

Subject: Comments Regarding the Comprehensive Land Use Plan

From: Bruce Block
Sent: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 2:31 PM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
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Subject: Comments Regarding the Comprehensive Land Use Plan

31 March 2025

To the City Planning Commission:

I am submitting these comments via email to express my disagreement and dismay with the “one-size-fits-all” direction that the City Planning Commission is promoting in its new Comprehensive Land Use Plan. That there is a housing shortage in Ann Arbor is not in dispute. What I do not agree with is the bludgeon that the Commission has cooked up to deal with it, namely, to throw out current R1, R2 zoning to replace it with an ill-considered, top-down, “upzoning” designation that affects all neighborhoods equally without consideration for their current and historical makeup or the desires of their current residents. It is my contention that the Commission should stop in its tracks to listen to what the current residents of Ann Arbor actually want and to adopt a more nuanced approach to (re)zoning.

Specifically, I address some of the adverse effects this “upzoning” might have on my 100-year-old, R2A-zoned neighborhood (and where I have been a homeowner for 30+ years). I enumerate my principal concerns:

1. Multiplexes of up to 48 feet high and unlimited units will destroy the very nature and fabric of the neighborhood that has made it (and much of Ann Arbor) a most desirable place to live and raise families. Namely:
 - Lots could be split or combined without any input from current residents.
 - There are “hints” that current setback requirements could be relaxed.
 - There is no provision for off-street parking (as though our current parking situation is not problematic).
 - As many units as possible could be crammed into a single structure without consideration for appearance or effect on neighboring properties (there goes my garden -- no more sunlight) or property values.

The above points cannot be in dispute as repeated statements by Commission members emphasizing them are part of the public record.

2. I am not interested in having commercial businesses in my residential neighborhood. There is no guarantee whatsoever that a business to be allowed into a neighborhood would be desired by or beneficial to the neighborhood. E.g., do we need marijuana dispensaries or fast-food restaurants “on every corner”?

3. Why is the Commission promoting huge, rental-only multiplexes for my neighborhood instead of more moderate-sized buildings consistent with my current R2A zoning? Is it because out-of-town developers do not find more moderate-sized structures to be as profitable? Nowhere in the Commission's work do I see an emphasis on owner-occupied housing, which is the backbone of my neighborhood. Homeowners have a strong stake in livable, crime-free neighborhoods where they can invest in their housing for the long term. This is one of the key things that makes Ann Arbor a great place to live.
4. Infrastructure in my neighborhood is already stressed. The city has flooded my basement twice in the last 10 years with raw sewage because it could not perform the simple task of removing tree roots from its sanitary sewer system. How will routine infrastructure maintenance be affected by all these proposed additional units? My local electrical grid routinely suffers outages without the additional loads introduced by added electric ranges, heat pumps, and EV chargers. And how are all those EV owners who live in the new multiplexes going to be charging their EVs given that they have no on-site parking? With extension cords snaking down the sidewalk?

It is highly unlikely that this plan will ever significantly increase the store of low-cost housing in Ann Arbor, much less in historical, desirable, close-to-campus neighborhoods such as my own. Equally, it is will-of-the-wisp thinking that the number of housing units proposed by the Commission (30,000-97,000!) will have any significant downward effect on housing prices within Ann Arbor.

In summary, I implore the Commission to take a step backward and reconsider its current “one-size-fits-all” upzoning approach and actually engage with the citizens of Ann Arbor, who are the real stakeholders. You might start out with a valid and comprehensive survey (no, the surveys that you promote are not real surveys) to find out what the residents of the city really want for their future.

Respectfully,

Bruce Block
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Ann Arbor