

Re: 601 Forest project design violates city safety rules and goals

Dear Mayor John Hieftje and the members of the Ann Arbor City Council and Planning Commission,

Prior to moving to Ann Arbor last summer, I lived 26 years as an American expatriate in Europe. There, I enjoyed first hand precisely what Ann Arbor is trying to accomplish with its goals of higher-density and greener urban living, and learned to recognize where high-density works well - and where it can go dreadfully wrong.

Out of all cities in the United States, we chose Ann Arbor because of its well-earned reputation as a future-minded U.S. city striving for healthy, high-density, high-quality and well-educated community, and specifically chose the tightly knit Burns Park district close to South University so we could bike and walk to schools, shopping and entertainment - as we had done in Europe. Our 7-year-old daughter rides her bike with us to shop on South University daily, and beyond to the books stores, city library, downtown and YMCA. We eagerly pursue precisely what Ann Arbor envisages and specifies in its Non-Motorized Transportation (NMT) Plan: an urbane, environmentally-sound lifestyle.

Now, with our house just 3 blocks south of the proposed 601 Forest site, we find ourselves confronted by a supersized housing project that directly threatens our physical safety and the welfare of our neighborhood. With the avalanche of cars and trucks that the huge number of residents will inevitably bring to the already fraught traffic congestion of South-U, this design defies all common sense and the very principles and goals spelled out in Ann Arbor's NMT Plan and 2007 Parking Study. The sheer numbers will create an onslaught of frustrated drivers in a very small quarter where long-term parking is already extremely difficult for the current population, totally negate any green advantages brought by the project, and drive safe bicycling from the streets – while driving Ann Arbor's good reputation for green "Tree Town" living right out the window. Alone the University of Michigan's staff- and student-to-car ratio data confirm the vast numbers of vehicles this project will attract.

If our daughter cannot ride her bike safely to the Ann Arbor public library and her swimming lessons at the YMCA, then safety regulations have been violated, and Ann Arbor's 'green' image of itself is meaningless. This safety factor is not some secondary, lower-tier criterion that takes backseat to the city's zoning ordinances: federal and state law dictates that public safety take priority over any private interests that pose a clear and present danger; public welfare demands that rights of the individual must sometimes yield to the rights of the people as a whole. The ancient Roman maxim still applies: *salus populi suprema lex* – the safety of the people is the supreme law.

This project's impacts, at this site, are in direct conflict with the city's codified safety rules and goals – which is why the council and commission should not fear litigation from the developer. No matter what the cost in hurt pride on the part of some council and planning commission members, it is far better to act now and not flinch from doing the right thing. Fear of possible litigation would show a singular lack of vision, wisdom and civic courage. You, as elected officials, cannot be forced into saying 'yes' to a proposal simply because it satisfies merely the computational requirements of only one subscope (i.e. zoning) of the total codes and standards it must meet.

We, as everyone, would welcome development, more business and more housing for South U - but never on the scale of a Soviet-Block-era housing project. Green, indeed, goes up: but this 25-story Albert-Speer monolith is not only supersized - it is grossly obese. The risk assessment is too high to permit this project to go ahead. I therefore strongly urge you to reject this project in its present design. The ramifications of approving it will be on a magnitude far greater than any short-term discomfort suffered due to threats from the developer.

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