

Subject:

Pause the Comprehensive Plan To Confer With Historic Districts

From: Julie Ritter**Sent:** Monday, July 21, 2025 12:29 PM**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>**Subject:** Pause the Comprehensive Plan To Confer With Historic Districts

Dear Planning Commissioners:

My name is Julie Ritter. I live at 920 Catherine in the Old Fourth Ward Historic District. Page 60 of the second version of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the CLUP, is the only reference to historic districts. The statement originally began as follows: "Historic district boundaries will be maintained, and development will continue to adhere to the existing standards and design guidelines approved by the Historic District Commission."

At last Tuesday's Planning Commission meeting, the Commission voted to replace this sentence with: "The Plan takes no position on historic districts." This statement makes no sense and appears to be just a placeholder. The purpose of the CLUP is to take positions on land use, not avoid them. Eliminating the text on historic district boundaries and the Historic District Commission strongly suggests the Planning Commission is opposed to historic districts despite the support of the vast majority of Ann Arbor voters. This is an overreach. The original text should be restored.

The revised statement goes on to read "The city's fifteen historic districts are legally protected with the purpose to preserve the city's buildings and places of cultural and historical significance for future generations, an outcome from decades of legislative actions of the city." This is a fine sentence.

However, the last two sentences are very concerning. They imply that historic districts prohibit an increase in density. This statement is misleading at best. First, non-conforming properties in historic districts can generally be replaced with higher-density structures, provided that the new development is compatible with the neighborhood's architectural context. An example of this increased density can be seen at 530 N. Division. Additionally, while restrictions are in place to protect the exteriors of historic homes, the interiors are not afforded the same level of protection. Because of this, numerous examples in our neighborhood have resulted in the interiors of historic properties being restructured to increase density. Sometimes quite a bit more.

The ways in which historic districts contribute to density need to be recognized.

In fact, the Old Fourth Ward Historic District, zoned R4C, is the most densely populated neighborhood in the city. It is a showcase for exactly what you claim you are trying to achieve. This should also be recognized in the CLUP. Because our neighborhood is already the densest in the city, there is no reason to change our designation from R4C to Transition.

The last two sentences sincerely need revision. I suggest they be replaced by the following:

To learn more about Historic Districts and Ann Arbor's past, take the Smart Tours on the Ann Arbor District Library website at <https://aadl.org/a2st> and visit Ann Arbor's Bicentennial website at <https://www.a2gov.org/ann-arbor-bicentennial/>."

To date, there has been zero engagement with historic district associations about this proposed change. Clearly, members of the Planning Commission should meet with representatives of historic districts to improve the wording of the historic district statement on page 60. I am asking the City Council to direct the Planning Commission to outreach to historic district associations on this issue. The Comprehensive Land Use Plan should be paused until this outreach is realized. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Julie Ritter

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"Consciously apply mystery to everything." - Tiokasin Ghosthorse, Lakota elder