

Subject: Research Park

From: Will Leaf
Sent: Monday, April 28, 2025 11:13 PM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Subject: Research Park

Hello commissioners,

At the last meeting, a public commenter said that Research Park was not an appropriate place for residential. I disagree and explain why in the memo below.

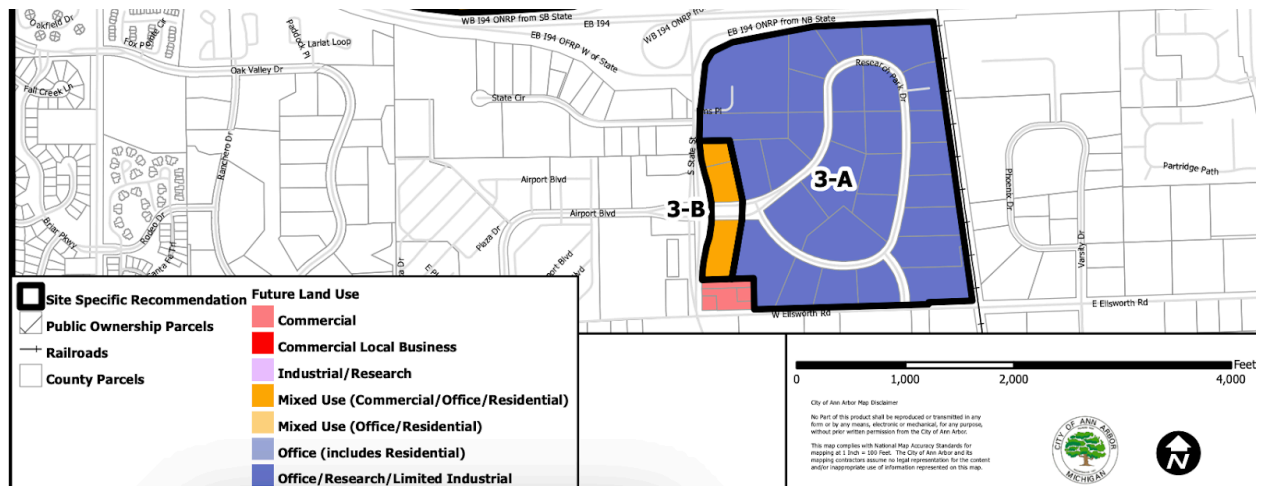
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XGO2CGxB_oix6IMCUJ9i22XfCwto2gbgNONBdp_jEFo/edit?usp=sharing

Summary

At the last planning commission meeting, a person speaking at public comment said that Research Park was “not an appropriate place for residential,” and that there were no libraries, parks, schools, or stores there, and that allowing residential there was unsafe, because there is no pedestrian connection across I-94.

I drove down to Research Park last week and found that several of the above claims are not accurate. Research Park contains both stores and a school and there is a park within walking distance. The Mallets Creek Library is a five minute drive away, and the bus service is good.

Parts of Research Park are already zoned mixed-use and allow residential. The current South State Street Corridor plan calls for more land in the park to be zoned mixed-use. Rezoning the entire park Transition would have many benefits, whereas downzoning the mixed-use areas to “Flex” would be a step backwards.



South State Street Corridor Plan – Page 31.

<https://www.a2gov.org/media/5s3fx2o1/sssc-plan-august-2013.pdf#page=35>

I found out in February that Oxford has already met with city staff to ask for a rezoning to permit an 800 unit mixed-use development with both market-rate and rent-controlled affordable housing. I don't know the details of this proposal, and I do not support public subsidies for private development, but I believe the zoning code should welcome this kind of development, not forbid it.

Safety

It's true that there is no pedestrian connection across I-94, and the city should remedy this shortcoming by putting sidewalks on State Street where it crosses the highway. However, it does not follow that it is dangerous to live without pedestrian access across I-94. Residents could walk to a large variety of destinations south of I-94, as I describe below. They could also take a bus to Briarwood or downtown with ease.

There are areas of Ann Arbor that are much less walkable than Research Park, like where I grew up, on Newport Rd north of the highway, where there are big sidewalk gaps on a moderately busy road and no shops at all. In contrast, Research Park has sidewalks, retail destinations, and minimal traffic. I am glad that my family was allowed to live off Newport Rd, even though the pedestrian infrastructure was mediocre. It would be unjust to exclude families from Research park, where the pedestrian infrastructure is better, just because there is no pedestrian route across I-94.

Where pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is mediocre, the comprehensive plan should call for improvements, not ban housing.

Schools

There is a public school for children with special needs near the center of Research Park. It is called Progress Park. It is run by the Washtenaw Intermediate School District. After school hours, it also serves as a public green space.



Some Geese walk by Progress Park and Sartorius

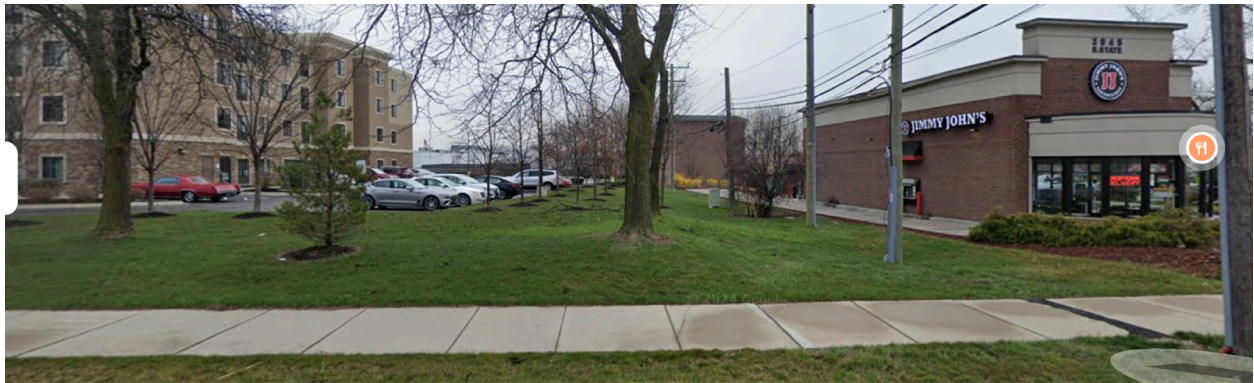
Parks

Aside from Progress Park School, Pittsfield Township park is also within walking distance. There is also a giant undeveloped lot owned by the City just south of Research Park. Perhaps some of it could be converted to parkland at some point.



Shops

Many businesses are within walking distance, including Jimmy Johns, Tim Hortons, Costco, Zingermans Bake House, and Mothfire Brewery. All of these destinations are reachable by sidewalk. The medians and pedestrian islands at the roundabouts on Elsworth make it possible to reach these places without ever needing to cross more than two lanes of traffic at a time.



Walk Scores

Walk scores provide more evidence that Research Park is friendlier to pedestrians than many other parts of Ann Arbor.

- Newport West, where I grew up, has a [walk score of 4](#).
- The middle of Miller, currently marked Transition, has a [walk score of 32](#).
- The middle of Research Park has a [walk score of 40](#).
- South Industrial has a [walk score of 65](#).

If more housing and retail was allowed in Research park, I expect its score would shoot up.

Libraries

The Mallets Creek Library is a 5 minute drive away. AAATA Route 6 goes through Research Park and then onto Briarwood and Downtown.

Route 6 map:

<https://www.theride.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/Route%206.pdf>

Potential Development

There are several empty lots in Research Park, and there is probably space for several thousand people to live within the park. With more housing and retail, the park could be a fun and lively neighborhood. The north side of the park is moderately noisy, because it is close to the highway, but I found the rest of the park to be pleasant. There's no need to forbid people from living here. Please plan to zone Research Park as Transition.

