

Subject:

DC-3 Resolution Regarding the Draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan

From: Brian Chambers**Sent:** Sunday, July 20, 2025 10:29 AM**To:** City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; Dohoney Jr., Milton <MDohoney@a2gov.org>; Lenart, Brett <BLenart@a2gov.org>; Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; Carolyn Lusch <carolyn.lusch@smithgroup.com>; jamie@interface-studio.com; Oliver Kiley <oliver.kiley@smithgroup.com>; Stacey <Stacey@interface-studio.com>; Bennett, Michelle <MBennett@a2gov.org>; Giant, Joseph <JGiant@a2gov.org>; Higgins, Sara <SHiggins@a2gov.org>; Delacourt, Derek <DDelacourt@a2gov.org>; Manor, Courtney <CManor@a2gov.org>**Subject:** Re: DC-3 Resolution Regarding the Draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan

p.p.s.:

Given my family obligations, I won't be speaking on this to Council Monday. Also, it was not easy for me to write in opposition. For this, I provided my earlier emails on this topic to add value to your considerations and policy discussions, before stating my position on it.

Yes, the physical parameters defining existing R1 and R2 set the 'context' for form-based zoning that is differentiated across the existing neighborhoods. Context, let alone 'character' attributes, need to be defined along physical and measurable characteristics, as I also provided.

So, hopefully, you'll be able to use everything I've shared in your deliberations. My intent is to consistently add value, even when we may not fully agree.

Also, while not directly related, Ballot Proposals A&B are under a similar set of challenges by the very same local activists. They've continued to make what I've described as a 'bad-faith' campaign. "Bad-faith" arguments force voters to accept a narrative of betrayal by Council, City Administration, as well as AADL, to oppose the project—undermining democratic trust and crowding out real debate about the proposal's benefits.

This bad-faith campaign is also being waged against the CLUP, in my opinion. This resolution will be seen as a 'success' in pausing the plan, since the resolution also includes an additional draft round.

I anticipate they'll continue to push to weaken the CLUP, following this resolution. This resolution may also impact community perception on Proposals A&B. It reinforces a key opposition tactic: that Council will back down under pressure, so now is the time to "stop them." This sentiment is already circulating.

This may be a statement from someone on Council regarding this aspect:

"Tonight's conversation is about refining the zoning conversation in low-density neighborhoods—not about pulling back from our citywide commitment to equitable housing, sustainability, and bold civic spaces. We are 100% committed to the Library Lane project, to Proposals A and B, and to delivering on that vision in full—library, plaza, and housing included."

Best wishes on your decisions!

Brian

On Sun, Jul 20, 2025 at 10:11 AM Brian Chambers wrote:

Regarding the Resolution to Limit Housing in Low-Density Residential Areas

Mayor Taylor, Councilmembers, thank you for your service and your attention on the Comprehensive Land Use Plan drafting.

I know this process hasn't been easy. You're balancing big-picture planning with deeply personal concerns from constituents—concerns about change, about fairness, about trust. I respect how seriously you're taking these responsibilities.

But I want to speak in favor of carrying forward the *vision* of the Comprehensive Plan—*without adopting this resolution*.

The draft plan offers a bold and balanced strategy: to gently add more homes in every neighborhood while respecting form and scale. That means allowing duplexes, triplexes, *and* fourplexes—within the same building envelope already allowed for single-family homes.

Why does this matter? Because every additional unit matters. A fourplex instead of a triplex can mean homes costing \$400,000 instead of \$500,000. That's a real difference for middle-income buyers—\$20,000 less for a down payment, and hundreds less in monthly mortgage payments. In Ann Arbor's housing market, that difference could be the line between staying and leaving for a teacher, a nurse, or a young couple starting a family.

I understand that some residents are afraid of what this plan might bring. But the data—here and across the country—shows that multiplex housing doesn't flood neighborhoods or destroy character. In fact, it opens doors to people who love this city but can't afford it. It gives us options. And it gives future generations a stake in this community.

I also want to acknowledge the challenge you're facing. You're being asked to act with vision—but under pressure from those worried the plan goes too far. It would be tempting to make a compromise now, to calm the waters.

But I urge you: don't undercut the very affordability and equity this plan was designed to deliver. Don't preempt the thoughtful zoning work that's still ahead. Don't close the door on homes that haven't even been given a chance to exist. Housing not allowed, is housing denied, so to speak . . .

You've set this city on a path toward fairness, sustainability, and growth. You've shown leadership in lifting exclusionary barriers and calling for a more inclusive future. Please stay the course.

Let the Planning Commission complete the job you asked of them. Let this plan guide implementation—not fear.

Let's build an Ann Arbor for all.

Thank you.

Brian Chambers

3rd Ward

p.s., I've attached a further description for the rationale on this. Scroll to the bottom of this email for it.

On Sat, Jul 19, 2025 at 2:00 PM Brian Chambers wrote:

Mayor Taylor, City Administrator Dohoney, Council and Planning Commission (please share):

It is an interesting conundrum: how to increase density in historically exclusive single-family-zoned neighborhoods, without upsetting those who benefited from the SFH neighborhoods.

Personally, I've advocated to provide for 2-plex, 3-plex and 4-plex units across those legacy SFH exclusive districts. You've previously received my working paper on Ann Arbor's Capacity for Increased Housing through Zoning Reform, where I modeled the amount of housing possible by allowing this full range in what has been traditionally R1 in Ann Arbor. It did project a population over 200,000 would be feasible, and I projected that growth through the rest of this century.

It was proposed based on form-based zoning ordinances, such that the allowable building envelopes for SFHs would be the same for the multi-plex structures.

So, instead of a \$1.5M home going in on a tear-down or in-fill development, there would be opportunities for 4-unit structures within the same building envelope, and costing ~1/4 per unit of the SFH, so less than ~\$400K, each.

Apparently, that is getting viewed as too radical for the existing SFH neighborhoods, to warrant that increase in affordability.

If we limit it to 3-unit structures, then we're likely seeing ~\$500K per home, under this scenario, versus a SFH building at \$1.5M.

This constraint on the number of units will definitely limit the affordability achieved by these additional densities. The \$100K difference is real to middle income families. \$20K more for a down-payment, let alone higher monthly mortgage costs, over what might be achieved with 4-unit homes, by comparison.

The economics of doing multi-unit homes in traditional R1 districts (SFH), are challenging enough, so I am not anticipating a lot of multi-unit homes going into these neighborhoods, as realtors and buyers will still be predisposed to single-family homes. We'll see even fewer built with this unit limitations per parcel, though.

That said, there are different '*contexts*' of neighborhoods. Below is a view of the current R1 District definitions. To me, these parameters define the existing '*contexts*' for these R1 districts. These are physical parameters that define '*context*' and not some culturally laden '*character*' definition.

The point is, that multi-unit form-based zoning specifications will need to differ between parcels that are 20,000 square feet with 90 foot widths, versus those that are 4,000 square feet with 34 foot widths.

The tables below essentially establish the building envelope. "Context" should only be defined in terms of the physical dimensions of the current allowable buildings getting modified for changes

made for all building types (1-unit, 2-unit, 3-unit, and 4-unit where the context is reasonable). Other non-physical elements of 'context' would be entering into the neighborhood 'character' debate, and I do not encourage that, as it can get divisive quickly.

TABLE 5.17-1: SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

Other use and development standards also apply and may supersede or effect the requirements in this table, such as Sections 5.16 Use Specific Standards, 5.18 Special Dimensional and Site Layout Standards, 5.19 Parking Standards and 5.20 Landscaping, Screening, and Buffering.

DISTRICT	MIN. LOT AREA PER DWELLING UNIT	MIN. BUILDING SPACING	REQUIRED SETBACK				MAX. HEIGHT	LOT DIMENSIONS	
			MIN. FRONT	MIN. ONE SIDE	MIN. TOTAL OF TWO SIDES	MIN. REAR		MIN. AREA	MIN. WIDTH
AG	100,000 sq. ft.		40 ft. [A][B]	10% of lot width	20% of lot width	50 ft.	30 ft.	100,000 sq. ft.	200 ft.
R1A	20,000 sq. ft.	[C]	40 ft. [A]	7 ft.	18 ft.	50 ft.	30 ft.	20,000 sq. ft.	90 ft.
R1B	10,000 sq. ft.	[C]	30 ft. [A]	5 ft.	14 ft.	40 ft.	30 ft.	10,000 sq. ft.	70 ft.
R1C	7,200 sq. ft.	[C]	25 ft. [A]	5 ft.	10 ft.	30 ft.	30 ft.	7,200 sq. ft.	60 ft.
R1D	5,000 sq. ft.	[C]	25 ft. [A]	3 ft.	6 ft.	20 ft.	30 ft.	5,000 sq. ft.	40 ft.
R1E	4,000 sq. ft.	[C]	15 ft. [A]	3 ft.	6 ft.	20 ft.	30 ft.	4,000 sq. ft.	34 ft.

Footnotes:

[A] Also see additional regulations in Section 5.18.5 (Averaging an Established Front Building Line).

[B] For roadside stands only, the minimum front required setback is 30 ft.

[C] Where more than 1 residential structure is to be constructed on a lot in the R1 districts, or where dwelling units are served by a private street under the provisions of Section 5.21 the following placement regulations shall also be applied:

- (a) The minimum spacing between buildings shall be twice the minimum front required setback dimension of the zoning district in which the lots is located;
- (b) A minimum rear required setback of 30 feet must be provided between the rear of a residential structure and the adjacent (nearest) lot line;
- (c) A minimum front required setback of ten feet must be provided between all structures and the private street pavement.

Same for R2 Districts, which are to be folded in to Low Rise Residential

TABLE 5.17-2: TWO-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

DISTRICT	MIN. LOT AREA PER D.U.	BUILDING SPACING	REQUIRED SETBACK				MAX. HEIGHT	LOT DIMENSIONS	
			MIN. FRONT	MAX. FRONT	MIN. SIDE	MIN. REAR		MIN. AREA	MIN. WIDTH
R2A	2,500 sq. ft.	[B]	25 ft. [A]	None	5 ft.	20 ft.	30 ft.	5,000 sq. ft.	40 ft.
R2B	4,250 sq. ft. [C]	[B]	25 ft. [A][B][D]	None	5 ft.	20 ft.	30 ft.	8,500 sq. ft.	60 ft.

Footnotes:

[A] Also see additional regulations in Section 5.18.5 (Averaging an Established Front Building Line).

[B] Where more than one residential structure is to be constructed on a lot in the R2 districts, or where dwelling units are served by a private street under the provisions of Section 5.21, the following placement regulations shall also be applied:

- (a) The minimum spacing between buildings shall be twice the minimum front required setback dimension of the zoning district in which the lots is located;
- (b) A minimum rear required setback of 30 feet must be provided between the rear of a residential structure and the adjacent (nearest) lot line;
- (c) A minimum front required setback of ten feet must be provided between all structures and the private street pavement.

[C] Except for fraternity houses, sorority houses, student cooperative housing, and group housings, for which minimum net lot area shall be 350 sq. ft. per occupant.

[D] Or the established front building line existing on the date this ordinance is adopted, whichever is larger.

I understand the compelling reason for these changes, to pacify the complaints now being made by some residents. It will definitely show that City Council is being responsive, but I believe it is leaving the Planning Commission looking unresponsive, and hence needing Council's interjection.

Lastly, the overriding assumption is that the multi-unit structures in residential areas will be rentals. I ask that home ownership also be emphasized, as these units could also be condominiums, or developments supported by the Ann Arbor Community Land Trust, for below market rate home ownership opportunities.

Regardless, I will continue to advocate for all of the parameters of the CLUP, as the greater framing is still intact (thank you!).

Best regards for weathering the heat, but from the vocal residents, and the summer itself!

Brian

I respectfully urge you to reject the proposed resolution to cap multi-unit housing in R1 and R2 districts at triplexes and three stories. This change would undercut the goals of affordability, sustainability, and equity that define the 'Ann Arbor for All' Comprehensive Plan.

Fourplexes—within the same building envelope—offer more affordable options for middle-income families and support homeownership through community land trusts and condominiums.

Let's not allow a well-intentioned compromise to turn into a setback for inclusive growth.

Please let the Planning Commission and a form-based zoning process do its job—guided by physical context, not fear.

Rationale:

1. The Resolution Undermines the Affordability Goals of the Comprehensive Plan

- As stated in your message and supported by the draft CLUP, **allowing up to 4-plex units within the same building envelope as existing single-family homes creates lower per-unit construction costs and increases housing options** for middle-income families.
 - The draft plan frames "Ann Arbor for All" around the need for housing **across all income levels** and identifies "missing middle" housing (including 4-plexes) as a key strategy to address affordability.
 - Capping units at triplexes **artificially reduces density**, eliminating what could be the most cost-effective additional unit per parcel. The difference between \$400K vs. \$500K per home, as you outlined, could be **decisive for affordability**.
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2. The Resolution Concedes to Fear, Not Evidence

- As articulated in the Council Member's justification, the cap is a political response to perceived public anxiety—particularly from residents misunderstanding the implications of allowing "unlimited" units.
 - But this public anxiety stems from misinformation, not from likely development patterns. **National data** (e.g., Minneapolis) and the CLUP show that **the vast majority of new housing is still being built along transit corridors and arterials**, not within the interior of R1 neighborhoods.
 - Good governance requires **public education and evidence-based policymaking**, not sacrificing long-term equity goals for short-term political cover.
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3. It Disrupts the Planning Commission's Process and Authority

- This resolution short-circuits the ongoing implementation process of the Comprehensive Plan and places unnecessary constraints before the zoning code is rewritten.
- It signals a lack of trust in the Planning Commission's ability to manage form-based code and neighborhood-scale regulation.

- As you noted, it could give the impression of **Council overreach**, undermining Planning Commission consensus and the integrity of the broader community-driven process.
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4. It Reinforces a “Character”-Based Narrative that Can Mask Exclusion

- While the resolution avoids overtly invoking “neighborhood character,” it still **entrenches low-density privileges** historically shaped by exclusionary zoning.
 - The term “context,” if reduced to aesthetic or status quo preservation, risks repeating patterns that systematically excluded renters, BIPOC residents, and lower-income households from high-opportunity neighborhoods.
 - The draft CLUP emphasizes **context-sensitive form**, but the logic is about **physical form, not socio-political gatekeeping**.
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5. Homeownership and Community Land Trust (CLT) Strategies Are Better Advanced With 4-Plexes

- The economics of CLTs and below-market-rate ownership improve with **more units per parcel**, making permanent affordability feasible without subsidies.
 - Capping at three units limits the business case for shared infrastructure and cross-subsidy across units.
 - If homeownership is a serious policy goal (as emphasized in your letter), **more flexible unit counts are a prerequisite**.
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