

Remarks to Planning Commission

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ON THE INAPPROPRIATE SIZE OF THE DEVELOPMENT

Imagine the proposed condo building. Now imagine that the proposed condo building were rotated vertically. It wouldn't be very stable but it turns out that while it was vertical it would be the 16th tallest building in Michigan and the second tallest building outside Detroit, only trailing the 34 story River House Condominiums in Grand Rapids by just 1 foot.. It would be 2 feet taller than the tallest of the three Town Center buildings in Southfield, and it would tower over Ann Arbor's own Tower Plaza, being just more than 50% taller.

But the proposed condo building has a very decidedly horizontal orientation. In that orientation it is way too large to be constructed on the playing surface of Michigan Stadium and it is almost as high as the new straight facade for Michigan Stadium that extends north on Main Street from Stadium Blvd.

Now imagine going to Google Maps and getting an aerial view of the property using Google Earth. You should see that the entire west and southwest ends of the property are covered by what I can best describe as thick forest. That forest covers about the area of three football playing fields. Imagine how much non-human life is being supported in that forest. Now imagine bull dozers coming in and clear cutting the entire forest .One third of the forest is replaced by a big 10 foot hole in the ground called a retaining pond or detention area. That pond area would not by itself fit within the confines of the playing field of Michigan Stadium and a volleyball court would easily fit on the bottom of the pond.

Now imagine a severe rain storm passes over Ann Arbor and partially fills the hole with water, possibly up to 5 feet deep, should the current severity of rain storms continue. Now imagine the storm has passed and some neighborhood children see that hole with five feet of water. I don't want to imagine what happens next. But I can imagine that many people, myself included, would consider that constructed hole in the ground an "attractive nuisance."

Now you know what I imagine. The proposed condo building is so out of scale compared to its neighbors and would dominate the Ann Arbor Saline corridor for decades. You should not recommend that it do that.

ON SIDEWALKS AND THE CRITERIA USED TO DETERMINE WHICH SAFETY MEASURES SHOULD BE PROVIDED

While preparing for this presentation I reviewed the video of the previous Planning Commission in July where there was public comment on the proposed 2250 condo development. I was struck by the following exchange between Commissioner Briere and the Fire Marshal Warreka Farrackand. The times I give are indicative of how far into the video recording the conversation happened.

01:35:22 - Commissioner Briere (SB) states: "One of the concerns that people have voiced to me and here at the public hearing is that there is no access from the south side of the building for fire personnel.

01:35:35 –The Fire Marshal (FM) responds: "There is no truck access but we can walk around – drag hose around.- ahh. - it does meet code for hose lay requirements from a hydrant. So all of the code requirements for access around the building –ahh - it does meet it as far as the hose. The truck does not have to get all the way around.

1:36:00 –Commissioner Briere starts another line of inquiry about why this project benefits from secondary access but none of the other neighborhoods do, to which the Fire Marshall responds....

01:36:40 FM: But the current code now, and the way I'm looking at the site, the secondary access is necessary from a fire response standpoint, not just a cut through for cars.

01:37:00 -- SB: I have heard this is not required?

01:37:04 - FM: It is not required. By code it is not required. ... And then a few seconds later...

01:37:20 – FM: It is not required, but it is desirable the way I see the plan for emergency response as a secondary entrance with a locking gate.

And then questions from the Chair veer off in another direction.

So what we learned from the exchange is that it is just fine to use the city code standard to determine south side access, but the code should not be used to determine secondary access.

What we did not learn is whether the fire marshal would consider better access to the south side necessary and desirable, and the criteria she is using to evaluate the secondary access. Nor do we know what the likelihood is of the proposed secondary access so-called sidewalk ever being used for emergency purposes. It strikes me that an emergency event that receives a multiple vehicle response is the kind of event that would also benefit from more than just hose from a hydrant response.

I do know that, aside from the project developers and possibly the Planning Commission staff, there is near unanimous conviction that the gated emergency 20' wide so-called sidewalk is just a short term kludge which is destined to become a long term liability to the Landsdowne home owners and residents. It will not take long for the developer or condo association to persuade some future city council to permit them to remove the gate because of some hardship it is placing on the condo dwellers.

ON WHO NEEDS PARKING AND DISINGENUOUS EXPLANATIONS

On page 5 of the revised site plan dated 08-20-15 there is a part of the “site data analysis” section that addresses parking requirements. It indicates that there are 111 spaces required and they are providing 154 with a footnote that reads:

“24 exterior parking spaces are to be deferred. As an active adult community it is very likely that many owners will have two vehicles, thus the additional spaces beyond the minimum.”

At approximately 02:12:15 into the video of the July 17 2015 meeting of the Planning Commission, Commissioner Peters gets Brad Moore, the architect who represents the developers, to agree that there is an excess of 32 [sic] parking spaces from what is required by code, then asks him why there is a need to be over-parked so much beyond code. Mr. Moore responds that “the amount of parking that is provided by the site plan is prudent for the use of the occupants in terms of the number of visitors. This is an active adult community” who he goes on to characterize as empty nesters. He then says “these people have a social life and they entertain and they have guests. And we feel that amount of parking is appropriate and is necessary for the success of the project.”

I would point out that all the site plans call for an excess of 43 spaces, and that Mr. Moore was quite disingenuous in his explanation for the excess of spaces. I agree with what is said on the site plan that it is very likely that many owners will have two vehicles. Since there are 75 units there are likely to be close to 150 spaces in use by the owners (or possibly the occupants the owners rent to) – one interior parking space and one exterior per unit. That would leave very few open spaces for visitors and guests. This leads to the very real possibility that guests will need to park elsewhere, with the most likely candidates being in the lot at Woodland Plaza across Ann Arbor Saline Road, or on Ascot near where the proposed 20’ wide sidewalk connects to Lambeth Drive. They would risk the possibility of being towed if they park at Woodland Plaza. There’s no risk to them for parking on Lambeth and Ascot, but the increased traffic and parking would present a risk and inconvenience to my neighborhood.

ON WHO WAS INVITED TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE PUBLIC

When questions were raised about fire emergency issues related to the Condo project, the Commission asked the fire marshal to come respond. Many questions have been raised about water drainage issues related to the same Condo, yet we have not had the water drainage marshal (wish I knew what the correct title for that person is) come and respond to the Commission and the community. Likewise while questions have been raised about the wisdom of clear cutting a densely wooded area, we have not had the forestry marshal come and respond to the Commission and the community. Nor have we had an Urban Planner come and respond to the concerns about how inappropriately massive the proposed project would be.