

**Subject:** Comments on City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan Draft Report  
**Attachments:** Ann Arbor city planning report April 2025.pdf

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**From:** Gregory Saltzman  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 21, 2025 12:16 PM  
**To:** Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>  
**Subject:** Comments on City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan Draft Report

Below and attached is a memo I just emailed to the Mayor and my ward's members of city council about the City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan Draft Report.

TO: Mayor Christopher Taylor, [ctaylor@a2gov.org](mailto:ctaylor@a2gov.org)  
City Council Member Dharma Akmon, [dakmon@a2gov.org](mailto:dakmon@a2gov.org)  
City Council Member Jen Eyer, [jeyer@a2gov.org](mailto:jeyer@a2gov.org)

FROM Greg Saltzman, Ann Arbor ward 4 resident,

SUBJECT: Comments on City of Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan Draft Report - April 2025

DATE: May 21, 2025

*p. 58: "As the city grows, it will also need to ensure open space can meet the needs of new residents, particularly in higher density areas that do not currently have park space."*

I agree. There is a particular dearth of park space downtown, where residential density has increased dramatically. Alan Haber and others will say that the city government ignored this issue in deciding not to build a park downtown on the library lot. The city council can improve the prospects that voters will approve the two referenda in August to sell the library lot to the library by, **PRIOR** to August 5, appropriating money to create both a downtown pocket park with green space and a downtown fenced playground for young children.

*p. 64: "Reduce the reliance on residential property taxes (single-family and multi-family housing) to fund the city."*

One problem is that the Headlee Amendment created an incentive to avoid selling commercial property, as a property sale would trigger an increase in taxable value to the new sale price. So Briarwood Mall has never been sold. Instead, the shares of stock in the corporation that owns Briarwood has been sold. This gradually shifted the property tax burden away from Briarwood and towards residences (which do eventually get sold and, thus, face a big increase in taxable value). The new construction now underway at Briarwood will presumably face a Headlee Amendment cap on its property taxes for multiple decade. That increases the initial value of the property when it is new. The city of Ann Arbor should consider this when setting the initial assessment of the new construction at Briarwood. In other words, the initial assessment of the new construction at Briarwood should appropriately be higher because the new construction will never be sold and thus will have future property tax increases slowed by the Headlee Amendment.

*p. 64: "42% of the parcel area in the city is tax exempt and taxable land continues to shrink as U-M acquires more taxable property, increasing the tax burden on the residential tax base further."*

Ann Arbor could reduce reliance on residential property taxes by establishing a modest city income tax: say 0.5% on city residents and 0.25% on nonresidents who work in Ann Arbor. Most all taxes cause some

economic distortions by muddling price signals. Combining a property tax and an income tax instead of relying only on a property tax or only on an income tax helps avoid the high tax rates that are most likely to cause economic distortions.

*p. 80: “Implementing the SEU will require land in the city for large-scale solar power.”*

It doesn’t make sense to build a land-intensive solar farm in an area with high land prices. If the city wants to build a solar farm, then it should be on cheap land **OUTSIDE** the city limits. There is no problem transporting electricity from a solar farm 15 miles outside Ann Arbor into the city. Similarly, New York City “imports” wheat from places like North Dakota, where land is cheap, rather than setting aside large tracts of very expensive land in midtown Manhattan for wheat farms.

*P. 82: “Transit is also most effective with dense nodes, which drive the ridership that makes it more cost-effective.”*

Correct. That’s why multi-story apartment buildings should be right on high-volume arterials with bus routes (e.g. Washtenaw, Plymouth, State, Packard, Main, Miller, and Division). Your proposal of putting 4-story apartment buildings a few blocks from bus routes on minor residential streets now dominated by single-family homes undermines the goal of shifting transportation from private cars to buses.

*P. 93: “The city should ensure that police and fire services have the necessary capacity and equipment to accommodate growing populations.”*

How tall is the tallest ladder on an Ann Arbor fire truck? With ever more tall buildings downtown, the Ann Arbor fire department probably needs a couple of ladder trucks downtown with 125-foot (or longer) ladders. Ann Arbor could sell a couple of older ladder trucks with shorter ladders to other fire departments with no buildings taller than 6 stories in their jurisdictions.

*p. 104: “**Residential District:** Buildings are limited to four stories in this district.”*

This has stirred great controversy. You should change the maximum in residential districts to three stories instead of four. You could still allow more duplexes or row houses.

*p. 116: “Industrial-type jobs, particularly in manufacturing and construction, provide higher wages and stable employment opportunities”*

Historically, this was true of **UNIONIZED** manufacturing jobs but not of nonunion jobs. The city government should not fetishize manufacturing jobs. Two hundred years ago, most people worked in agriculture. The drastic reduction in agricultural employment has not been a problem because labor flowed into, first, manufacturing and, then, services. It makes sense for Ann Arbor to have manufacturing jobs in industries that require lots of engineering talent because of the University of Michigan being here. It would have been nice, for example, if Ann Arbor had lured TSMC to locate their advanced semiconductor factory in or near Ann Arbor rather than in Phoenix. But Ann Arbor has no competitive advantage in low-tech manufacturing, such as garment factories.

Also, as the Gelman Sciences water pollution problem shows, it’s not an advantage to have an industry that causes significant pollution located in or near Ann Arbor.

*P. 122: “Building & Fire Codes: Existing building and fire codes related to ingress/egress and structural materials increase costs and reduce housing options.”*

Sweden is a world leader in prefabricated housing, which results in considerable cost savings. Prefabricated housing has been facilitated by Sweden’s use of performance-based building codes specifying outcomes that must be achieved (energy efficiency, structural integrity, and fire safety) rather than specific materials that must be used.

Greg Saltzman  
Professor Emeritus of Economics and Management  
Albion College, USA

TO: Mayor Christopher Taylor, ctaylor@a2gov.org  
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City Council Member Jen Eyer, jeyer@a2gov.org

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