

**Subject:** Zoning Proposal Letter  
**Attachments:** Planning Commission Letter.docx

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**From:** Marjorie Checkoway  
**Sent:** Monday, March 3, 2025 12:41 PM  
**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>  
**Subject:** Zoning Proposal Letter

Please include the attached letter in the meeting packet.

Please advise if there is a better way to be sure the Planning Commissioners see and are able to read this.

Thank you!

Margie Checkoway

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I appreciate your reading this commentary about your proposal to upzone the City.

It is based on best practices in city planning.

It is my understanding that the discussion of upzoning was to address people who work in the City and are unable to afford to live here as well as lower-income residents who have been forced out because of rising rents. It now seems to have evolved to a one-size-fits-all approach where zoning regulations will be the same in residential areas across the city.

City planners have learned that it is a false argument *that* to build “sufficient” housing, we must eliminate zoning regulations. Likewise, case studies across the country have raised the alarm on this practice. In fact, many have argued that upzoning is simply the deregulation of land use, this deregulation being a central tenet of conservatives since the Nixon Administration. No wetlands, no land conservation, etc. It has been found that upzoning advocates use ideas and phrases that mislead the public and limit debate because there is not widespread acceptance of such in progressive communities. The goal is not to address progressive issues of equity and affordability but to enable developers to flourish. **I know this isn’t your goal in presenting carte blanche upzoning, but these become the unintended results.** In other cities, Black, Brown, and low-income residents have been the victims. Upzoning drives up rents and housing prices, Look at Seattle, where a neighborhood of modest bungalows has been torn down, house by house, street by street, for high-rise structures, many with studios that house highly-paid Microsoft employees, likewise in SF, where residents were displaced by Silicon Valley employees.

Russell, Skiba, Ph.D., former Director of the Equity Project at Indiana University and Co-founder, University Alliance for Racial Justice, wrote, *Unlike the theories of the new urbanists, the negative effects of upzoning are real, and the burden of those effects falls most heavily on the dispossessed and marginalized. It isn’t surprising that the well-off and overwhelmingly White members of the California YIMBY organization, funded primarily by ultra-rich, overwhelmingly White tech industry moguls, fail to understand that. But the LA Tenants Union, a powerful voice for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised, attempts to educate all of us when they call the upzoning strategy “a dangerous ideology that is funded by the powerful to serve the powerful.” Gentrification and racial displacement are not progressive. Catering to wealthy developers in the vain hope that affordable housing will someday filter down to those in need is far from progressive. Limiting or short-circuiting public discussion on matters that so clearly affect our future is most definitely not progressive. Upzoning is not progressive.*

In Ann Arbor, the North Burns Park neighborhood has been and will continue to be negatively affected by upzoning. Currently, there is a delicate balance between resident owners and student renters. As more landlords and developers see the opportunity of student housing, formerly historic homes that were attractive to families and newcomers

to the City who were looking for a historic, aesthetically pleasing setting, have become student housing. In this case, developers and rich families of students who can afford high rents are the winners. The losers are the City who will have lost an attractive neighborhood that would be a calling card in other cities, which would want to retain such a beautiful, historic area, and will have lost current residents who move out because of noise, congestion, red cups and all that go with them, and deterioration of those properties. And where are they moving? Often to surrounding communities where school quality has improved, taxes are lower, and student housing is not an issue. Believe me, this is nothing against students. I am a teacher and love students. The students are the first to admit that their transient three-year residency in Ann Arbor housing is not something their parents or former home community neighbors would tolerate nor would they if they weren't a 19-22 year-old student. They have profusely apologized the next day for vomiting on front porches and breaking glass bottles in driveways. They acknowledge they need their own dedicated spaces to accommodate this period of their lives.

This is not an appeal from NIMBY or conservative residents. We are knowledgeable and progressive. We see and experience every day the positive and negative effects of decisions on the quality of City life. Social Capital is key. City life improves when people feel connection, bonding, and well-being. Zoning for the benefit of developers and students of rich parents brings money to developers, congestion, and deterioration of the physical space. It does not support block parties, potlucks, book groups, babysitting co-ops, being able to walk to elementary school, riding your bikes without congested streets and sometimes impaired college-student drivers, knowing your neighbors and being there for them.

There should be a case-by-case assessment of the implications of upzoning. North Burns Park, for example, already has houses close together with small yards. Most houses have the width of a one-car driveway between them.

The example of the Sports Illustrated downtown proposal is relevant here. The townspeople were far more knowledgeable and had broader and deeper perspectives than the City staff. They knew that such a proposal did not fit the downtown Main St. block. (We needed to go there to shoot baskets with our kids?!) The high-rise model was not in keeping with the historic and attractive building scale that brought outsiders to dine and shop. The homework hadn't been done. Fortunately, the residents with longer-range perspectives of what a healthy and thriving community looks like seemed to save the day on that one.

Most residents are not anti-development but rather pro-development that has an end game as to the overall health, look, and social capital of the city. An across-the-board approach seems reckless and chaotic. Shouldn't planning be carefully planned and mindful of all aspects of community growth, including social capital and attraction of people other than

non-students to the City? And as stated earlier, wasn't the initial interest in zoning changes to attract working people to be able to afford to live within the City which I totally support?

When neighborhoods that already have a delicate balance of attractiveness to non-students are inundated with more student buildings--because these will be the only developments in North Burns Park for developers who have dollar signs in their utmost thinking--that quickly become poorly maintained, then that plan is not in the city's best interest in the long run.

Thank you for your time,  
Marjorie Checkoway  
Ann Arbor