

Subject: 2025-04-01 Planning Commission Meeting Feedback
Attachments: 2024-04-01 Planning Commission Written Comment - Scerbo.pdf

From: Mark Scerbo
Sent: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 5:14 PM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Cc: City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>
Subject: 2025-04-01 Planning Commission Meeting Feedback

Hello,

I plan on speaking tonight with a shortened version of the attached feedback regarding the Comprehensive Plan. Please include my attached PDF statement to the meeting information in Legistar.

I'm also CC'ing City Council because of the last-minute addition of a *Low Rise Residential Land Use Area* memo. I think the fact that the Legistar listing calls it a *Low **Density** Residential Resolution* speaks to the proactive capitulation to a few loud and wealthy residents who don't want to see any kind of change. The Planning Commission has repeatedly told city staff and consultants about their goals for the existing low-rise residential districts moving forward, but staff keeps reverting to language that [does not meaningfully change the ability to add density](#) to these neighborhoods.

I hope that City Council will encourage staff to propose meaningful changes to existing limits on land use to make Ann Arbor welcoming to all.

Thank you,
Mark

Hello,

Ann Arbor is a highly educated city supported by a massive research institution. That's why I was surprised when the City recently sent out a [Comprehensive Land Use Plan FAQ](#)¹ which didn't include any mention of research results from the well-established urban planning field.

One question asks: *"If new housing being built is so expensive, how does greater density contribute to our goal of affordable housing?"* The FAQ briefly mentions that "the City wants to increase supply to help alleviate demand pressure." This is true, but doesn't explain the well-researched filtering effect, by which new construction, i.e. 'luxury development' makes homes more affordable—even for those who can't afford the new units.² In fact, cities that have built the most new luxury apartments have seen lower rents at all price points.³

We know the big picture ideas on how to address the housing shortage in Ann Arbor. Not only that, but thanks to extensive research and examples from other cities, we know the specific policies that can enable more affordable home choices for people with jobs here. The biggest mistake the city could make would be failing to stand for those specific policies throughout the city because of a few loud voices. We know that the people who show up to public comment tend to be older, whiter, and land-owning, even though the majority of residents here are renters.

Those loud voices have said things like:

- *Scio was building way too densely. They laughed at me when I said it. We took over the township for 20 years. The board had lost sight. City council and planning commission in Ann Arbor have too ... The rot goes all the way and it's the whole city. Nothing in this plan is for the people who live here now. It's for the people in the future and they don't vote.*
- *Another voice has said: UofM identifies with Berkley, Boulder, and similar cities. One similarity is "When development enthusiasm rises, there are ways to slow it down." Ann Arbor is poised for this to be slowed down. ... Slow it down by challenging the community participation process as having been too small. A good lawyer could very easily win that case. ... If there's a good lawyer who wants to slow that down and start a neighborhood process they can.*
- *Similarly:, Affordable housing as offered by the large apartments, doesn't mean teachers, it means near-homeless. An endless flow of homeless people flow into the shelters. Our crime rates near Millor Manor are 100x higher than any other neighborhood. My tenants suffer. All the drugs and dealing and crime make my tenants unsafe.*

These loud voices don't represent Ann Arbor's largely welcoming, progressive voters. A statistically representative survey sent out by the city in 2024 showed that more than 50% of residents feel there is too little multi-family housing, with a significant difference based on respondent age. 72% say we should prioritize controlling housing costs first, and support environmental sustainability and subsidized affordable housing as secondary priorities.⁴ At Comp Plan public engagement sessions, attendees answered the question of "How and where should Ann Arbor grow?" by making a map that asked for growth of "a lot" basically everywhere in the city.⁵

¹ This FAQ is not available on Legistar, on the consultants Comp Plan website, or on Engage.A2

² www.upjohn.org/research-highlights/new-construction-makes-homes-more-affordable-even-those-who-cant-afford-new-units

³ <https://yieldpro.com/2024/02/building-more-luxury-apartments-lowers-rent-for-all-classes/>

⁴ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1F8vJolD5HJESztKarh0FuzNRbFFQ4OGtZNip6y57Onc/edit?usp=sharing>

⁵ <https://a2compplan-a2-mi.hub.arcgis.com/pages/how-and-where-should-ann-arbor-grow>

Allow me to run through my policy stances, many of which have been discussed throughout the engagement process and are supported by urban planning research and best practices:

- I support heights of 48' in low-rise zoning districts
- I support having two, and only two, zoning districts. Not two concepts of a district that become the 34 we have today in the UDC, but two. These should be a low-rise district and a mixed-use hub. The latter district would have built-in height limits and step backs based on proximity to low-rise districts.
- The mixed-use hub district should include an expanded downtown, including across the river to lowertown; all the transit corridors; SouthU; South State ...
- The low-rise district should support commercial uses such as cafes, restaurants, child care, bars, grocery shops, neighborhood retail, etc. Our nuisance laws should be able to handle the management of impacts to neighbors.
- The plan should reiterate existing transportation goals and Council resolutions, including to diet all multi-lane roads in the city and to collaborate with AAATA and U of M to integrate bus rapid transit and non-motorized transportation improvements.⁶

The Planning Commission has done an excellent job so far in asking city staff to hold true to Ann Arbor's values and best practices in urban planning. Last year, a constituent asked State Representative Carrie Rheingans if she supported background checks for criminals applying for rental housing. Instead of placating or evading, she said "everyone deserves housing, even murderers. I think you and I are just going to disagree on this one." I have incredible respect for politicians who stand up for what they believe in. I hope City Council can do the same: don't water down your commitment to growing Ann Arbor.

Thank you,
Mark Scerbo

⁶a2gov.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6403222&GUID=9DFF681B-9CAC-4E09-88DC-20B4EA882C42&Options=ID%7cText%7c&FullText=1