

Subject:

Support for more housing in Ann Arbor

From: Barbara Lucas**Sent:** Tuesday, July 1, 2025 11:02 AM**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>**Subject:** Support for more housing in Ann Arbor

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I care about a lot of things, but my umbrella concern is climate change—it has the potential to make everything I care about so much worse. Because of this, I support more housing in our city. Yes, each new home represents embodied energy, but new homes need to go somewhere. To me it's only logical: to reduce emissions from cars, new homes should be built near the jobs, to cut commutes. We *must* think regionally when making sustainability calculations. Carbon emissions know no boundaries.

New housing in urban areas will reduce pressure to pave over farmland and open space. This is a reality that is forgotten when we don't think regionally. For me, it's a fact I can't forget, because thirty-five years ago my parents financed their retirement by subdividing our hundred-acre farm in western Michigan into ten acre lots, permanently taking all that rich farmland out of production. They gave it over to a handful of homeowners, who then had long commutes to schools and jobs (I was on a bus for 45 minutes each way as a child). And the loss of our farm is only one example amongst countless others in the march of this very destructive trend. I support regional planning that prevents the pressure to do this type of thing. There is plenty of already converted space in towns and cities for new housing without radical change.

Here's another example from personal experience: In 2009, after thirty years of long commutes, my husband Dave and I decided to move to Ann Arbor to live near our jobs. We found a lot with a small, rundown, abandoned house in an R-4 zone near UM hospital where Dave worked. We had it evaluated by folks from the Historic Commission who deemed it "not worth preservation dollars." So we dismantled it, saving what materials we could, and built a LEED Platinum home with an Accessory Dwelling Unit within. (In 2009, ADU's weren't yet allowed in single family zones but were legal in R-4).

Our location by the hospital is close to both UM campuses, bus stops, the Border-to-Border trail (which we use to bike to Ypsi and Dexter), the Amtrak station (which we use for trips from coast to coast), grocery stores, the Farmer's Market, libraries, tons of parks and restaurants, and thousands of jobs. We've had up to five adults (averaging four over the years) living in our house at a time, and most days none of us need to use a car. That's a big potential savings, as car use averages about \$9,000 a year. We charge about half market rate for our ADU in exchange for help around the house. It's a great situation for all of us. Far more people can live sustainably and affordably on that footprint than previously, and we still have room in the yard for vegetables and native gardens.

I think back on how ADU's were originally fought in Ann Arbor, but the fears seem relatively forgotten now. I believe antipathy to "gentle density" changes like duplexes/triplexes/quads or row houses will similarly fade, given time. Housing and architecture change is a constant force, as can be seen through every town or city's history. (If it wasn't, today's residents would be living in the structures of the indigenous people who were here originally.)

We live next to various types of multi-family options, and for those living there when they were built, I'm sure it was hard to witness the changes, so I empathize with folks that want things to stay as is. But I look at the big picture. The chaos, suffering, and biodiversity loss that will be brought on by global warming are exponentially far worse than accepting housing that some feel doesn't "fit the neighborhood." So I support zoning that allows alternative living arrangements such that more people can enjoy the lifestyle that we do without eating up greenspace. It is healthier—not just for us, but for our planet.

I greatly appreciate the recent improvements to transit options and pedestrian infrastructure that we have had in Ann Arbor. And the lifestyle we enjoy promises to get better yet, if we allow more neighbors to join us, as this will support more upgrades. I know from experience that the option not to have to drive is a freedom and a joy: I lived for a while in Guadalajara, Mexico, which had a fabulous bus system that could take you anywhere in the city, with very little waiting. And I've biked in cities around the world that have such safe and convenient bike infrastructure that people from young to old bike to jobs, school and errands. These are quality of life improvements I hope to live to see here too.

But welcoming more housing, like any change, must proceed carefully. I hope our community can set aside the acrimony and work together to do the right thing for future generations. Some past changes were definitely regrettable: The neighborhoods were dotted with corner stores such that people could walk to them. There were so many streetcars, residents could get all over town without a car. There was a grand train station with a plethora of trains to destinations north, south, east and west. (You could even catch a train to Frankfort and take a ferry from there all the way to Wisconsin—which many people did just for fun!). I hope and dream that someday Ann Arbor can regain corner stores and great transit. We were walkable not long ago, and we can do it again.

I know Dave and I may not live to see these improvements, but in the bigger picture, it's not about us, it's about future generations. If we can at least reduce the length and frequency of our car trips, we'll reduce our carbon footprint and those that come after us will have a fighting chance for a liveable world. I believe those who desire to not just reduce their time in a car, but live without a car altogether, should have that option, as well.

According to Progressive Insurance, in the early 1980s, 80% of American 18-year-olds had a driver's license, but in 2021, only 60% did. If we allow more flexible housing, it will allow our region to meet housing demand in a way that suits the generations that are coming. If we older folks say no more people can live in Ann Arbor's potentially walkable neighborhoods, that just forces the conversion of outlying areas—our precious woodlands, wetlands, and farmland. Trying to force the door shut behind us is not just unfair, it's destructive.

Some Ann Arborites fear more renters. Yes, some renters can be hard to live near, and perhaps student districts should be buffered, but most renters are simply responsible workers who can't yet afford a home. Over the years I've lived in five homes in Ann Arbor, and only this latest as a homeowner. So who am I to say now it's time to shut the door and keep out more renters?

I do not fear that with more people we'll necessarily have less social interaction. My niece's family lives in a low-rise in Brooklyn, and when I visit them, I witness a remarkable level of social interaction and sense of community within her neighborhood, far greater than we had when we raised our kids in car-centric suburban Detroit. Social interaction depends on many factors other than density!

I am sad to see how threatened many Ann Arborites feel. A friend says he fears a Taco Bell or tall building being built next to him in Water Hill. I see nothing in the Comprehensive Plan that recommends such things in his neighborhood. I hope fears can be allayed so they don't infect the community such that all sensible change is fought. We need to be a leader in sustainability. Let's face it: Gentle density may be uncomfortable for some, but it's *not* an existential threat, while climate change is.

Sincerely,
Barbara Lucas
1211 Wright St., Ann Arbor