

To: Ann Arbor Planning Commission, Planning Commission Staff, and Ann Arbor Council members

Re: Council Resolution 24-1560 - expansion of in-home commercial uses

Date: November 29, 2024

To: Taylor, Christopher (Council) <CTaylor@a2gov.org>, <ebriggs@a2gov.org>, <jcornell@a2gov.org>, <lsong@a2gov.org>, <planning@a2gov.org>

Dear Planning Commission and staff -

I have recently learned that the expansion of the regulations for the commercial uses of homes for small businesses in Ann Arbor is under study. While I strongly support and frequent local businesses, I do have some concerns; mainly, the need to take into consideration the timing of business hours, and the proximity of the businesses to area schools, especially elementary schools. We are lucky enough to be in a town where kids can and do walk to school, and we need to keep their safety in mind.

A few years ago a neighbor around the corner opened a small cafe and CSA pick-up point in her home. It was very popular. My daughter volunteered there, and the proprietor wrote a very nice letter of reference for her, helping her to get her first high school job at a local bakery, which I really appreciated. It seemed like a great concept, but I developed some concerns as time went on. The cafe was right by Eberwhite Elementary, and the cafe's starting times overlapped with the starting time for the school - already a very busy time with increased road and (young) pedestrian traffic. I live on an intersecting street but sometimes drove to work that way, and on the weekdays that it occurred, I noticed increased traffic. I occasionally observed parked cars partially blocking the main crosswalk to the school, reducing my view of oncoming traffic and, more importantly, the drivers' view of the crossing children (and the children's view of traffic). I also saw cars parked in front of fire hydrants and partially blocking a neighbor's driveway. I don't know whether these drivers were from school traffic or the cafe, of course, but the increased traffic made access to the school more difficult for everyone and more dangerous for the students.

In summary, I am in strong support of examining more flexibility in home businesses. But I think there should be limits, particularly for businesses that draw a lot of customers/drivers at one time, especially if they are near a school. Perhaps these businesses, including the one in our neighborhood, if it decides to reopen under the new rules, could only be open on weekends or at times during the day when they don't overlap with the school rush. In addition, I think it would be helpful for businesses in neighborhoods where residents have or have had concerns to communicate with those residents to identify, and hopefully address, those concerns.

Thank you.

Amby Gallagher