

Subject: HRWC memo re: Ann Arbor Comprehensive Land Use Plan
Attachments: A2 Comprehensive Land Use Plan comments Huron River Watershed Council - City Council.pdf

From: Rebecca Esselman
Sent: Monday, August 4, 2025 3:43 PM
To: City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Subject: HRWC memo re: Ann Arbor Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Dear City Councilmembers and Planning Commissioners,

Attached, please find comment from the Huron River Watershed Council on the proposed Ann Arbor Comprehensive Land Use Plan for your consideration.

Regards,
Rebecca

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Huron River Watershed Council
117 N 1st St, Suite 100
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

July 30, 2025

Ann Arbor City Council and Planning Commission
301 E Huron St
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Dear Councilmembers and Commissioners,

The Huron River Watershed Council supports the Ann Arbor Comprehensive Land Use Plan. This plan is a sound move toward a more sustainable and resilient Ann Arbor. It will help address climate change and will reduce stress on the Huron River.

Overwhelmingly, the scientific evidence tells us that zoning for increased density in urban areas is one of the most effective strategies for mitigating the effects of climate change while safeguarding the Huron River and its watershed. Preserving undeveloped land by reducing development sprawl is critical. Less sprawl means less impervious surface, less deforestation, and less fragmentation of natural lands. Compact development helps to preserve wetlands, floodplains, and forests, which serve as natural filtration systems essential to maintaining water quality in the Huron River. In short, HRWC's position aligns with the science-based conclusion of building upward, not outward.

Development should be concentrated on underutilized parcels within the city whenever possible, relying on existing infrastructure and updating it as needed. By prioritizing mixed-use, transit-oriented development, the plan supports walkability and public transportation, significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions from personal vehicle use. Fewer car-dependent neighborhoods mean fewer pollutants entering our air and, ultimately, our water systems.

High-density zoning also plays a key role in stormwater management. Compact development patterns allow for greater investment in shared green stormwater infrastructure, such as permeable pavement, rain gardens, bioswales, and even underground storage and infiltration, which help to filter and absorb stormwater runoff before it reaches our rivers and lakes. By reducing dispersed suburban growth, we can

better prevent excessive runoff from overwhelming local waterways with sediment, pollutants, and untreated wastewater.

Furthermore, dense urban areas promote more efficient use of resources. Multi-family residences and high-efficiency buildings require less water per capita than single-family developments. The integration of modernized water infrastructure in urban centers allows for improved filtration, monitoring, and mitigation of contaminants before they enter the watershed.

The Ann Arbor Comprehensive Land Use Plan aligns with A2Zero's climate goals and demonstrates a commitment to building an equitable, environmentally responsible city. By supporting density in appropriate areas, we enhance access to sustainable transportation, reduce development pressure on sensitive ecosystems, and promote housing affordability.

While density provides all the above listed benefits for water quality and the river, HRWC encourages a nuanced approach to determining if natural lands remaining within the City are appropriate for development. Not all remaining natural lands are created equal. Ann Arbor has both high- and low-quality natural lands. We strongly support the preservation of high-quality ecosystems, wetlands and floodplains. These will work in tandem with density to protect our watershed and can provide habitat for area wildlife and ecosystems.

HRWC understands that the future of Ann Arbor's development pattern looks different from its past. As Ann Arbor evolves, our land-use policies must be sustainable for the ecosystem in which we live. The Huron River Watershed Council looks forward to collaborating on the plan's implementation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Esselman
Executive Director, Huron River Watershed Council

*Planning commissioner Richard Norton is also a member of the HRWC's board of directors. He did not participate in the preparation of this letter.