

Subject: Public Comment May 7, 2025 Engagement Activity Boards | Housing & Neighborhoods

From: Monroe, Greg

Sent: Friday, May 16, 2025 11:07 AM

To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>

Cc: Gregory Monroe; Briggs, Erica <EBriggs@a2gov.org>

Subject: Re: Public Comment May 7, 2025 Engagement Activity Boards | Housing & Neighborhoods

Attention Ann Arbor City Planning:

Re: Public Comment May 7, 2025 Engagement Activity Boards | Housing & Neighborhoods

I am writing in opposition to the current Comprehensive Plan. I am requesting that the plan be paused so that more residents can be notified and given the opportunity to provide input and shape a plan that can work for everyone, including future and importantly our current residents.

We suffer from a dearth of local journalism in this country and Ann Arbor is no exception. Which means it is increasingly more difficult to gain insight into local government activity which hinders our ability to hold it accountable, this plan included. I believe if we had intact local journalism or if the city made more of an effort to reach more of its citizens, there would have been more engagement and feedback from residents throughout this process.

I learned of the plan's existence only recently through word of mouth, and since learning of it, all three meetings I've attended in the last week were only made aware to me through the texts of an engaged friend.

This plan has so much at stake. So many residents will be impacted, whether they are aware of it or not. This plan has the potential to fundamentally change the city in ways that cannot be reversed once implemented. The proposed framework is more than a concept, it will be used to inform changes in zoning code. There are real stakes here. It is only fair and just that we pause so that more residents can voice their concerns and be involved to help shape a suitable alternative.

Thank you for reading thus far and for continuing to understand my concerns.

My main concern with this plan is that it places too much faith and power in the hands of developers, and as a result will bring about the destruction of single-family housing stock in Ann Arbor's most desirable low income and moderate income areas, displacing residents and making their neighborhoods unrecognizable from what they are today.

At the most recent public comment period on May 13, 2025, several residents spoke out against this. As a result of upzoning single-family residential areas and the implementation of transition zones, neighborhoods like those near Allmandinger Park will be subsumed by dense student housing.

Others like "Lowertown" (I grew up on Wright St. nearly 40 years ago and even though this is historic nomenclature, I can assure you it is only since the area has begun to be gentrified that this moniker has stuck) where low income and moderate income residents have lived for decades are already succumbing to a similar fate.

Relaxing zoning laws to encourage new development is frequently presented as a way to lower housing costs. In

theory, increasing supply should reduce prices. But in practice, especially in desirable areas, that's not what happens.

- **Developers prioritize luxury units:**
 - Without affordability requirements, new construction overwhelmingly targets high-income buyers and renters. This doesn't help the people most impacted by the housing crisis.
- **Luxury supply doesn't trickle down:**
 - Developers often build high-end condos and apartments because that's where profit margins are highest—not because the community needs more affordable housing.
 - These units don't reduce demand for mid-range or low-income housing; instead, they attract new, wealthier residents.
- **Upzoning increases land speculation:**
 - When zoning is relaxed to allow taller buildings or higher density, land values rise based on what *could* be built, not what is there now.
 - This makes land acquisition more expensive, not less, and incentivizes speculative investment and rather than community-focused development, worsening affordability.
- **Upzoning incentivizes demolition of existing affordable housing stock:**
 - When zoning is relaxed and land values rise based on what could be built, not what is there now, it leads to the demolition of older, more affordable homes or apartments to make way for high-end replacements.
 - This reduces net affordability even if more units are added, because the types of units lost and gained are not equivalent.
- **Upzoning creates neighborhood change and displacement:**
 - New luxury development can shift neighborhood demographics, attracting higher-income buyers or renters and increasing prices for nearby homes.
 - This leads to gentrification and displacement as long-time residents are priced out by rising rents, property values and costs of living.

If you think this is not what will happen, it already is. Here are two new developments in Lowertown:

The J Sinclair Development: <https://thejsinclair.com/>

- Four-story luxury condominium complex with fifteen units slated to be built across the street from what is for now an affordable collection of town homes, apartments and single-family homes. They range from \$3,000,000 - \$5,000,000 in price.
- A 1,000 square foot house sold around the corner sold this winter for roughly \$400,000, which equates to \$365 / square foot and \$200,000 / bedroom.
- For comparison, one of these new 6,000 square foot luxury condominium, an addition to the neighborhood, comes in at roughly \$825 / square foot and \$1,250,000 / bedroom.

River North Ann Arbor: <https://rivenortha2.com/>

- Recently broke ground by clear cutting 1.2 acres of mature growth forest on the edge of a public park to build five luxury duplexes, 10 units total. They are two bedroom, two-and-a-half bath and start at \$1,000,000.
- For comparison, these new 2,000+ square foot luxury condominiums, additions to the neighborhood, come in at roughly \$445 / square foot and \$500,000 / bedroom.

Developers don't care about a dynamic, affordable, sustainable and equitable Ann Arbor. Nor should they. Their job is to make money. Our job is to regulate them. Upzoning fails to do so at the expense of our residents—current and future.

I do not mean to demonize developers by including this, I bring up these examples because I think this is more likely outcome based on my understanding of the Comprehensive Plan. The most desirable areas will be targeted with luxury development first. And I don't think that really moves the needle on affordable housing. What it does accomplish is to erode the character of our neighborhoods and make it more expensive to buy a house and start a family.

There are numerous negative environmental implications of incentivizing the destruction of existing housing stock for new construction as well, such as releasing embodied carbon from existing structures and creating additional demolition waste for landfills. Even green or energy-efficient homes can take decades to pay back their carbon cost from construction, meaning their short-term effect is net negative for the climate.

Finally, what hasn't been said is that I think what comes through in this too is that Ann Arbor residents value a sense of place. Its character neighborhoods are lovely places. Arguably a public good in and of themselves. I don't think anyone wants to lose that. I know I don't.

I am for affordability, sustainability and equity. I am for more density. I think most of us concerned with the plan agree there. But what we are most concerned with in this plan is that it must be more targeted. It must be more protective of existing residents and neighborhoods. And it must do more than simply ease restrictions on developers on hope for the best.

Please pause the plan. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

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