

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes- June 5, 2013

301 E. Huron, Council Workroom 7:00pm

Present: John Chamberlin, Marsha Chamberlin, Hugh Sonk, Jim Kern, Sue Kern, Herb Kaufer, Jane Kaufer, Ray Detter

Absent: Joan French, Susan Nenadic, Kathleen Nolan

Guests: Christine Crockett, Steve Kaplan, Stefan Trendov

It was over two years ago that the Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council joined other neighborhood groups in supporting the passage of new Downtown A2D2 zoning and approval of new Design Guidelines and Design Guidelines Review Board process. Although compliance to Design Review Board suggestions was voluntary, we believed that Board recommendations would serve to educate developers, architects, planners and the entire community on possibilities for improving downtown building design.

On May 13 of this year, however, many of us were present when the all members of City Council were unanimous in opposing the design, mass and scale of the proposed student housing development at 413 East Huron. It would clearly have a negative impact upon its neighbors. The proposed traffic patterns threatened a real danger to public health and safety. Council then proceeded to vote 6 to 5 in favor of the project because six members of City Council feared we might face a law suit on a “by right” project that met the requirements of the D1 zoning .

It’s obvious that something is wrong with our D1/D2 zoning and our Design Guidelines and Design Review process.

There are currently other sensitive areas of D1 that have been similarly zoned-- lots along E. Ann from N. Division to S. 5th, the site to the East of Sloan Plaza, perhaps the Ahmo’s site, perhaps the former YMCA site? There are real conflicts between our D1 Downtown zoning and the zoning of nearby historic and residential neighborhoods—perhaps with City Master Plans in general. We now have an opportunity to change that. And it should be a process open to everyone. That does not mean there wasn't public input earlier, it only means that experience requires we do a better job this time.

In the case of D1, that means that recommended changes should not be left up to an Ordinance Revision Committee made up of Planning Commissioners but lacking in public input.

We have heard from a lot of people who think the City should not be giving FAR premiums for things that we no longer want as a community--student housing for one thing. We can take this opportunity to change that. Maybe a temporary moratorium is necessary while we decide.

The same thing is true of the Design Guidelines and Design Guidelines Process. We made tremendous strides when we created them over two years ago. A lot of good work was done. But we need to improve the Design Guidelines--better defining character areas is one way--resolving conflicts in zoning areas, including those between historic residential neighborhoods and D1 areas is another. It's very important to consider context and possible negative impacts.

Also, an increasing number of people in our community think that the Design Review Board's suggestions need to be given more teeth--perhaps made mandatory. This needs to be considered.

We don't want 413 to happen again. Possible changes in Guidelines and the Design Review Board process are due Sept. 16. The process of improving D1 zoning is due on October 1. That's not much time.

No one is going to be satisfied with what we do in considering changes unless we have an open process that includes a substantial amount of public input.