

Planning Commission March 21, 2023 public hearing
721 South Forest PUD Rezoning
Marc Gerstein comments

I am Marc Gerstein of 1321 Forest Court where I have lived for over 40 years. I am strenuously opposed to the application for a PUD project at 721 South Forest. I strongly support the analysis of Matt Kowalski and the Planning Department staff in his memos of October 13 and December 12, 2022. The proposed luxury student apartment building is totally inconsistent with the zoning of this site and the land use goals of the City's Master Plan. It significantly exceeds any density and building size permitted for this zoning district. The proposed building is totally out of character with the surround R4C neighborhood. It disregards the existing buildings around it on and adjacent to South Forest between Willard and Hill Streets, a diverse and pleasant area of well-maintained residences, small apartment buildings, fraternity and sorority houses, and a child care center. It contravenes the Central Area Land Use recommendations that seek to encourage appropriate development and transitions and to protect the existing character of neighborhoods. The Central Area plan states that the goal should be "To protect, preserve and enhance the character, scale and integrity of existing housing in established residential areas" and "To ensure that new infill development is consistent with the scale and character of existing neighborhoods." This project clearly does none of this, unlike the recently constructed small apartment buildings at 727 S. Forest and adjacent at 1315 Hill, as well as the Towsley Children's House.

The proposal is in complete and total violation of the zoning created by the City in the recent past establishing D1 and D2 zones with transitional step downs to preserve the character and integrity of the surrounding R4C areas. It seeks to do via a PUD what the established zoning will not allow. If this PUD project is permitted to go forward, it will make a mockery of and demolish the zoning regulations studied, negotiated and voted on by the City Council and open up the whole area south of Willard to barely restricted development. Ignoring the City Master Plan and Central Area Plans for this PUD is not how city planning is done, nor should Ann Arbor be remade through single site spot zoning like this. As the developers' proposal admits, changing the zoning "would require a deeper review of the overall needs and impacts in this area", so it intends to do it with a PUD instead. The City's definition of a PUD states that "The zoning district shall not be allowed where it is sought to primarily avoid the imposition of standards and requirements of other zoning classifications or other City regulations." This is precisely the only purpose of this request for a PUD for this project, to circumvent the existing zoning of this site.

I strongly urge you to reject this PUD proposal that is in total violation of the zoning and of the purposes of Planned Unit Developments. Approval will only open the way for other such PUD proposals in the R4C zoned area between Willard and Hill and beyond. In addition, construction of this project is certain to degrade and even kill some of the heritage trees to its north at Forest Plaza apartments through damage to their root systems and blocking the sun during large portions of the day. This is precisely what happened with the building of Foundry Lofts on Huron at Division to the old trees to its north. And, do we really need another ground floor coffee shop posing as a public benefit?