

Planning Commission February 6, 2024
711 Church Street PUD Application
Eleanor Linn Remarks

My name is Eleanor Linn. I live at 1321 Forest Court, less than a five-minute walk to the east of these Church Street properties. The developer's proposal for a very tall student high-rise is out of compliance with the zoning of the neighborhood, the size and scale of the surrounding buildings, and the well-being of the nearby residents.

The neighborhood between Hill Street and South University is an attractive and tranquil area with well-maintained houses, ample greenery, and a harmonious mix of long-term residents and short-term student renters. Several guidebooks to Ann Arbor have called it a "hidden gem." It is the kind of urban landscape that should be protected, celebrated, and replicated in our desire to make Ann Arbor a livable city.

The Planning Commission made an error last year when it approved the oversized new student high rise going up at 721 S. Forest. But one mistake does not justify another. Zoning exists for a purpose. PUDs are meant to help develop otherwise unbuildable sites. They are expressly not intended to be a way to get around whatever zoning regulations a developer does not like.

We will receive no benefits if this project is built. It will likely create more heat, forcing us to use more air conditioning in the summer. It will be no more energy efficient than other student high rises along South University. It may limit our sunlight and the health of our heritage oak trees.

The project, as it is proposed would be disturbingly negligent of the young children at the UM's Towsley Children's House. They would not be able to use their play yard, a necessary part of their early education.

I also fear that this project will set a venomous precedent. The R4C houses that sat on this block were demolished with the understanding that new R4C town houses would replace them. Now, with a large empty area, something must be done, but the new project needs to follow city zoning requirements of scale and character. Otherwise, any developer could promote a false replacement and then switch plans later on. We deserve better than that.