

**Subject:** Neighborhood Comp Plan Opposition Flyer & The Abundance Agenda Response

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**From:** Brian Chambers

**Sent:** Saturday, March 29, 2025 3:51 PM

**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Lenart, Brett <BLenart@a2gov.org>; Stacey <Stacey@interface-studio.com>; jamie@interface-studio.com; Carolyn Lusch <carolyn.lusch@smithgroup.com>; Oliver Kiley <oliver.kiley@smithgroup.com>

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**Subject:** Re: Neighborhood Comp Plan Opposition Flyer & The Abundance Agenda Response

Comp Plan and City Leadership:

As the neighborhood flier is still getting circulated, I looked up the building they depicted, with an image search on Google.

Sage on Jackson is a 5-story residential apartment building on Milwaukee's Lower East Side.

<https://urbanmilwaukee.com/building/sage-on-jackson/>

Not sure why a 5-story building is being used to depict a 4-story.

Brian

On Sat, Mar 15, 2025 at 10:21 AM Brian Chambers wrote:

Dear Comprehensive Plan Project and City Leaders: (Brett, please share this with the Planning Commission):

I am sharing this information, so you are all aware of a segment of the Ann Arbor community organizing against the recent updates to the Comprehensive Plan, such as using Form-based Zoning and 48' heights for Low Rise Residential.

The attached flyer, "**Upzoning - letter to neighbors**" being distributed speaks for itself.

The main thrust of their critique appears to be that the new provisions are being done for the benefit of developers and city tax revenues, and not the interests of current residents (at least those who object to density increases), nor to necessarily build more subsidized, affordable housing at scale.

Recently, I was interviewed on the **15-minute Neighborhood** objective by a reporter from Concentrate. In the interview, I made sure they had the 'complete neighborhood' analyses done by the Comp Plan project last fall. He came back and asked if these land use reform initiatives by the

City and Council could be considered examples of the "Abundance Agenda" as outlined by Klein and Thompson in their 2025 book, **Abundance**.

See: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/03/10/abundance-ezra-klein-derek-thompson-book-review>

My response was an emphatic **yes**, the City and Council are calling for a reimagined and efficient City government that actively facilitates growth and innovation.

This is reflected in their charge to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan project, creating the Economic Development office, and bringing on board Joe Giant, as the Director. You are also working to remove unnecessary regulatory obstacles by having more 'by right' development, and implementing strategic regulations that enhance supply and competition. For example, your revamping of the development approval process is to create a more effective way for non-traditional developers to work on projects in the City, is an example of increasing competition in our local housing market.

However, there is a '**progressive**' critique of the 'abundance agenda' which is worth noting so that the communications on the Comprehensive Plan may better and proactively engage in respect to it. That critique reflects what you are reading in the attached neighborhood flyer. Progressive critics fear that the *Abundance Agenda* rhetoric could be used to justify a corporate-friendly deregulation push.

#### **Progressive Critique of Abundance Agenda:**

- Some progressives may view *Abundance* as overly focused on supply-side solutions that emphasize efficiency and production without adequate concern for redistributive justice.
- The critique might be that it leans too heavily on reducing regulatory barriers rather than strengthening neighborhood protections, environmental safeguards, or community-led decision-making.
- Progressives could also argue that expanding production in housing might still fail to benefit marginalized communities if those gains are not distributed equitably.

#### **Response from Abundance Advocates:**

- Advocates can emphasize that abundance is not an alternative to equity—it's a necessary precondition for it. A society with more housing and abundant energy will make it easier to enact equity and inclusion policies. The **Renters Commission** in Ann Arbor is an example of this, as well as police reform initiatives, let alone simplifying our development project review processes to reduce the cost and risk to housing development projects.
- The *Abundance Agenda* does not advocate for deregulation across the board, but rather for **smarter** regulations that streamline development while maintaining worker rights, environmental protections, and affordability measures. **Labor rights initiatives by Council** should also be highlighted.
- The approach aligns with progressive priorities by removing artificial scarcity that disproportionately harms lower-income and marginalized communities.

Anyways, I try to provide recommended messaging and communications on these policy initiatives when I write to you.

Minimally, I want you all to be aware of the nature of a segment of the community organizing against the Comp Plan objectives and provisions on creating the context for sizable increases to Ann Arbor's housing supply, and what might constitute a rejoinder by the City to that critique

Best regards for equity-based, sustainable development,

Brian