

September 10, 2024

Milton Dohoney, Jr., Ann Arbor City Administrator
301 E. Huron Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

✓ Ann Arbor City Planning Commissioners, including:

Wonwoo Lee,
Donnell Wyche,
Sara Hammerschmidt,
Sarah Mills,
Ellie Abrons,
Lisa Disch,
Julie Weatherbee,
Daniel Adams,
Richard Norton

301 E. Huron Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Re: Resident Comment on Zoning Resolution that seeks to expand home occupation, including ACUs

Dear City Administrator and Planning Commissioners:

I am writing about city council's recent resolution directing you to revise zoning to expand home occupation uses and structures, including accessory commercial units. I saw in MLive that city council members especially liked the former Selma cafe which operated from a home on the west side, and city council wants to change zoning so the Selma Cafe and others like it can rise up again all over Ann Arbor.

For those of you who don't remember, the food at Selma was delicious and local grow, and Selma was so popular that it brought in over a 100 people a day for breakfast -- people who drove in from all over the county. Because Selma was so awesome, I think it justified all the nuisances it caused neighbors and all the dangers it posed to kids walking and biking to elementary school. More on this below! I'm especially glad about the zoning changes, because I want to make some money on the zoning changes by setting up my own home cafe, modeled after Selma.

In addition, I REALLY appreciate that city council eliminated the requirement for public comment in the planning process for these new zoning rules. The proposed zoning changes could be controversial, so you should finalize them without giving any notice or allowing any comment, before residents catch on.

Push through the zoning changes, with haste and stealth. Be as sneaky as you can. Capitalism should always take precedence over democracy. Especially when it is me who wants to make money on the zoning changes. (hahaha!)

City planners, please rush the zoning changes through before the end of the year like city council wants, before people figure out what you have done. Don't worry about whether it's unethical or illegal or undemocratic to eliminate notice and public participation. If Trump has immunity from lawsuits, so should you. We Dems can learn a thing or two from Trump and Project 25. Be secretive and suppress all disagreement and dialogue. Create a kind of "shadow docket," like the Supreme Court, so nobody knows what you're doing.

If you DO go forward without notice and comment, I guess it means you agree with me that it's a bad idea to involve residents, right?

Just in case some scared, pesky residents catch wind of what you're doing, I've laid out some advice below, and I've described things that have caused trouble in the past, so you will be prepared to argue against them.

First, call any annoying residents names, like "NIMBY" or "stupid" or "wrinkled" or whatever. Name calling distracts people and shuts down all consideration of the actual issues, which would be time consuming, complex, and require way too much thought. We want this process to be as slight as possible.

Second, study the history of the Selma cafe and the objections people raised. I plan to open a home-based cafe on the Northside where I live, near the elementary school. I'm going to make it like Selma.

I used to love to go to the Selma Cafe. It was located in an adorable house right next to an elementary school. Selma had like 100 guests for breakfast each morning when they served. Seriously, those are Selma's attendance numbers that Selma itself reported. I'm not making this up. The local grow food was so scrumptious. And it was fun to meet gobs of people for breakfast, people who drove in from all over town and even from outside the county. It was that popular!

Not many nearby neighbors went to Selma though, because the NIMBYs got mad about all the Selma car traffic, and they said their kids couldn't walk or bike to school anymore because it wasn't safe, supposedly because of all the "crazy" car traffic "speeding by" and "making u-turns" next to the elementary school, blocking school buses, blah, blah, blah. In my defense, it was impossible to get a car out of that tight parking spot without making a u-turn (or else driving into the school parking lot and running over a kid), so what was I supposed to do!?

And the nearby neighbors said Selma was noisy and crowded and woke them up in the mornings, but it didn't seem noisy to me! And a guy I know who lived four blocks away from Selma said he wasn't bothered by the noise at all. Selma's neighbors need to stop being so selfish and let me have what I want, which is a tasty breakfast in a cute home with creative, nonprofit, sustainable people. I heard that the whole neighborhood got mad about Selma. Neighbors argued, and many friendly bonds were broken forever, but it is good in the long run for neighbors to have conflict, like building a family and fostering hostilities that fester for years.

Well, to be honest, there WAS a huge volume of cars generated by Selma's customers. The Selma cars parked all down the street and on a bunch of the side streets too, but hey parents, you should just drive your kids to school to protect them from the Selma cars! **We want to discourage kids from walking or biking to school, and encourage people to drive to in-home businesses.** And we want more creative, new, in-home businesses, even if that means more people driving miles across town to have breakfast. Residential businesses are much more important than neighbors getting along and keeping children safe.

It was wrong of the city to shut down Selma because of all the angry neighbors complaining to the city and worrying about their kids getting hurt.

In fact, I would love to see a Selma cafe near every elementary school in town. It's such a great way for people to meet and build bridges over locally brewed coffee. After breakfast, the Selmas could serve local craft beer and wine all day, like cozy old pubs in Europe. We might need to add some portable toilets in the yards, so be sure to allow for that.

The NIMBYs are so ignorant. They whine about peace and quiet and safety, but they don't understand how important it is for people like me who don't have to work in the morning to find a cute place to have a delicious, artisan breakfast -- a place where cutting-edge people can gather and do good deeds, like eating craft bacon.

And I want to make some money. If my business disturbs my neighbors and causes them pain, that's the price I'm willing to let them pay for the higher good.

Hey, will expanding commercial use drive up home property values, like it did with that Airbnb thing? I hope so! People tell me I will be lucky to be zoned more commercial, because that ALWAYS drives up property values.

So, is it true that expanding commercial zoning in residential neighborhoods will make my house more expensive for someone to buy from me? That's good for

me, so that's another reason you should make the zoning changes! Too bad for working families who might want to buy my house in the future.

If you make the zoning changes, eventually rental-property companies and private equity (whatever THAT is!) will buy up more of the homes because regular working people won't be able to afford them. Then there will be more renters with uncontrolled rent increases they can't afford. But as long as I get MY windfall with your zoning changes, I'm okay with other people being shut out of home ownership.

So, city leaders, make the zoning changes, and don't fuss about how those changes will make housing more unaffordable. Don't overthink it!

But will the zoning changes, if they increase my property values, also make my property taxes go up? I do **NOT** want that. And will the rent lords pass their tax increases on to tenants in the form of higher rents? You need to figure out how to stop that too.

Oh, by the way, for the sake of optics, please allow the expanded commercial uses and ACUs throughout ALL the residential neighborhoods equally, not just in the neighborhoods close to downtown. Please also allow triplexes and quadplexes (you know, the ones you are currently planning for residential areas) in ALL residential neighborhoods, not just those close to downtown. Please, I beg you, permit all those things on the Northeast side, Angell, Burns Park, etc. Rich people want quadplexes next door to them too! Just ask them!

Plus, it looks bad if you leave the wealthiest neighborhoods quiet and pristine, while causing congestion, noise, pedestrian injuries, conflict, and lawsuits in the less rich neighborhoods. That could make you and city council look like you don't really care about equality, or like you favor wealthy people, or like you are NIMBYs or hypocrites, and we know you are not like that.

Words speak louder than actions, so just make it SOUND fair, even if it's not really fair in the fine print. Maybe you could draft some exceptions favoring the wealthiest neighborhoods, and bury those exceptions in a different code section -- like, hide the exceptions in an ordinance addressing "Septic Tanks" or "Drainage," where people won't notice.

My son said, "Hey mom, if you really want to make money, set up an adult entertainment business, a pot dispensary, or a bar next to Huron High." Kids say the craziest things.

That said, I do think that an in-home, adult-only, group massage therapy business would be a creative addition to a residential family neighborhood, and an impactful way to bring diverse people together and break down restrictive old ways of thinking about our bodies. Progress and change are good. Don't be scared of it.

My daughter said, "But how would you feel if there was a crowded, loud, music production business next door to you, running from early morning until sundown?" My daughter overthinks things. That would never happen next to my house.

Thanks very much!
An Ann Arbor Resident

P.S. I don't REALLY want you to push the zoning changes through without notice and comment. I want the opposite. Please start soliciting residents' thoughts. Mail a notice to EVERY resident. Have public meetings. We all know the fix is in, but please hear us out anyway. It's important that you actively notify and solicit comments from all affected residents. At least go through the motion of pretending that we have a democratic process that gives us all a voice. It will make us feel better. And it might even make you feel better too. This sneaky junk you guys do has got to stop. It's counterproductive and inflames people.

If you really believe that the great majority of residents want your proposed changes, you have nothing to fear. The city's failure to actively solicit views suggests that city leaders believe they are pushing through changes that their constituents don't actually want. That's undemocratic.

City council has signaled a willingness to engage in sneaky, GOP-style tactics to push through legislation. It makes me worry that the city will operate its new election center in equally undemocratic ways. What's to stop council from rigging the vote in the name of its higher good? Council will express outrage at this suggestion, and I'm not saying this is happening, but the point is that council's deliberate refusal to be transparent -- and yours, too, if you go along with it -- will naturally arouse wider concerns about concealment, self-dealing, influence peddling, and misconduct.

cc: City Council