Subject: Comprehensive Plan Feedback - Pause the Plan

From: Ralph McKee
Sent: Friday, May 16, 2025 11:30 AM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Cc: City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>; blenart@a2.gov
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Feedback - Pause the Plan

I am writing in support of pausing the plan process to allow further public engagement. There are two primary reasons: 1) the plan process did not engage enough residents and didn't focus on feedback from neighborhoods, and 2) the plan is deeply flawed, in terms of its data/premises, its failure to appropriately analyze our current situation, its "one size fits all" approach, and the lack of specifics.

The plan process should have started with a postcard to each resident. Council appropriated money to promote themselves via postcards to residents and should have instead used those funds for postcards re the plan. Then staff and consultants should have organized meetings focused on individual neighborhoods. Consultant Interface has used that approach in other plan assignments. Why not here? The result here was a limited gathering of feedback, none of which was scientific, and the data and methodology for determining purported "consensus" on certain items has (to my knowledge) still not been described.

I have seen several detailed critiques of the draft plan which I know have been sent to you, so I will not delve into the much detail here; my "big picture" description above of the flaws ought to be enough for you to pause the plan and re-do it. And while many of you have touted recent opportunities to engage, the PC meetings I have observed (not all, but several), reveal a stubborn ideological view which only grudgingly acknowledges contrary views and, worse, ignores or glosses over facts and reasoning undermining your overall approach. And much of the time the PC spent in meetings was used, instead of really grappling with the recent feedback you received, 1) to reiterate tired talking points and 2) to defend the plan and/or attempt to spin the plan to appear "less scary".

I believe it's worth it to try to reach an actual consensus on concepts like "gentle density".   But you cannot do so without discussing and making reasonably specific recommendations on height limits and exceptions/premiums to them, setbacks, numbers of units, uses, lot combination restrictions, STRs, etc. Much of the public is now convinced that the vagueness of the draft and the "we'll deal with that later, when we change zoning" are part of a cynical attempt to just do what you originally wanted, after the protests have died down; the zoning discussions could be more constrained from a scheduling perspective too. That is highly undemocratic.

Further, you need to do the opposite of "less scary". It's not "fear-mongering" to use examples of what would potentially be allowed. How about analyzing some parcels in transition districts, in detail, to show what could be allowed, using specifics like the lot lines, so that folks would better able to consider the impact down the street from them? Instead, many of you have accused those who attempt to do that of "spreading misinformation".

Next, the misleading density = affordability mantra needs to stop, at least in its current form. While massive densification might get us a slowing or even a small decrease in rents in the upper end of the market, it's not likely to have that impact in the lower end of the market, at least not for many years, And it's likely to have a negative effect on SFH prices, because there's very little land to build any more SFH, some of the current moderately priced stock is likely to replaced by more expensive condos or apartments, and a substantial number of folks who want SFH don't want to live in apartments. Further, a major justification of big density - reducing commuter auto emissions - could be attacked in better ways, like working with regional partners to have development in adjoining townships and better "park and ride" availability.

In sum, you should pause and think how to re-do the process to have a better result - one that the community can understand and hopefully agree on.