

Subject:

Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Trojan Horse

From: Tom Stulberg

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Subject: Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Trojan Horse

I read Jeff Crockett's letter dated 10/3/25 to the planning commission and city council, regarding Kirk Westphal's group tailgating in city council chambers. I believe the matter is far worse than merely that circus atmosphere. And the problem is far worse than just the optics of coziness that Jeff raises. May I suggest a formal investigation is in order.

Kirk Westphal, and others in his clique, were snuck onto the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee by our planning manager Brett Lenart.

The comprehensive Plan revision process has been tainted by skewed public representation on the steering committee. This was knowingly done.

At the 11/14/23 planning commission meeting, the comprehensive plan steering committee was approved.

In choosing the members for that committee, **Brent Lenart said:**

“ Additionally, but not uniformly, I emphasized applicants that less frequently engage with the City on land use planning on a regular basis.”

I spoke against one of those appointees, Ben Connor Barie, as noted in the minutes. Why? Because his appointment was a Trojan horse for an entire group of people that *“frequently engage with the City on land use planning on a regular basis.”*

From the meeting minutes: Tom Stulberg, Lowertown resident, spoke to respect for natural resources and voiced opinion on Steering Committee member selection.

<https://a2gov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=M&ID=1069333&GUID=E09E207C-4456-473E-AEF5-D4B095618907>

Here is the video of the meeting starting at my three minutes. <https://youtu.be/WO53FuYYPYU?t=496> (I'm working on a transcription but try closed captions if it is hard to hear.)

So, there can be no claim that the planning commission was not aware of this issue prior to their vote to approve the members of the steering committee.

Note that one appointee, Ben Connor Barrie, who lives in Ypsilanti, is a long-time participant in such matters and has a blog called DamnArbor where he writes about such matters regularly. A list of guest authors on his blog reads like a who's who of one faction that *"frequently engage with the City on land use planning on a regular basis."*

Here is an excerpt from a recent (2/10/25) blogpost on <https://www.damnarbor.com/>

"Gentle reader, tonight is a special, working session edition of #a2Council. Here's the [agenda](#). The real meat of it is tonight, Council will be seeing a presentation on the proposed revisions to the Comprehensive Plan. You can see that presentation [here](#).

Call to action: watch the presentation to council tonight. The meeting starts at 7. Call for public commentary at the end of the meeting and tell them you support an aggressive re-write of Ann Arbor's Comprehensive Land Use Plan to maximize affordability, equity, and sustainability. This means maximizing the amount of new housing allowed in all zones in the city. If you can't call in tonight, you can also email council. "

The 2/23/25 post on the DamnArbor blog is very detailed and included:

"Call to action: please call or write Planning Commission. Tell them that you support the new Comprehensive Land Use Plan but that they should skip the Retail Hub and Innovation Hub districts. While you are at it, encourage smaller minimum lot sizes and a larger and taller downtown.

The consultants who have been working on the updated Comprehensive Land Use Plan will be presenting their proposal for the new plan. I've been a member of the Comprehensive Land Use Steering Committee, which has advised the consultants during the duration of this process.

Overall I think the proposed plan does a great job of addressing the goals Council set forth: improving affordability, equity, and sustainability.

Now I am going to nitpick.

- I want to make sure that in the low rise residential district, the maximum height is at least 45' and that minimum lot size is no more than 1200 sq ft. This*

will help to maximize affordability by reducing land costs for projects. It will allow more people to live near transit and their workplaces improving sustainability. You can read more about my lot size thoughts here: [Legalize Cottage Courts](#)."

So, who are the followers of the blog? I'm not sure how to know the full list, but a little homework shows that the guest writers are people that *"frequently engage with the City on land use planning on a regular basis."*

- Adam Goodman 1/26/24
- Lisa Sauve interview 9/18/23
- Michele Hughes preview 4/17/23
- Adam Goodman 1/18/23
- Dan Adams 1/17/23
- **Kirk Westphal 1/3/23**
- Abdulrahman Ateya 12/6/22
- Jessica Letaw 11/21/22

and Brandon Dimcheff is on the editorial board.

If you want to see the DamnArbor blog's political leanings, along with the usual misrepresentations and false narratives, check out the 6/27/22 pre-primary post from the last contested council election.

This excerpt from the 10/21/24 blogpost is also very telling:

"There are 5 public hearings on the docket tonight. The [first two](#) are routine township island annexations. My only question here is why we are we making these new parcels R1B. **The absolute lowest density anything in the city should be is R1D** (aside: [but really things should be much denser](#))."
(You can go down the rabbit hole by clicking on the "aside" link.)

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