

Ann Arbor Planning Commissioners
Planning and Development Services — Planning Division
PO Box 8647
Ann Arbor MI 48107-8647

Re: 221 Felch / Kingsley Condominiums rezoning petition

Dear Commissioners;

My name is Ross Orr, and I have resided at 519 N. Ashley (at the eastern edge of the project site) for some 27 years.

I was present for the Planning Commission's meeting of 1 March 2016, where action on this petition was tabled due to a lack of a quorum. As it was not clear when the matter will be rescheduled, I would like to take this opportunity to put a few comments on the record.

I was struck by the petitioners' statement that due to numerous constraints, "this site cannot be improved piecemeal."

As the commissioners are well aware, many of those complexities—former industrial uses, adjacency to the AARR tracks, and floodplain restrictions—all apply to a long, continuous belt of properties forming the western edge of downtown.

These include city-owned properties; as well as private ones (such as Fingerle Lumber, Ross-Beakes Collision, or the former Carter's Auto repair).

The traditional "workshop" uses of this belt are currently undergoing a major turnover, within a fairly brief span of years. When any development is proposed within this belt, it would be a terrible missed opportunity to address it in some **piecemeal** fashion.

Rather I would encourage the city's planners to articulate a coherent, consistent, and comprehensive set of goals and policies for this corridor.

City Council has already directed creation of an Allen Creek Greenway master plan. It is unfortunate that this will not be available in time to guide decision-making on the 221 Felch property. Until then, the prudent course would be to preserve as many options as possible: for example FEMA-subsidized purchase of land (as happened with the nearby "fish garden" site) or possibilities for a parkland purchase or donation in the (unbuildable) floodway zone.

A bike route through a parking lot does not contribute any meaningful amenities to a future Allen Creek Greenway.

Leaving aside any Greenway aspect, I would also call on the planners to remember a cornerstone goal of zoning: striving to reduce and manage friction between different land uses and building types.

Adopting a unified planning approach, Ann Arbor has a rare opportunity to encourage a harmonious transition zone between the tall buildings of downtown and the neighborhoods of detached houses directly to the west.

As proposed, the Kingsley Condominium site plan fails this goal entirely. Floodplain constraints squeeze the building into the property's back corner, at three stories taller than anything that surrounds it, or that could be built given the surrounding zoning. It is simply an untenable island of dense development, with more than twice as many units as the (not unanimously approved) site plan at 410 N First.

As a final comment: The "blighted and obsolete buildings haphazardly constructed" are the property which the Beals chose to purchase in December of 1992. The extra development challenges of 221 Felch are ones they knowingly took on themselves. They cannot reasonably expect the rest of the community to pay the price for this.

Thank your for your time in noting my comments,

~~Ross

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