

Downtown Area Citizens Advisory Council Meeting Minutes- March 5, 2013 and
Comments to the DDA- March 6, 2013

The CAC continues to support the DDA's continuing leadership in the careful planning of the future of our downtown—and having the necessary finances to do it. Although there are now some roadblocks, the “Connecting William Street” concept of a coherent plan for the five City-owned downtown properties that emphasizes context in defining the appropriate buildings, density, and use simply makes good sense. We must not be for sale to the highest bidder. We also applaud the DDA's commitment to a mix of housing opportunities in the downtown its willingness to give support to of the Village Green City Apartments at First and Washington site as well as the smaller-unit Planned Project at 618 S. Main. That now in the face of the potential of seven high rise student housing developments in downtown—on what is a decreasing amount developable sites.

Two important resolutions were proposed before City Council on Monday night. The CAC supported both. A Resolution was passed to Reconvene the Design Guidelines Taskforce to review and make recommendations to the City Council regarding improvements to the city's design guidelines and design review process.

The DDA's Connecting William Street recommendations for future projects on five downtown public sites included asking the Planning Commission to report to City Council how future developers considered changes in their design in response to the Design Review Board process. Recommendations on “Density and Massing” for future buildings on city-owned downtown lots made clear that “surrounding context should be considered and buildings designed to step back from lower-scale neighbors.” What the DDA's Connecting William Street plan requires for development on City owned property—we hope—may soon be required for all new buildings in the downtown.

We know that Council in 2009 developed the D1/D2 zoning after considerable discussion and uncertainty—and it did so as a trial, expressly stating at various times that it would revisit the zoning and design guidelines and process after a year. Now is the time.

On Monday night, a resolution was proposed and a decision postponed that a six month moratorium on D1 development in the downtown be approved in order that the city could re-evaluate the zoning requirements of large D1 projects. This was done in the recognition that the zoning requirements sometimes conflicted with the stated goals in our adopted Downtown, Central Area Plans and City Ordinances.

We all now see what the Varsity high-rise project on East Huron looks like. We have all seen the renderings of the massive student-housing proposal proposed at 413 East Huron. In fact, the Historic District Commission recently passed a resolution saying that 413 E. Huron “threatens the preservation of significant historic resources in the adjacent Division Street Historic District.” Nearby the strip of E. Huron includes multiple parcels that could be inappropriately be developed—like the UM Credit Union Parking lot next to City Hall and the Hands-On Museum. The Downtown Area CAC supports a D1 Moratorium for six months in order that we can bring our zoning more in conformity to

what our Adopted City Plans and ordinances as well as the goals of the DDA's Connecting William Street intended..

When our zoning and developers ignore the goals of City Master Plans and historic district ordinances, stretch their floor area capacity with unwarranted housing premiums, create massive and pedestrian-unfriendly structures, and totally reject the advise of our Design Guidelines Board -- yet still insist they are "by right"—then something is wrong. We are looking forward to helping to fix it.