

Subject: Comprehensive Plan -- Note re: transition districts and historic districts

From: Pablo Gaston

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To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>

Subject: Comprehensive Plan -- Note re: transition districts and historic districts

Dear Planning Commission members,

I am writing in reference to the draft comprehensive land use plan. I want to encourage you to do as much as you can to allow more, denser housing to be built throughout the city. More specifically, I want to encourage you to expand the “transitional districts” in the plan. I also want to encourage you to explore ways to include historic districts in the efforts to increase housing density.

I live on Koch Ave. For context, Koch Ave is a little, two-block-long street at the border of multiple dividing lines in the city. It is the southern edge of the OWS historic district—my home is in it, the property behind us is not. We are also at the border of a higher-density area, in view of multiple apartment buildings (the Nob Hill complex is right around the corner), with a handful of multifamily apartments and townhomes on our block, but strict single-family blocks around the other corner.

For the purposes of this note, Koch is right on the border of a “residential” district, with a “transition” district right around the corner (see map, Future Land Use, pg 101 of draft comprehensive plan). As the description above would suggest, from my perspective my little neighborhood is already a sort of transitional area. It seems awkward to me that my block—which already has apartments and townhomes—is characterized as “residential,” while the newly “transitional” area is one that already has dense housing.

If this comprehensive plan is intended to gently increase density and expand housing, this proposed boundary does not make sense. It just reflects what is already here. Indeed, the line between the transition district and the residential district has a little westward bulge right below my street—where dense apartments are already built. These proposed changes won’t have much of an effect at all, at least in my little area. If you want to encourage more, denser housing, those borders have to shift.

That’s what I know most intimately. But a look at the proposed map makes me think the plan is not being expansive enough in terms of where these transitional areas should extend. Where the transition zones appear to branch out, along major streets and transit lines, they go barely a block beyond the arterial. That is not enough space to make a difference. You should make these zones substantially bigger—at least a few blocks. Dense housing can be transit-oriented without having the bus literally roll past the building’s front door.

Back to my block. I suspect that one of the reasons my neighborhood is not being more aggressively rezoned is because of the OWS historic district. I do not think the OWS should be exempted from *any* of the changes being proposed. I hope the planning commission can think creatively about how to maintain the historic character people value while increasing gentle density and allowing multifamily

housing.

We already have a handful of multifamily buildings throughout the neighborhood, built before the district was created. It is my understanding that the historic district was defined in large part to restrict the construction of multifamily buildings like those I see out my window. Frankly, I think that's a pretty dark legacy, and not one the comprehensive plan should preserve.

I appreciate all your work on the plan, and in support of more housing in Ann Arbor.

Many thanks,
Pablo Gastón
375 Koch Ave