

**Subject:** Comprehensive Plan analysis, Chuck Ream  
**Attachments:** comprehensive plan copy.odt

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**From:** Charles Ream  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 5, 2025 4:47 PM  
**To:** City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>  
**Subject:** Comprehensive Plan analysis, Chuck Ream

If you had a great tree ordinance we could have an agreement.  
Please don't even think about diminishing the setbacks in the new Residential zone.!!!!!!!  
That would mean that this whole thing has been a "dirty trick", a straight up land grab to take down trees and put up housing...while mouthing platitudes about "values".  
That is where the voters will fully reject this whole thing. and get you guys and gals out of there.  
Let's get something we can agree on.

# **The new Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan:**

## **Accept the Essence: Reject the Excess**

### **Statement of Chuck Ream, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward City Council Candidate**

see “[chuckreamsavetreecity](#)” (Website coming soon)

Look toward downtown to see who controls Ann Arbor. Now these developers are coming for your neighborhood. The new Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan gives full control of Ann Arbor's future to developers, and City Council wants to help them! Prices and taxes will go way up.

The Ann Arbor City Council has a plan for our future that is unnecessary and destructive. it's ostensible goals of “equity and affordability” are elusive, very hard to accomplish. Instead we will get gentrification, with older homes (and people) cleared away.

The central mistake of this plan is for this city council to think they can change the basic values of Ann Arbor voters. ... who strongly relate to Ann Arbor's beauty and “character” and the fact that it really is “Tree City”. Now we are being told to sacrifice these core values in order to uphold other values like equity, affordability, sustainability and dynamism. The report states, that we must focus on these new goals “rather than” worrying about old-fashioned things like “protecting the existing character and natural environment” (trees) “of Ann Arbor”.

Sorry, any “value” they can think of is secondary to the trees and character of Ann Arbor. The defacement of Ann Arbor could go on until they “kill the goose” that laid our golden egg.

On August 4, 2026 the voters must replace some of this city council that thinks that trees and character are obsolete, and elect council members who will love and protect Tree City. We still can enter the future dynamically and provide needed mid level housing to satisfy legitimate needs. It's not our job to satisfy the greed of developers.

## **Why is this comprehensive plan so dangerous?**

### **1) It will make our great city congested, expensive, and degraded.**

City planners wanted to put seven story apartment buildings along bus routes and four story apartment buildings within neighborhoods. Four story buildings would have cut off the sunlight from neighboring homes. Our pressure has forced the Planning Commission to drop the idea of four story apartment buildings in Residential. (Great work! Keep it up!)

Seven story buildings, by right, along every bus route, are equally poor planning. The report suggests that “downtown’s built form can serve as a model for hubs across the city”. The last thing that voters want is something in their neighborhood that resembles downtown, ... giant buildings belong downtown! A large percentage of Ann Arbor citizens will not go downtown anymore.

Neighborhoods will have few parking places. New apartments in Ann Arbor no longer require parking to be provided – we are supposed to walk, take a bus, or ride a bike.

### **2) It is not needed!**

The population graph of Ann Arbor shows that the population of Ann Arbor has gone up very little

since 1975, if at all. It has “plateaued”. “Ann Arbor households have actually declined in recent decades”. Our population is “stagnant”. Any new population has been students, and plenty of new buildings have been made for them. More mid-level housing is needed, and can easily be provided without the excess included in this “Comprehensive Plan”.

Referring to the housing situation as some sort of “crisis” or “emergency” is analogous to President Trump saying that immigration is an “emergency”. They are both problems that need to be solved, not exaggerated and exploited.

We need to greatly scale back this growth fantasy, and carefully plan for 10% to 20% growth prior to 2050, focused on mid level housing! (20% growth prior to 2050 is twice what is forecast for A2 by SEMCOG - The Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments).

We need to drop this attitude of “crisis” and prioritization of “growth”. We can meet real problems head on, and solve them without needing to replace all our infrastructure – at great cost. Ann Arbor is already one of Michigan's most highly taxed cities.

#### **4) It will degrade our residential neighborhoods.**

The plan says that it will “prefer developments that align with the existing scale” and, “maintain low rise development that is not a drastic change in scale from what exists in neighborhoods now”. We shall see. (See photos of other cities.) A seven story apartment building could be built beside my home. Apartment buildings and “fourplexes” will forever change neighborhoods. Many families with children aren't happy. Parking and traffic will be more challenging. Many trees will be gone.

#### **5) This plan could take out much of the tree canopy of Tree City.**

This plan cannot go forward until we have a strong tree ordinance, like Evanston, Illinois, or Cambridge, Mass., which actually protects trees on public and private land. In this new Ann Arbor plan trees are an afterthought, not a goal, and we should take this seriously.

Trees are not respected in Ann Arbor anymore. On Winchell Street, on my morning walk last year, a gigantic healthy sycamore tree was cut down right in front of me. I honestly wondered where I was, this could not be Ann Arbor! This perfect huge robust tree was in the way of no road or sidewalk, it was in violation of some city rule by 1 foot, and it was destroyed. It should be alive! You can drive by and see the trunk of that tree in the owners front yard. She says it is “my silent protest”.

The more I dug the more real became the quote from Hamlet, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”. We learn that the chairman of the Planning Commission, [the authors of the Plan], is the development director for a local Real Estate investment company. The vice chair of the Ann Arbor Planning Commission believes that its mission is to enable development and growth “at a rate to be determined by investors, capital, and the market”.

Where did this guy come from? The mission of the Planning Commission is to decide what is best for Ann Arbor. At least 5 planning commissioners make money from real estate development!

In the new plan all residential zoning districts are combined into one. The city will not say whether building setbacks will be reduced in this new residential district. That's the key for trees, if the city diminishes the setbacks in their new residential district, then much of “tree city” will be lost for good.

Current city council members want “growth”, they want more people to come here, on purpose! Voters hate that, we already have congestion and pay enough taxes.

Most of Ann Arbor's trees are in residential areas. The new plan “replaces” the “Natural Features Master Plan”, but with nothing. There is no tree protection strategy whatsoever! The city claims to have “strong natural features protections that mitigate the impact of development”. Sorry, not true! They will cut trees and plan to try to take parkland!

## **6) Parks – They would like to take Ann Arbor park land. This plan enables them to attempt it.**

The Plan repeatedly implies that they plan to “leverage” public land to be used for their “growth”. This concept makes long time Ann Arbor park lovers feel unnerved..

We could have a 25 year raid to take land from our parks and open spaces.

- \* they speak of “leveraging publicly owned land” to create “affordable housing”, and “accommodate growth”.
- \* they will be “ redistributing under utilized land and spaces”.
- \* the city should “target” “publicly owned assets“, “to create growth space”.
- \* they say “quality (of land) is more important than quantity” as a pretext for taking parkland.
- \* they plan to “introduce new residential opportunities in parts of the city that have never had permanent residents”.

Parks could be on the chopping block. Voters say NO!

## **7) Infrastructure – There is no way to pay for this but us!**

Two thirds of Ann Arbor’s revenue comes from property taxes. The implementation of this plan will lead to a major tax increase and the city won't talk about that. No way to pay for all this is ever explained, except that you and I will pay for it. The comprehensive plan does not try to hide the amount of infrastructure investment that would be needed.

A public comment: “We keep building but our infrastructure cannot hold all these people without terrible traffic and overcrowding“.

And another, “There is concern over the high tax burden - that additional density would strain city infrastructure, or require unrealistic investment”

Infrastructure expense will be huge, that is made clear:

- \* “public investment in infrastructure will also be required”.
- \* “the city will need to upgrade infrastructure and city services to support new uses and density”.
- \* “infrastructure investment is required” to “shift transportation modes”.
- \* “new infrastructure investment will be needed to accommodate anticipated growth.” This means water, sewer, streets, police, fire, schools, libraries, community centers, waste management, plus equipment, and vehicles... (all of these might also be put into public park land).
- \* “investments are needed to achieve future land use vision”.
- \* “shopping centers and office parks will require significant redevelopment and infrastructure investment”.
- \* “upfront investment may be necessary to support the increase in growth”.

All this will entail a massive amount of money, spent for people of the future, It is ludicrous to

present this plan with no way to fund it except from the taxpayers's pocket. It doesn't benefit the current taxpayer.

It is legal for the city to charge "impact fees" to developers to cover the infrastructure cost of new building, which is about \$100,000 per new residential unit. This plan never mentions it. This plan, is simply "more more more" (residential units lacking supporting infrastructure) ... (that is a quote from a planning commissioner!)

The plan boldly states that their future land use "vision" "is **not** limited by current infrastructure". Then they go on to explain that every part of Ann Arbors infrastructure is now at its limit. They give no details in terms of new taxes, but explain that "significant infrastructure investments will be needed to accommodate future growth". The money is to come from you!

#### **8) Future problems for Ann Arbor will be locked in, "by right".**

This plan will be firmly in place for 25 years! When planning principles are codified in a master plan, it can be very difficult for citizens to influence anything. We must stop it now! For the next 25 years city council members could say "the comprehensive plan calls for this infrastructure and you get to pay for it" or "the plan said to use parkland", or "this 16 unit apartment building will go next to your house", or "those trees will have to come down". There would be nothing you could do.

Council members can say that anything they want for "growth" is implied in this plan. Citizens will be shut out, just like they lately have been shut out in terms of reviewing site plans; and just like the "design review board" (a group of expert design professionals working for free) was disbanded...since it might delay developers. Citizens will be effectively removed from the planning process if this comprehensive plan succeeds.

#### **9) The city is so dominated by developers that City Council thinks we need to spend tax money to help them!**

Citizen comment: "We distrust developers and city government"

Another citizen said: "It is a top priority to preserve natural features and especially tree cover"

Instead, this comprehensive plan implies that developers are the new "oppressed class" in Ann Arbor. Therefore, we must "streamline the development and review process to make it easier", and, the city will proactively develop a strategy to "incentivize" contractors. Your taxes will also pay for the city to do "entrepreneurial training" as well as "company development" for private developers. Is this a joke? This isn't right, I was in government for 20 years and never saw anything like it.

These planners together "drank the Kool-Aid" of "new urbanism". Then, in their plan, with developers as constant cheerleaders, they leapt overboard, with plans for 100% more housing units. This isn't what we need.

Many planning commissioners have direct real estate connections, and lobbying by real estate oriented folks has become a constant drumbeat of self interest, (...they often talk about affordable or middle income housing, not about "milking" huge profits from A2). This plan is a "wolf in sheep's clothing". It would trigger the next big Ann Arbor land rush, with bulldozers on your block; and radically raise your taxes.

#### **10) This plan tries to change "the balance", and will be used to prioritize**

## **housing over trees!**

The “plan” constantly speaks of “balance” between competing interests, such as “Balance development with protection of critical natural features.” However, this “growth” obsessed city council will use this comprehensive plan as a weapon to help them alter “the balance” to favor housing over trees. They say “Ann Arbor wants to grow”...with zero real data to back that up. Our tree canopy will begin to come down if they can accomplish their central goal, the reduction of building setbacks in residential zoning. This would kill trees but provide more buildable land.

Sentences like the following ones will kill lot of trees. “Prioritizing housing development may require an easing of certain restrictions and constraints”. Or try “we will rewrite zoning code to remove barriers to housing development”. (Where is the “balance”?)

Ann Arbor voters value trees far more than squeezing out more land for “growth”!

City commissioners who vote to reduce the tree canopy in residential zoning will be voted out of office. Save Tree City!

This is our mission. If this particular city council can wreck Ann Arbor we will never restore it!

## **11) The “Public Engagement” process was a complete farce.**

The city bases the legitimacy of its “plan” on “public input”. During this entire process they never dared to send even a postcard to tax payers to explain what was going on, ( imagine the uproar if they had). Before they began this fake public input process the conclusion they wanted was already fully formed (and no effort was made to insure that citizen participants were representative of Ann Arbor voters ...many were not even from Ann Arbor).

To quote from the “plan”, “The process **began** with the understanding that the city must grow and evolve to address underlying issues” like affordability and sustainability. It is no wonder that, after months of a carefully choreographed charade, participants reached their predetermined conclusion.

## **ACCEPT THE ESSENCE!**

We do need to adapt to meet new realities... to move forward equitably and sustainably. Kids are growing up and leaving older homes. Many modern people are single or have small families. We do need more mid range and lower income housing, and we can do this. We can make our neighborhoods more diverse, allowing apartments within homes, more residences on a single property, apartment blocks in residential areas, as well as small, neighborhood commercial opportunities and amenities. We can have more “complete communities” where people can get most of their needs met without driving. “Gentle Zoning” is their euphemism for allowing four homes on any lot, which is proposed.

We can create “nodes” of walkable communities, building upon locations where they are already forming naturally. We can allow small businesses within neighborhoods if they are clean and quiet.

We could allow three story apartment buildings in residential neighborhoods, and four story apartment buildings along bus routes. All this housing would be plenty to meet any objective that the city or housing advocates have stated, without trashing Ann Arbor too grossly.

The city has dropped the fourth story in residential, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh story along bus routes also need to go. (These absurdly big buildings are the “bulldozer magnets” touching off the feeding frenzy of developers.)

They have to figure out a way to finance this social engineering that does not fall on the back of the taxpayer. (Renters will be just “collateral damage”, tossed right out...never able to afford what was built where they used to live.)

If the city will make the changes to the comprehensive plan that citizens are demanding, it could work. If city council insists on passing their current version of a “comprehensive plan” voters will revolt. Members of city council will be voted out. People who love trees and the character of Ann Arbor will serve in the next city Council, and they are being recruited for the “Save Tree City” slate of candidates. Ann Arbor can move skillfully and equitably into the future and still forever be “tree city”.

## **PLEASE WAKE UP ANN ARBOR!**

If we lose our city now to the investment companies we will never get another chance! Please fight back! Run for city Council in 2026! It’s time to SAVE TREE CITY! This big mistake could control Ann Arbor's future, and wreck the magic. Ann Arbor has been rated #1 for “Quality of Life”, why throw that away?

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ChatGPT says that “new urbanism” is very difficult to do in a city that is already built.

“To make it work, you would need strong mandates about affordability, and strong protections for individuals to be able to remain in their homes ...along with financing.”

The Ann Arbor plan contains nearly nothing of this, since it is largely a gift to developers.

The plan says “existing affordable housing needs to be safeguarded”, but there’s no plan...just like with trees.

Save Tree City! I will run for City Council in 2026 from Ward 3. Please find a person from your ward who will run and win!

Chuck Ream 5/20/2025

From the anonymous essay by “Need not Greed”:

“We should demand that our city stop promoting an exploitative, extractive business model and instead pursue authentic solutions that treat housing not as a commodity but as a human right”.

I fully supported the mayor and city council until I read this plan.

SAY YES TO NEEDED DEVELOPMENT – BUT SAVE TREE CITY!

ACCEPT THE ESSENCE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – BUT REJECT THE EXCESS!



ACCEPT THE ESSENCE - REJECT THE EXCESS! SAVE TREE CITY!