

**Subject:** Thoughts on the Draft Comprehensive Plan

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**From:** Sam Homan  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 10, 2025 12:19 AM  
**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>  
**Subject:** Thoughts on the Draft Comprehensive Plan

Dear Planning,

I've had a chance to go through the first draft of the comprehensive plan and wanted to share some thoughts.

**Goal 1 (Page 53)** is missing increasing home *ownership* opportunities as a goal. This strikes me as a significant omission.

**Goal 4.3 Promote “complete neighborhoods” (Page 60)** This needs additional flushing out and specificity. Neighborhood hubs or village squares (as I like to think of them) should be *off* the arterials. No one in the history of Ann Arbor has ever said, “Lets meet for coffee at Starbucks at Arbor Land, we can sit outside.”

These hubs should be centrally located in the middle of supper blocks created by the Arterials.

Getting more full service grocery stores spread out in the city should be a major goal.

**Goal 6 Create more walkable mixed use (Page 72)** For Briarwood redevelopment, I would propose not having height limits there. Really lean into having this be a shiny new “financial district”. There are no notable parks or nature areas, cozy residential neighborhoods, or historic buildings that very tall buildings could overshadow. This is the perfect place to go all in with height as an incentive to redevelop.

**Goal 7.1 Preserve a variety of commercial and industrial spaces in the city (Page 74)** I fully support this goal, but... There will never be enough space for this in the city. The plan should call for working with Pittsfield township to preserve industrial zoning in the area south of I94 by the airport and along Ellsworth and with Ann Arbor Township and the University of Michigan to revive Ann Arbor Technology Park. The University releasing a small fraction of the roughly 400 acres it bought in Ann Arbor Technology Park was key to bringing KLA to the area.

One additional possibility to explore would be to move the airport about 5 or 6 quarter sections west into Lodi Township (onto a much larger site) and working out a deal with Pittsfield to preserve the area for industrial uses, given that no one is ever going to build a large factory in the city proper.

**Goal 9.1 street typology (Page 86)** The city should classify all its roads into two broad, primary functions: Access Movements (Streets) and Through Movements (Roads).

Roads should support high volumes of consistent traffic. Not particularly fast traffic, but smoothly moving traffic.

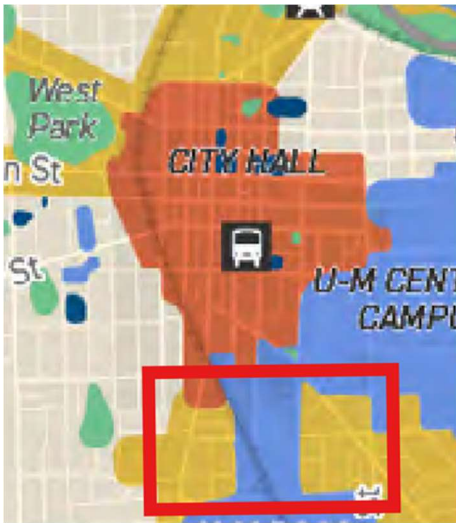
Streets should be short, straight, and connected to other streets. (Burns Parks street network fits this description to perfection.)

A goal of should be to reduce the number of streets that intersect with roads and increase the number of streets that intersect with other streets.

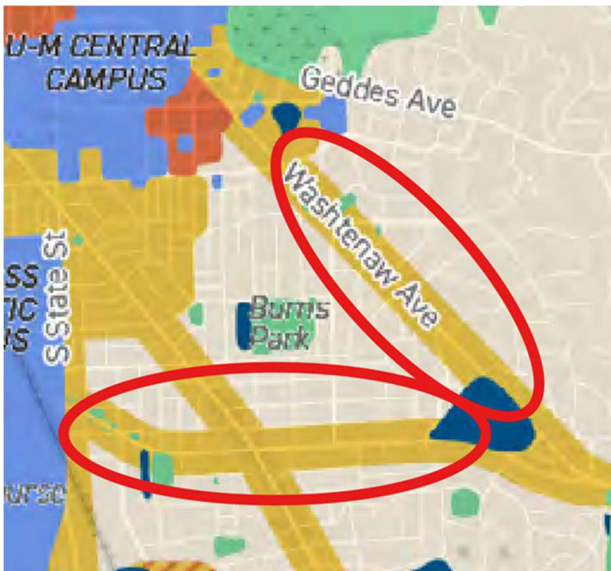
**9.3 Support a shift in transportation modes (Page 87) + Transit (Page 106)** If you're serious about this, a long term vision should be to double track and fully grade separate the Ann Arbor railroad through the city and use it as the backbone for a north-south, heavy rail metro system. It would be highly efficient, move tons of people, not get stuck in traffic and connect the Briarwood, Downtown, and Uplands/north campus hubs along with potential commuter lots to the north and south of the city outside of the freeway ring. The best part is that the right of way is already there.

### **Future Land Use Map (Page 100)**

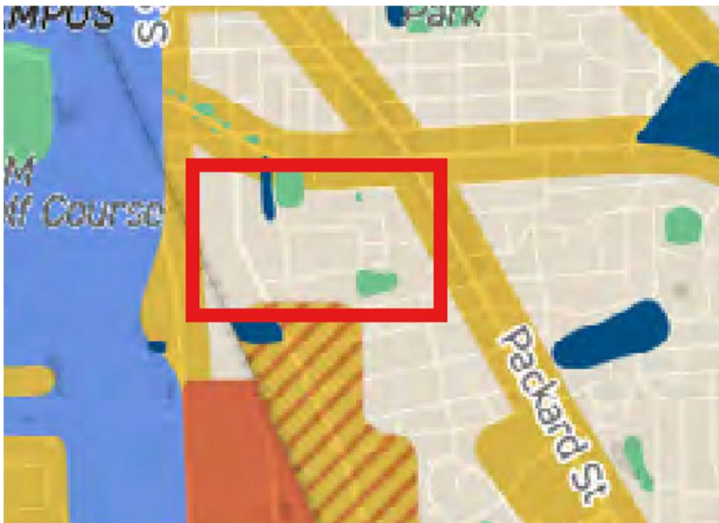
The Downtown Core should be expanded all the way down to Hoover. Especially, the new dorms going there, this area is now indisputably part of downtown, we should plan accordingly.



Realistically, I don't think these areas are going to be rezoned away from residential. If Granger didn't make the cut for Transition, I don't foresee Iroquois, Shadford, or especially Norway Rd raising their hand for significant redevelopment either.



Why is Woodbury Gardens marked as Low Rise residential? This is a place that's requested TC1 Zoning.



I would put Pittsfield Village into the transition zoning. There's so much open space there that could be worked with.



Research Park is NOT an appropriate place for residential! Seriously, this is dangerous. I see people walking across State Street I94 overpass currently. I don't want to see a lot more of them. This area was not built for residential use. Either in terms of pedestrian crossing of I94 or amenities like parks and schools.



**Nodes (Page 104)** – While the plan doesn't explicitly say this, I'm concerned that its suggesting that the intersections of major arterials are anything other than just that: Busy intersections. These are not good places for development, other than maybe gas stations and such. They are unpleasant places. They should be treated as such.

**Residential District (Page 108)** A major (but not exclusive) purpose of this district should be as a place for people to own homes and the land they sit on. Ann Arbor should be a place where people can get on the property ladder. Not just rent.

**4 stories vs 3 stories.** I would suggest splitting the baby here. Specifically, I would have **Low Rise Residential 3 Story Zone** and a **Low Rise Residential 4 Story Zone**. A four story building would look out of place in the middle of many existing blocks, so the 3 story version should be the default. But there are places where higher heights would be appropriate. Namely on lots with frontages along large parks and next to elementary schools



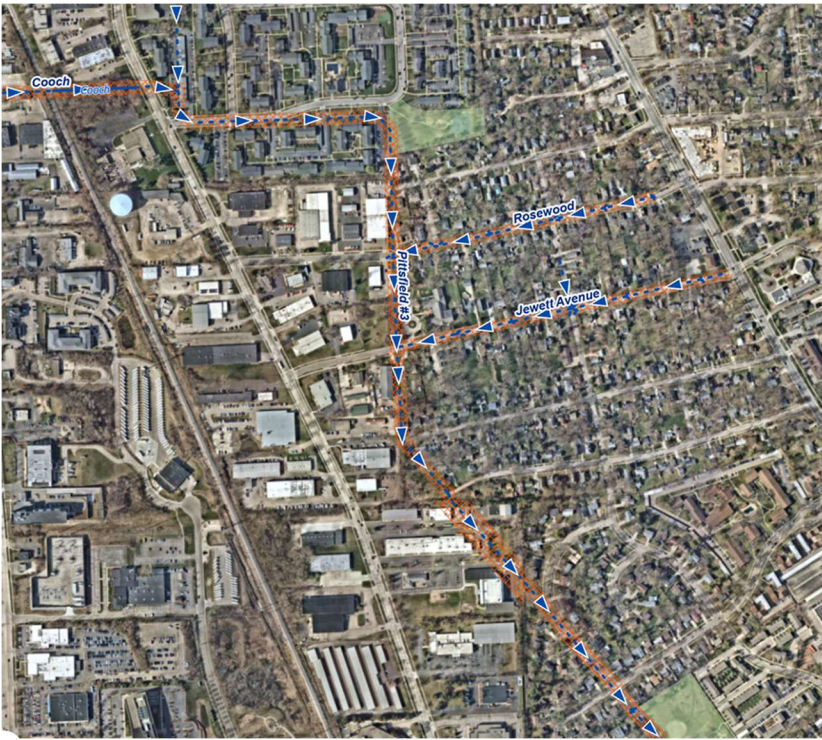
Buhr is the perfect spot to increase density around. If you don't have a yard of your own, a 60 acre park out your door is the next best thing!

“we don't all want nuclear families and single family homes” This pull quote irks me. There is nothing wrong with it, BUT the generation that comes after “next generation” will come from people mostly in nuclear families. Nuclear families make strong communities. Housing for nuclear families should be what we want to encourage. We don't want to be a city of retirees, college students, and no children. And I say this as someone without children. One of the great things about how the city is laid out is that its neighborhoods were centered around elementary schools.

**Flex District (Page 116)** Why are large apartment buildings included here? Do we really envision a large apartment building off South Industrial at the end of Kensington Dr? If that's the case, then South Industrial will simply become a type of “super transition zone”.

If we really are going to turn South Industrial into a residential zone—and let's be clear, that's exactly what we're talking about here—then the plan should call for a new street to connect Esch Avenue in George Town to Astor Avenue in Woodbury Gardens following the path of Pittsfield Drain #3 to break up the blocks and tie the neighborhood together.





### Additional Challenges to Development (Page 122) –

**Shopping Centers** you’re going to need to allow significantly more parking here than you do at other hubs. Otherwise, you’re simply not going to get redevelopment. Arbor Hills Crossing with Apartments on top would be a huge win. Arbor Land Frozen in zombie non-conforming mode would not.

**Building & Fire Codes** – Especially for the transition district, legalizing point access apartment blocks in the state should be the major focus of the city’s lobbying in Lansing. This configuration means that units often have windows on multiple walls and are often much better than apartments built with double loaded corridors with stairwells at both ends of the corridor.

### Additional Thoughts

#### The Absence of Place Making as a Consideration

For understandable reasons, this plan leans heavily on Arterial corridors for redevelopment. I would have liked to have seen focus on adding density around the city’s many parks and schools, but I understand the reason you made this decision. However, I think it’s important to understand that even if all this development does happen these will still be arterial roads. They will not become downtown streets.

**A policy goal should be to embrace these corridors as *roads for through movements*.** A major goal of redevelopment should be to **delete as many access movements on these corridors as possible**. The goal should be high volumes of smooth, safe through movements with constant speeds. Not fast speeds, just constant speeds.

- The city should prohibit new driveways/curb cuts on these corridors and aim to eliminate existing curb cuts over time as redevelopment happens. (See Packard Row as an example of a new development on an arterial that deleted curb cuts.)
- Place making should be focused on streets around the corridors not on the corridor roads themselves. Trying to make roads into "places" is how we end up with stroads.
- The most successful recent road "activation" project I can think of is Arbor Crossing. You can see the place was packed on the Saturday I took this picture:



- Except... Washtenaw itself was dead with respect to pedestrian traffic at this exact same time. The opposite of "activated".



- No one actually wants to spend time along an arterial road, they just want to use it to get from place to place.... and that's ok. The people and activity are just off Washtenaw and not on Washtenaw. My argument is that city and planning should embrace that observation rather than try to fight it.
- We can think of the parking lot that the retail Arbor Crossing surrounds as a sort of "town square" for that development. We may not like that it's a parking lot, but it is an active place.
- Consider a recent project that completely failed to activate an arterial road: The George.





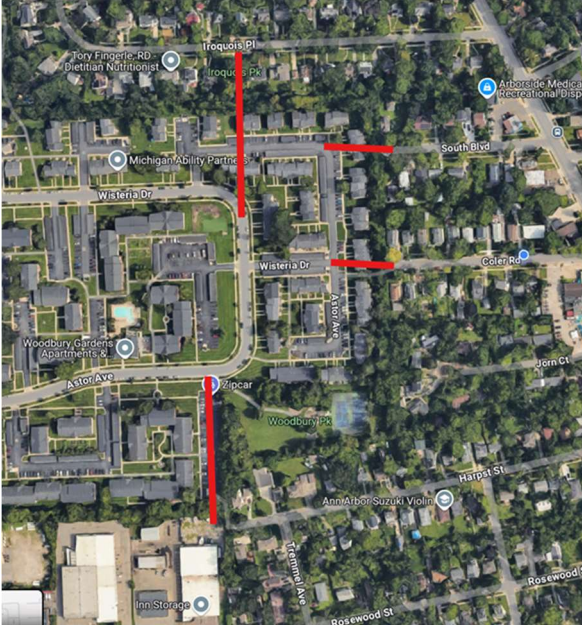
- There's a lot of reasons this didn't work out as a retail location--the change in elevation really hurt it--but also the part of Packard it's on is definitely a road and not a street. So, any retail here was never going to get meaningful foot traffic. But what if instead of trying to activate Packard, the site had tried to activate Page Avenue on the other side of the building?]



- I could see neighborhood retail working here. Particularly, if some "place making" effort had gone into trying to make this area around Page Avenue a village square for the Georgetown neighborhood.
- Two areas by me that I think the plan should call out for building "Village" squares around (i.e. "place making") are: Page Avenue between Pine Valley and King George and in the middle of the center block of Woodbury Gardens. A really nice "village plaza" could be developed there if the complex is fully redeveloped.

### **Connecting The Street Grid: Renters are Pollution Land Use Barriers (and Parks, so many Parks.)**

A thing we see in Ann Arbor in developments since the 70s is strict separation between multi family developments and single family developments. The street I live on Coler, abruptly ends in a 30 foot conflicting land use barrier rather than continue on to the R3 and R4 areas of Woodbury as though it were an industrial site. (Whoever platted out Woodbury seems to have thought this might change one days since they almost perfectly aligned certain access roads with Coler and South Boulevard.



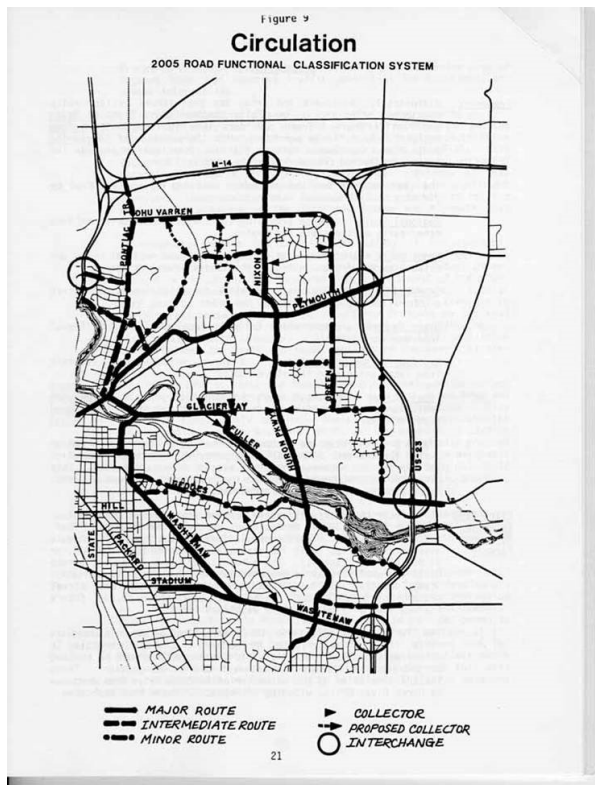
But even more common than a land use barrier is the park. Iroquois Park exists because it was a driveway into the botanical gardens before Woodbury was built. The north-south section of wisteria is aligned such that it could continue north on to Iroquois, but this city put a park there.

This is surprisingly common in the city.



- The Ponds park (the playground section) is placed on top of the right of way for Candlewick Dr and seems designed to ensure Candlewick and King George never connected.
- Meadowbrook Park is placed at the end of 7<sup>th</sup> street and seems designed to ensure 7<sup>th</sup> street and Meadowbrook Apartments are never connected.
- The 1989 North East Area Plan called for the abandonment of Huron Parkway to M14 so that Huron Parkway wouldn't go through Leslie Golf Course:

"This plan recommends revision of the Huron Parkway "inner belt" concept, making use of existing roads to serve future development in the northwest portion of the study area and minimize disruption to Leslie Golf Course and adjacent residential developments"



- But it did suggest that Tuebingen Parkway be extended to Dhu Varren Road as an alternative to Huron Parkway. Except...Tuebingen Parkway was abruptly ended by Placid Way Park

This is a long way of saying that fixing street connections in the city is going to be hard and the plan should be very specific about which ones it wants to address. This city really likes to *not* build roads and streets. The Clark road extension and filling in the missing section of Oakbrook are two very obvious projects that the plan should call for.

## Huron Parkway

Finally I will say, the Inner Belt concept was a good idea and its abandonment should be revisited. Specifically, I believe Huron Parkway should be extended to North Main Street. As a four-lane divided parkway.

If we did this, it would solve many of the problems on North Main Street

- First it would add a much needed additional river crossing.
- Second, it would allow for both the Main Street and Barton Drive ramps to be removed. All traffic exiting M14 would exit at a diverging diamond interchange north of the river, traffic going to North Main Street would have more time to slow down
- Third, this reconfiguration would make the North Main Street trunkline transfer easier for the state as there would not be a risk of traffic backing up on onto the freeway if the city say wanted to convert North Main Street to three lanes
- Finally, slower traffic would make residential redevelopment of that section of North Main much safer, should the plan go in that direction.

Good Luck with the next stages of the process,

Sam