

Subject: The Residential Partition Proposal

From: Will Leaf

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To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>

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Hello commissioners and planning staff.

Below are some comments on the recent proposal to partition the Residential category.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/11bdMq9axPcNd6njGpad73hozje6HArxYlbfV2NLnXEc/edit?usp=sharing>

Summary

At the last meeting, the commission was unsure of how to categorize some peripheral R3/R4 parcels. A recent [staff memo](#) suggests an answer to this question—partition the Residential category into multiple subcategories before the plan is adopted. Existing R1/R2 areas might be put in a subcategory with a 3-unit maximum, whereas R3/R4 parcels might be put in a less restrictive subcategory.

This proposal would ban 4+ unit apartments in all R1/R2 areas, greatly restricting the construction of missing-middle housing in Ann Arbor. It would also create other problems that I discuss below. Instead, I suggest simply categorizing the peripheral R3/R4 parcels as either Residential or Transition.

The Original Question

Should R3/R4 parcels near the edge of the city be Residential or Transition?

At the last meeting, there was a suggestion that this question might not be solvable within the plan's current framework, because there are parcels that don't fit in Residential or Transition, but instead fall somewhere in between.

I don't think this problem actually exists. There is little to no space between the concepts of Residential and Transition. They are right next to each other on the density spectrum, so every parcel in question fits into one of those two categories.

The staff memo doesn't explain why the parcels in question shouldn't be marked Transition. Why would the city forbid a condo association by the highway from redeveloping into a mixed-use development with tapering height limits? And if the city does decide to forbid this redevelopment, wouldn't the obvious alternative be the 3-story residential category? Creating a new category or sub-category is not helpful.

Problems with the Staff Proposal

Small apartment buildings would be forbidden in all R1/R2 areas.

Banning 4+ unit apartment buildings in all R1/R2 areas would go far beyond what the city council resolution called for and would greatly restrict the creation of missing middle housing in Ann Arbor.

The commission would have to quickly decide how to divide up the Residential Category.

Presumably not all R3/R4 parcels would be recategorized from Transition to Residential. This change would negate some of the most important parts of the plan, like the expansion of downtown to include near-campus areas.

But if not all R3/R4 parcels will stay in Transition, then how will the commission determine which ones stay in that category? Rushing to make that distinction now, while the planning commission is finishing up the plan, is not a good way to complete this categorization.

The Simple Solution

Any of the following options are preferable to the staff memo solution:

1. Categorize all R3/R4 parcels as Transition.
2. Categorize R4 as Transition and R3 as Residential.
3. Finish categorizing the remaining parcels one-by-one.