

**Subject:**

Rezoning proposed for 343 South Fifth Avenue - Downtown Library

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**From:** khart1233@comcast.net <khart1233@comcast.net>**Sent:** Tuesday, March 4, 2025 7:59 AM**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>**Subject:** Rezoning proposed for 343 South Fifth Avenue - Downtown Library

To the City Planning Commission and planning staff:

Yes to rezoning this pivotal site! Yes! Yes! Yes!

When I returned to Ann Arbor in 1992 to be planning director, one of the very first items brought to my attention by the City Administrator and Planning Commission was the block bounded by South Fifth Avenue, East William, South Division and East Liberty. Carl Luckenbach, a renowned architect, had been hired by the city to prepare a conceptual plan for this block, and the city was anxious to pursue this new plan to jump start activity in an area that languished between the vibrancy of Campus and Main Street.

Over the nearly 13 years I was with the city, very few potential opportunities came, and all “went.” Finally, the DDA built the underground parking garage, which had the ability to support a tall building (which the plan had called for), as well as to connect parking to the library. Unfortunately, no above-ground proposal came even close to reality until the Core Spaces proposal long after I was retired. That proposal had the potential to activate the block 24/7 because it included a mix of uses and would have provided private maintenance and programming of the small public space above the parking structure. About the same time, the library was beginning to seriously think about its ever-growing need to replace its steadily deteriorating building, and the city was trying to figure out what to do with the “old Y” lot. Instead of these three significant sites being reimaged all together, each party focused on its own site. Then a small group of people again began advocating for a gathering space/park/”commons” above the parking structure and gathered enough signatures to put it on the ballot as a charter amendment. The amendment passed, partly because some voters thought it would truly be a significant park and central gathering place and others just didn’t like tall buildings. Core Spaces dropped its proposal, though it’s now constructing a different building on William next to the library’s small parking lot.

Meanwhile, the library moved forward with a millage proposal to replace its aging, inadequate structure. People who didn’t think a new library was needed and some who

didn't think a millage was the way to finance it succeeded in convincing a majority of voters to defeat the millage. But the library never stopped trying to figure out a way to not only replace its building with a larger and more efficient one that would better serve the community, it also began to see how it could help facilitate activation of the rest of the block. I'm excited about the potential of their vision and give them a huge amount of credit for figuring out how to do it without asking for a millage.

Clearly, the city agrees with this approach and is willing to convey the air rights about the site to the library to further their vision. There would still be several steps before the vision could be realized, but I can't think of a better steward of the open space as a gathering space than the library. A wonderful new library, much-needed housing, and perhaps another use or two added in, will activate the space, serve the library, take advantage of transit, and really create a wonderful center to our city, something we can all be proud of. I urge you to help them go the next level and recommend approval of their rezoning request.

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