More significant density increase could occur in some of the mixed use transition zones. With a height increase to 4 stories between intersections, many more units could be added. Intersections with existing business activity could be increased to 5-6 stories. A height increase to 7-8 stories is out of keeping with the character of the town. If population increases dramatically over the next 5 years, it would be possible to increase heights even further in the next revision of the CP. However, population increases do not look to be dramatic at this point, and keeping transition zones to 4 stories in many areas would avoid many adverse consequences.

But perhaps the most significant problem I have with the plan is that it would reduce the stock of affordable housing and undermine home owners in the more modest parts of town. The neighborhoods that are likely to be bought up by out of town developers are precisely the ones that are currently the most affordable. Many are owned by people who have a significant portion of their wealth invested in them.

For example, Miller is presently a street with modest homes. These older homes have lower rents and allow home ownership for many. If it is rezoned to 7-8 stories, developers will begin offering prices people can't refuse, merging lots, and building market priced properties. The new development will be more expensive than what people are currently paying. There will be more of it at higher density, but it could take decades for the prices to come down to affordable levels. The homeowners could be forced to become renters in order to stay in Ann Arbor. What would happen in this case is a transfer of wealth from Ann Arbor constituents to real estate development interests. Many may not be able to afford to own again. The people who may fill their places are important, but they are not current constituents. We should support the people who live and own in Ann Arbor, especially those with less financial means.

The CP bets on Ann Arbor becoming a much larger city and allows real estate developers to act as if that was already the case. As we know, developers will take advantage of the opportunity and max out profits. What if the large population increase that the CP is based on doesn't happen, and instead, during this phase in our town's history we allowed unrestricted development to undermine current residents of modest incomes and destroy the charm of our college town?

The CP process hasn't been inclusive because of the lack of a direct mailing. For this reason, I suggest that the timeline for the plan's adoption be extended from November 2025 to July 2026. This would recognize the need to be thoughtful and inclusive about this process and allow time for necessary revision.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Carrie McClintock
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