

Subject: Resident feedback regarding the A2 Comprehensive Land Use Plan

From: Caroline Mohai

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To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>

Subject: Resident feedback regarding the A2 Comprehensive Land Use Plan

My name is Caroline Mohai and I live at 1331 Marlborough Dr. in Ann Arbor. My husband and I bought our house 36 years ago. Our neighborhood is still one of the few entry level single family home neighborhoods in the city.

I do understand and appreciate the values expressed in the April 2025 draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan: Affordable, Equitable, Sustainable and Dynamic. These are values we all share. The concerns I have are about this plan's ability to address those values and on the lack of resident representation in the planning process.

1. Resident representation – the rollout of upzoning has been rocky over the 15 years of its history with many lawsuits being filed and city council members voted out of office. Although as one observer stated, city leaders are improving their communication with residents, there is still need for more transparency. (<https://stateline.org/2024/09/16/the-yimby-push-for-multifamily-housing-hits-a-nope-from-homeowners/>)

Input has been gathered from an unscientific online survey, focus groups, and from other people selected due to their representation of a subgroup such as students, people of color, small business owner, etc.

To truly have resident input in the development of this plan, there should have been a first-class postcard announcing the comprehensive plan and the website where residents could find more information. Instead, I heard about it through the grapevine since I do not have time to review websites to see what new information might be on them. Others I've spoken to also say they do not actively look for information and were angry that that was the mode of communication our council was relying on.

We also should have representation ON the Planning Committee. Reporting to us and getting our reactions isn't a democratic form of engagement. What would be democratic is having residents at the table with the Planners discussing different scenarios and deciding what parts of the Plan need more specifics. Madison appears to have had a resident as part of their planning group. I will share more about this once I get more information.

2. Affordable: There is much literature out there stating that building more rental units may eventually bring down prices but it is not clear by when and by how much. The Plan, starting with Section 4, focuses heavily on the development of rental units. Two concerns I have are: (1) the desire of developers to keep building even if the market is saturated and (2) the instability of university enrollments which, having recently gone through a growth spurt, may slump and dramatically, if foreign students stop coming to US universities. Have you collected data on how many new rental units have been created over the past 10 years and how many are in the planning stages? What are your projections based on? Do you have a maximum number by which you'll slow more construction?

How more apartments will bring down costs of homes is not clear. Prices of single-family homes have been escalating and with more land being sold to developers, those single family homes will only get more expensive. What specific ideas do you have to provide affordable homes families can purchase?

3. Equitable: This goal is vague and alludes to continued discrimination that prevents African Americans from moving back into Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor's racial discrimination back in the 50s, 60s and 70s is well known; however, it's not clear how that is relevant to your proposed plan. How is this plan going to repair/restore the loss of "once-vibrant (African American) neighborhoods" and give the ability of those community members to "build generational wealth" if the focus of development is apartments? To bring back African American families, you need a program to make single family homes more affordable.

4. Sustainable: Greater density will reduce the use of cars but by how much? Is there any solid research on this? I know as an older resident that I will need to use a car to get downtown. Also, there are dentists and banks and other businesses that draw clients who don't live downtown. The rollout is important. When do people show up to be customers to the small grocery stores, drug stores and home supplies that you envision in your "hubs" and what commercial group would place a store in an area where there aren't customers? It's kind of an egg and a chick problem and I don't feel that it has been given much thought.

Renewable energy is referenced in the plan, but it is unclear how apartment buildings will be able to help with this. Will new high-rises be required to install solar panels and incorporate energy-saving building design? High density buildings, which will be allowed to take up the entire footprint of a lot, will increase runoff since there will be no ground to absorb it. Recycling will be less likely in large apartments since renters are not as committed as homeowners to recycling. Tree cover will be less.

Ann Arbor is blessed with a population of very well-educated, forward thinking citizens. There is enough talent here to produce a well thought out and scientifically designed survey that could be mailed to a randomly sampled group of residents with follow-up emails/postcards to improve the response rate. We also have many qualified residents who could serve as effective volunteer members (or observers) of the planning team. Not only would they provide helpful feedback to the planners but they could also let their neighbors know how thoughtful the planning process is being undertaken.

Please pause the comprehensive plan schedule to allow resident representatives to be part of the planning team. Also, please either explain when residents will see plan specifics or start inserting those specifics now.

Thank you,

Caroline E. Mohai
Resident, Fourth Ward