

Subject: Form-based Zoning for Gentle Density, ToD Density Targets per District, and Community Land Trusts - Key Priorities to Emphasize

From: Brian Chambers

Sent: Thursday, April 24, 2025 8:57 PM

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Subject: Re: Form-based Zoning for Gentle Density, ToD Density Targets per District, and Community Land Trusts - Key Priorities to Emphasize

Typo correction, the Knowledge Economy benchmarking paper was referring to my paper. Somehow I misstated it as the city's.

Oops!

Brian

On Thu, Apr 24, 2025 at 8:15 PM Brian Chambers wrote:

Mayor Taylor, City Administrator Dohoney, Council and Planning: (please send this to the Planning Commission)

I'm writing to support and strengthen the draft Comprehensive Plan's vision for an inclusive, sustainable, and livable Ann Arbor. I appreciate the values-based and equity-driven approach reflected in Chapters 1–4. But to fully meet our moment—especially around affordability, climate, and walkability—we must go further.

First, I urge you to retain flexibility for future zoning that allows **up to three or four stories in Low-Rise Residential areas**, especially where both third- and fourth-story step-backs can ensure compatibility with surrounding homes.

These kinds of **gentle density solutions—duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes—already exist** in our most loved neighborhoods. A form-based zoning framework can ensure these additions feel right at home, using setbacks, step-backs, massing, rooflines, and street orientation—not just height limits—to shape character.

Second, we need greater clarity around **transit-oriented development (TOD)**. The draft names TOD principles, but lacks the specificity to make them actionable. The city's own Knowledge Economy Benchmarking study shows that areas within a half-mile of the **Blake Transit Center** and **Amtrak station** should support **at least 50 units per acre**, and other walkable transit corridors and hubs can support 15–25 units per acre. These targets align with national best practices and help reduce vehicle miles traveled—advancing both housing and climate goals.

Third, let's treat **affordable homeownership** not as an add-on, but as a core land use strategy. Tools like **community land trusts**, **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**, and **universal design** belong in the Comprehensive Plan—not just zoning ordinances—because they shape where and how we build. These mechanisms ensure that the new homes we enable are accessible to our essential workers—nurses, teachers, bus drivers—who are being priced out of the city they serve.

I also recommend the plan support:

- A **minimum lot size around 2,000 square feet** for infill housing and a **maximum lot size around 8,000–10,000 square feet** to prevent land speculation and mega-lots;
- Thoughtful use of **Floor Area Ratios (FAR)** and **site coverage limits** to balance density with privacy and open space.

These details can be refined at the zoning ordinance stage, but the Comprehensive Plan should clearly state the intent: to **create more diverse housing types in more parts of the city**, with form-based tools to ensure they're welcomed additions—not intrusions.

In short, let's anchor this plan with three additional priorities:

1. A bold commitment to gentle density across residential neighborhoods;
2. Clear TOD-based density targets around transit hubs;
3. And the inclusion of affordability tools like CLTs and TIF to deliver permanent solutions.

Let's get the vision right now—so zoning can follow with confidence and clarity.

Thank you for your leadership.

Brian Chambers

3rd Ward