

Rezoning: 228 Packard on city block spanning South fifth Avenue and South fourth Avenue between Madison and Packard.

This is a follow up to the letter I wrote on 10/04/2023 on this project.

Additional citizen input is needed because the scope of the project has changed significantly. It is no longer a PUD but a developer initiated rezoning request. My original objections to this project outlined in my letter dated 10/04/2023 still stand.

Process

First, I would like to make some general comments about the process and how the different commissions interact with the citizenry.

Many of the meetings are held remotely only via zoom. While the majority of citizens have become proficient in using these remote conferencing tools, when combined with a call-in only mode for public comments, it represents discrimination to the first degree.

While the developer is allowed to present his power point with a top of the line zoom connection, the citizens are relegated to use the much less effective phone call ins. Not only is the call-in process exceedingly clunky, not unexpectedly as the technology is more than 200 years old. In addition, as I inadvertently found out, when one tries to call in from abroad it does not work at all. The only one who profits from this setup are the phone companies who charge a bundle for people on hold for an international call.

I know of several people who were locked out from commenting on this project during the Design Review Board meeting on 12/13/2023. This situation is particularly serious for meetings scheduled close to Holidays when many people are traveling.

If the city wants to maintain any credibility on listening to opinions of their citizens, these discriminatory zoom meetings must stop immediately. Access to zoom should be equal for everybody and phone ins should only be made available as a last resort.

Rezoning

As this project has morphed into a rezoning project a much bigger swath of downtown will be affected by the requested changes. Therefore, the process of public input needs to be restarted and notifications need to be sent out to all the stakeholders of the DDA, i.e. all parcels in the DDA and any neighboring parcels within one thousand feet of the DDA, as required by Chapter 55 of the UDC.

A new public input meeting needs to be scheduled by the developer so that all stakeholders have the opportunity to weigh in before the plans are finalized.

Expert studies

The review process so far has been performed without the reviewing committees nor the citizens having access to any of the relevant issue specific analyses such as traffic study, shade study, flood management, sustainability assessment etc.. The reviewing committees or the citizens cannot competently assess the impact of the project without knowing all the specifics. Thus, scheduling meetings without all the stakeholders having access to these studies is

meaningless as the developer is basically selling a cat in a bag, not revealing the all-important technical details of the project. Future review meetings of any kind that have any claim to credibility cannot be scheduled prior to completion of all the issue focused expert reports.

Misrepresentation of the neighborhood

The developer continues to present their project as squarely based in the downtown area. They make that argument using imagery of buildings 2 or more block away from their site. In the case of the phase 2 U of M project on Division Al generated views are presented (The university has not published any plans for phase 2 yet). None of the 22 houses that will be destroyed are taken stock at all and their value to the low-income housing in Ann Arbor is not acknowledged. A shortcoming a city administration, that claims desperately to work towards affordable housing, should weigh gravely.

As the Design Review Board recognized during the 12/4/23 meeting, this block is in an unique transition zone with delicate traffic patterns affecting city wide car and public transportation. This project will tax the same traffic infrastructure from large projects like the 336 Williams and the Y lot. In the view of the developers these already approved projects don't even exist.

In summary, I urge you to implement the changes outlined above that are enshrined in the City Charter. As this project would have character changing consequences for a wide swath of Ann Arbor , the developer needs to be hold to the highest standards of transparency and should not be permitted to violate zoning laws.

Sincerely,
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