

Bowden (King), Anissa

From: Hieftje, John
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2013 12:13 PM
To: Beaudry, Jacqueline; Bowden (King), Anissa
Subject: FW: A voice you won't hear at tonight's City Council meeting

For inclusion in the record.

From: Stephen Kemsley [<mailto:stephenkemsley@gmail.com>]
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2013 12:04 PM
To: Hieftje, John; Briere, Sabra; Kailasapathy, Sumi; Lumm, Jane; Petersen, Sally; Kunselman, Stephen; Taylor, Christopher (Council); Higgins, Marcia; Teall, Margie; Anglin, Mike; Warpehoski, Chuck
Cc: paul@annarborusa.org; Andy@a2ychamber.org; diane@a2ychamber.org
Subject: A voice you won't hear at tonight's City Council meeting

To the Ann Arbor City Council and Mayor John Hieftje,

I attempted to sign up for a speaking slot at today's City Council meeting, but was unable, despite calling at 8:00am. I am now sending my statement to all of you, in hopes that you might read it and consider my thoughts before the meeting. This is in relation to the DDA and economic development. Thank you for your time and service!

My name is Stephen Kemsley, and I'm here today to voice my concerns about Ann Arbor and about the proposed change to Downtown Development Authority. I speak for myself and, I believe, many young professionals that can't be here tonight. Like many in my generation, we're getting our careers started, working long hours, raising families, and unfortunately don't have as much time as we'd like to attend City Council meetings.

As a remote employee for a website, I can work from anywhere. I chose to live in Ann Arbor two years ago, moving from Chicago, because it seemed like a blend of some of the great things about Chicago: good restaurants, cultural events; and other things that the city can't provide, like forest trails and fresh air. I own a house here, and I'm invested in seeing that Ann Arbor lives up to its potential.

Unfortunately, some of the attitudes of this Council have made me question whether or not Ann Arbor is on the path to meet this potential. As a member of the tech community, many of my friends are young professionals, remote workers, and people interested in starting businesses. Unfortunately, many of them arrive to Ann Arbor with high hopes and find themselves itching to leave to another city after a couple years.

Why? For one, it's incredibly difficult to find a place to live. Compared to any other city I've lived in, Ann Arbor has the most competitive rental and real estate market. This is because there isn't much supply, especially with regard to affordable housing in or within close walking distance to downtown. The DDA is the most vocal advocate of affordable downtown housing, and that's exactly what our downtown needs.

There's also a lack of affordable office space downtown

. When looking at a place to start a business, this is a major concern. Again, the DDA seems to be one organization that recognizes that this is a problem and is doing something to remedy it.

I can attest firsthand that these factors are driving people and startups away from this town.

Watching these meetings, it seems that there is a prominent anti-development stance. I agree that it's important to preserve the character of Ann Arbor. We certainly don't want to lose it's charm for the sake of careless development. Fortunately, I don't think we have to. When you work with, not against, developers, setting clear development standards without holding up projects for months or years, it's possible to create development that positively impacts the community. There is such a thing as smart development, and I think the DDA understands this. They involve the public in the planning stages of development process, and consider the needs of all citizens in their development recommendations, not just those that are able to attend City Council meetings.

I want to see Ann Arbor develop intelligently and live up to its potential as a regional technology hub and a place that young professionals want to live in, not run away from. Stripping the DDA, a progressive actor in this city's much needed economic development, of important funding, and setting a moratorium on new development will do nothing to attract smart development, businesses, or people like me looking for a fun and dynamic city to live in.

Thank you for your time.