

Subject: Stories from R4C

From: Scott Trudeau
Sent: Saturday, March 16, 2024 5:53 PM
To: City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>
Cc: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Subject: Stories from R4C

Hello Council & Planning Commission,

I am not writing on any specific matter but rather sharing some stories from my block on N Main St. Stories from our block, (mostly) zoned R4C, illustrate many ways our overly rigid and complex zoning code, especially in areas near downtown, are causing us to miss opportunities to make a better city for us all. **I hope to instill a greater sense of urgency for making bolder changes to our zoning code.** Spending years on plans and community engagement meetings while making small tweaks in the margins or betting on massive redevelopments on the city's edges continues to be too little, too late.

Some Stories

Most recently, a house around the block from us on 4th Ave, in very poor condition, sold for an eye-popping sum of money. Analyzing the zoning, the house is on one of the rare conforming parcels in the neighborhood. It will almost certainly be torn down to build a large multi-million dollar single-family home or 2-4 \$1 million+ condos, the maximum density our zoning here allows.

Our neighbor's two houses down [just listed](#) their modestly sized 100-year-old house for an even larger amount. There are two interesting stories I took from their decision to sell:

They own a well-regarded International Dinnerware Design museum, which has never had a physical home, though you might have seen one of their many pop-up exhibitions, including frequently at AADL branches. They could never find a physical home for this museum in Ann Arbor. The closest they got was considering buying an old church for the purpose, but **because a museum use required an SEU, they deemed it too risky** to make a purchase without a guarantee they could site their museum there. They are moving because they finally found a home for the museum *in Kingston, NY*.

They also spoke to the landlord of the house between ours to see if he would be interested in selling simultaneously. Both of their lots are nonconforming, so there would likely be more interested buyers if the lots were sold together. He is disinclined to sell because his **carrying costs are so low and the rents are so high that even the currently extremely high sale prices of houses** in this location aren't high enough to justify a sale.

Similarly, a landlord has assembled most of the houses on the block across N Main St and listed them as a block. They never sold. I did the zoning math. A developer could not meaningfully increase the uni-density when redeveloped because none of the parcels currently conform to the zoning. **The rents are so high, even on these mediocre-to-poor-condition homes, and the zoning so restrictive, it makes no**

economic sense to redevelop the sites, despite being located immediately next to downtown and walking distance to campus.

One of our own stories: Avalon owns the parcel next to ours with a strip of land between our buildings they do not use. They would happily sell it to us, but R4C zoning is so restrictive that splitting the parcels is forbidden because it'd make their parcel less conforming. This means **we can't build an ADU or install a ground loop heat exchange because we can't use the land immediately next to our house** because of these zoning rigidities.

There are a million other stories like these about things that never happen because we have made them so impossible that the possibility never even makes it to Planning or Council for consideration. It makes us all worse off.

People want to live here, and people especially want to live near downtown and campus. The only redevelopment that happens in these prime location neighborhoods is barely replacement-level density. We usually get few or no net new units, just larger ones, when sites are redeveloped in our supposedly "multifamily" zoning district.

Every year we wait for another round of meetings and plans is another year where rents continue to go ever higher, while people are pitted against each other for the few housing options available. The only beneficiaries of this status quo are the landlords, who are happy to collect climbing rents on their deteriorating houses, most of which were purchased cheaply many years ago, paying relatively little in property taxes. The rest of us lose out with potential neighbors forced to make harder choices for longer commutes, worse quality homes, and a strained City budget.

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