

July 5, 2017

City of Ann Arbor
Planning Commission
301 E. Huron Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48107



RE: 1140 Broadway Zoning and Planned Project

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Please find this note as my formal support for the project being considered at 1140 Broadway. I am providing this support both as a long-time resident of Ann Arbor and as a local design professional who is keenly aware of issues within our community related to development projects. I have seen numerous projects come in front of this board of the years, many of which have been fraught with challenges and issues. Many of these have been tremendously successful, establishing benchmarks for future projects and held in high esteem not only in the neighborhood where they were constructed but in the overall fabric of our City. One of these is Liberty Lofts which is a true bellwether for both adaptive reuse and contextual new construction in a well-established neighborhood. This project was completed by Morningside who is likewise the petitioner for this project. I recall the great efforts that Morningside went thru during this effort to engage the community which it likewise appears they are doing for Broadway. I have followed the media accounts of this project since it was first considered and have subsequently reviewed the documents submitted by Morningside on behalf of this project. I view this project as one destined for similar success.

The site being considered is presently a weed-strewn, unsightly eyesore within our community, the results of the poorly-considered previous proposal started in the mid-2000's. The Morningside proposal takes this site in it's raw state and resolves many of the desired outcomes prescribed by the City at large in its design and planning. I will not go into any great detail in regards to the specifics of their proposal as I am certain that the Morningside team will provide more than ample exposition in their presentation and documents. However, I do wish to emphasize certain key points that make this project exemplary. These include:

- Harmonious planning and design: This project is designed to provide the greatest heights and densities on the site aligned along the "urban edge" condition prescribed by Maiden Lane with a secondary emphasis along Broadway. Development of a streetscape along a pedestrian corridor in a noted goal of most projects in the city at this time. Likewise, moving the greatest heights to Maiden Lane emphasize a strategic balance between the densities of the current UM structures and providing a formal transition between these heights and those of the adjoining neighborhood. The buildings proposed closest to the neighborhood are not only the lowest in overall height but are likewise placed in broad setback from the nearest residence. This is further buffered by an existing stand of large trees. Further, this site has commonly held the name of Lower Town and is at a point much lower than the adjoining neighborhood further east on Broadway.

- Unique architectural expression: The project indicates a variety of materials that adapt “pedestrian” scaled materials at the base of the buildings to emphasize this human scaled design. Rather than rely on the rote response of an all masonry structure beyond this condition, the design emphasizes integration of other unique architectural finishes at the upper stories, providing a varied architectural palette of materials, textures and finishes.
- Sustainable design principles: Locating the project within the City boundaries is key as this accommodates immediate access to municipal infrastructure. The project will also be “fixing” a current brownfield condition thru environmental remediation and groundwater containment, something that has been left unfettered since the initial development proposal. In addition, the project emphasizes pedestrian activity by providing walkable conditions along the entire perimeter of the property and access to the numerous parks, the Huron River, bike paths, etc.. I have even noted that Morningside is a pedestrian access easement along Traver Creek. Further, the site is located adjacent to readily accessible public transit including the AATA bus lines, the UM bus system, and even the Amtrak depot (regardless of future location for a new hub).

I am not a person nor an architect that is distinctly aligned with either the pro- nor anti-development fronts that populate any community. Rather, my focus is on developments that provide the greatest return on investment to the community at large, one that is measured based upon previous successes in conjunction with new proposed project opportunities. In this regard, I whole-heartedly support this project as an opportunity for success within our entire community.

Sincerely,



Robb Burroughs, RA
Principal
O|X Studio, Inc.