

From: Linda Winkler [<mailto:wink625@gmail.com>]
Sent: Monday, April 04, 2016 1:51 PM
To: Planning
Cc: Kahan, Jeffrey
Subject: Comments on 615 S. Main Street Planned Project Application

Dear Planning Commission Members,

We would greatly appreciate your reviewing our attached comments before you consider what action to take on the 615 S. Main Street Planned Project Application that is on the agenda for your meeting tomorrow evening.

If possible, will you please let us know that your received them?

Thank you very much!

Best,

Linda Winkler, Lucy Miller, Rita Mitchell, Robert Fouser, and Kathryn King (Old West Side residents)

To: Ann Arbor Planning Commission

From: Lucy Miller, Rita Mitchell, Linda Winkler, Robert Fouser, and Kathryn King (Old West Side residents)

Re: Planned Project Application for The Residences at 615 S. Main Street

Please review and consider our concerns below before deciding whether to approve the Planned Project Application for The Residences at 615 S. Main Street. Thank you very much for your work on this and all of the matters that come before you.

- 1. The proposed project, a massive-looking, suburban-style development with a private courtyard in the center, does not provide publicly beneficial open space or belong near downtown.**

The stated intent of the ordinance governing planned projects is to provide permanent open space preservation. Though the ordinance's definition of "open space" does not specifically exclude enclosed private spaces from qualifying as "open space" for this purpose, we question whether a private courtyard inaccessible to and barely if at all viewable by the public was what those who wrote and approved the planned projects ordinance had in mind, particularly for a project placed in or near downtown. If this developer is permitted to build higher buildings in exchange for the private courtyard space, the public (walking and driving by the development) will actually be worse off than if the height remained within zoning requirements and there were no open space in the center. (The ordinance should be amended to clearly define open space in a way that prevents this sort of downtown or near downtown planned project in the future.)

In its November 18, 2015 report, Ann Arbor Design Review Board members expressed concerns over the private, closed off courtyard style design and wondered why a C-shaped or U-shaped building was not instead proposed. A C-shaped, U-shaped, or other such design could provide both publicly and privately beneficial open space that would justify allowing taller buildings on the site.

- 2. The proposed development will result in vehicle accidents between those making a left turn from W. Mosley onto S. Main Street and those making a left turn from the proposed development on E. Mosley onto S. Main Street.**

The traffic impact study conducted by the developer states this:

Since most of the site traffic will enter and exit via the Mosley Street intersection, it is not surprising to see that the site would have its greatest impact on the westbound approach to that intersection. Left-turns from westbound Mosley Street onto South Main

Street will be more difficult during the peak hours of the day. (Source: Midwestern Consulting Traffic Impact Study)

Article V, Sec. 5:70 (c) of the Ann Arbor Code states: *The planned project shall be designed in such a manner that traffic to and from the site will not be hazardous to adjacent properties.*

There is little question that the number of cars leaving a development as large as this is proposed to be will make it all but impossible to safely make a left turn from W. Mosley on to S. Main Street.

- 3. The proposed project would replace the current commercial space in three contiguous properties with significantly less commercial space (in one of the last remaining areas within walking distance of downtown appropriate for that). In addition, the proposed plan does not provide parking adequate to meet the needs and help ensure the long-term viability of potential retailers.**

In its planned project application, the developer states that it will maintain retail on the site. While we appreciate the developer's alteration of the initial plan to increase the amount of retail space, it is important to note that this development replaces most of the current and potential commercial space with student housing.

The site is currently occupied by 8,467 square feet of office space, 11,062 square feet of retail space, 4,255 square feet of a car wash facility, 8,714 square feet of a hookah smoking lounge, and 9,819 square feet of an academy for the arts school. All of the existing uses will be removed and replaced by the proposed development. (Source: Midwestern Consulting Traffic Impact Study)

This considerable amount of commercial space will be replaced with only 6200 square feet of commercial space if the proposed project is approved.

As long as E. Mosley remains a city street under the control of the city and so subject to the parking rules of the city and enforcement (or lack thereof) by the city, retailers will not have the designated, protected spots they need to ensure the success of their businesses in the proposed project. In this location and particularly given the nature of this proposed project (which will discourage increased pedestrian traffic), the retailers will not be able to rely on pedestrians to sustain their businesses.

- 4. The developers make several claims in their application that are questionable:**
 - They say the proposed project would be a "replacement of obsolete and blighted structures with new construction." Though perhaps not of the most modern design, the current buildings are not obsolete and only one, the old buggy factory, is in need of rehabilitation.

- They say the proposed project would “increase the supply of downtown housing.” As 55% of the apartments in this proposed project contain 3 to 5 bedrooms and it is hard to imagine that anyone other than students would choose to live in a development where that is the case, it is more accurate to say that this project would “increase the supply of student housing.”
- They say the proposed project would result in a “reduced need for individualized ownership of motorized vehicles in the heart of the city.” In fact, by replacing commercial space in one of the last remaining places near downtown appropriate for commercial space, this project would INCREASE the need for individualized ownership of motorized vehicles for all of the people living both downtown and in the surrounding neighborhoods.
- They say this project will “buffer a residential neighborhood from industrial uses east of the site.” To the extent that the residential neighborhoods need to be buffered from Fingerle Lumber, the existing commercial space already does that. And any other development would, too.

5. Will the units be attractive to the mix of people for whom the developers say they intend them? And if not, is this a viable development?

55% of the apartments in this proposed project will have three to five bedrooms. Clearly, these are meant for undergraduate students. On the first page of their site development plan, the developers state, *“These units are designed primarily for young professionals, faculty, visiting professors, and college students.”* Is it realistic to expect that faculty, visiting professors, and young professionals will want to live in a development with so many college-aged students living communally in larger apartments?

Also, if this will be student housing, how does a swimming pool make sense when students are gone for the season when a swimming pool would be useable? And, as the Design Review Board asked, has a shade study been conducted to see if the pool would be in perpetual shade?

The last thing the city and neighborhood want or need is a very large, failed apartment complex.

6. As the Design Review Board notes in its report, the proposed project is only marginally consistent with the applicable Ann Arbor Downtown Design Guidelines. Members described it as “massive” and “uncomfortable.” One noted, “the design is inward-focused and with the new building across the street creates an “eye of the needle” viewscape at this gateway location.” Surely, we can do better than that.