Subject: Feedback on Comprehensive Plan Project Questions

From: Brian Chambers
Sent: Sunday, January 26, 2025 9:17 AM
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Subject: Re: Feedback on Comprehensive Plan Project Questions

Planning Commission, Brett and the Comprehensive Plan Project Leadership:

Thank you for your engaged discussions on the Comprehensive Plan review held at your last meeting.

I was greatly encouraged by the feedback provided by the Planning Commissioners on their expectations for the inclusion of housing, unimpeded, in all proposed new districts, and to revert back to the more simplified plan elements previously proposed, that provided for standardized and flexible zoning across each of the current TC1 Districts.

In particular, I believe it is important to stress that the U-M is building out their North Campus Research Complex and their holdings east of US-23 as their own 'innovation district' styled along the lines of Stanford Research Park. They have the KLA development on their land, paying rent on a ground lease basis. Their corporate sponsors have also stressed their desire for mixed-income, mixed-use developments integrated with housing and transit. The U-M is also working on plans for on-campus employee housing on North Campus, using similar design criteria. Their growth on that basis will likely lead to a continued expansion of their employment well beyond the 21,000+ additional employees they added to their Ann Arbor campus over the past 20 years.

Again, it is critical that Ann Arbor also fosters the mixed-income, mixed-use, transit based housing in demand for Ann Arbor.

The Comprehensive Plan draft may require major re-work by the project team before it goes to the City Council working session scheduled for February 10th. They have been doing fantastic work and have the engagement style and prior project experience that hopefully will allow this rewrite to be fairly straightforward.

Their work, expertise and value they bring to the project is certainly appreciated.

Brett, please forward this to the Planning Commission.

Thank you, again.

Brian Chambers

Ward 3

On Tue, Jan 21, 2025 at 5:29 PM Brian Chambers <brchambers58@gmail.com> wrote:

> Dear Comprehensive Plan Project and City Leaders: (Brett, please share this with the Planning Commission)
>
> In the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update to the Planning Commission, a series of questions and other topics were presented. I'd like to offer a response, as well.
>
> Overall, the Comprehensive Plan approach and value focus is excellent. Below, I make a few points on how it can be improved to incentivize affordable housing in all proposed districts.
>
> I know incentives for affordable housing in the downtown core were determined to be counter-productive, but with a value focus on 'housing for all incomes' there should be a way to see specifically how that 'all income' priority is actually enabled in the Comprehensive Plan being proposed. Maybe there are other approaches for an explicit approach to increasing low and middle income housing, based on zoning and land use priorities, but so far it has not been clearly outlined.
>
> **Low Rise Residential**
>
> 1. Should low-rise residential replace R1 & R2? What does low-rise residential mean to us?
>
> - Consolidating R1 and R2 with provisions for gentle density increases for 2 - 4 units on a site is entirely appropriate, given the objectives for the Comprehensive Plan stipulated by the City in the project charter.
> - Bundling zoning reforms that include eliminating single-family zoning, amending height restrictions, minimum set-back requirements, eliminating or lowering minimum floor area, and minimum lot size requirements can prove highly effective.
>   - This comprehensive approach enables properties to have more units in a building by increasing height restrictions and allows for more housing on previously zoned single-family lots, fostering improved land use efficiency and creating more affordable housing.
>
> 2. When we talk about missing middle housing, what are the project examples shown that do/don't fall into this category?
>
> Location, location, location needs to be within a 1/4 mile of transit transfer stops !
>
> - "Missing Middle" is a popular term among planning professionals to emphasize the gap in housing between detached single family homes and large-scale apartment towers. For increasing affordability, however, it is a misconstrued phrase, as it implies there is adequate housing below and above those types of structures for housing access, when there clearly is not.
>
> - An incentive for increasing affordable units should be included in ways comparable to the incentives used by Seattle and Portland, with higher densities allowed if the units are affordable.
>
>   - Since Ann Arbor is considering allowing 4-unit structures in the combined R1 / R2 Low Rise Residential zones, it would make sense to provide the option of up to 6 units on a site if they are within a quarter-mile walk of major transit or if two units are affordable and

income restricted, in addition, allowing 3 stories for a market-rate development, and 4 stories for development with income-restricted affordable homes would be an additional incentive. Transit-oriented development needs to be written into the specific zoning districts being proposed, with incentives for higher density along transit-transfer lines.

    - Ann Arbor needs incentives for more developments to include affordable housing to support a Community Land Trust model, so affordable housing isn't only the domain of the Ann Arbor Housing Commission or with developers who may add a few affordable units but only with a15 year life. Incentivizing a Community Land Trust model can be done with the incentives in the zoning code for affordable units.

- Missing-Middle housing is strong if it aligned to transit oriented development

    - The projects outlined in the Comp Plan update, themselves, could all be valid for increasing housing densities in and around current residential zones. However, a larger framing is required.

    - To actually lower living costs with these gentle density increases (i.e., not towers), they need to be done with a 1/4 mile walk of transit transfer stops, and in areas where the housing density will be great enough to actually foster and support mixed used development (2,500 housing units within the 1/4 mile radius). For example, The George was used to depict greater density, but it doesn't have the scale of housing to foster mixed-use walkability.

3. Do you envision that mass/scale apart from height that should be regulated by unit count or other form-based standards?

- Ann Arbor should primarily use form-based standards that focus on factors like maximum building width, depth, and lot coverage, alongside unit count regulations, rather than solely relying on unit density per acre, as this allows for more control over the overall physical appearance and character of a development while still achieving higher density.

Mixed-Use Areas (Hubs and Corridors)

1. CORE: Do you see a distinction between the character and land use designation of downtown vs. State/Eisenhower?

- The downtown core is characterized by two regional transit centers, AAATA's Blake Transit Center and the AMTRAK Train Station. Having two regional transit centers means that the housing and employment densities should be that much greater than a transit hub area like the TC1 District at State/Eisenhower.

- Recommended densities are typically ranging from 20 to 30 dwelling units per acre for the regional transit centers, while a bus-only hub might only require a density of 10 to 15 units per acre; this is because high-capacity transit like regional rail necessitates a greater concentration of residents to support ridership levels. Higher capacity transit like light rail or commuter rail generally requires higher densities to be efficient than bus services.

2. INNOVATION: Should this area be designated to maximize business/entrepreneurial development over other potential land uses (e.g. solely residential/retail/etc.)

- Innovation Districts in the U-M Campus 2050 Plan designate development parcels to support a variety of land uses, including academic, research, innovation, partnership, residential, and amenities. The aim is to offer a flexible structure that can adapt to U-M's evolving needs and priorities over time.
    - The U-M has received guidance from corporate development partners that mixed-income / mixed-use campus developments are preferred for joint investment over other types of research facility only innovation districts.
- Ann Arbor should match the U-M model for an Innovation District, which incorporates walkable mixed-income / mixed-use housing.

3. RETAIL: Should we explore a land use category that provides a wider range of development potential to provide more flexibility/incremental investment in retail centers?

- Retail districts can function well within new zoning approaches that promote mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods; in fact, they are often a key component of such developments, as they provide convenient access to shopping for residents living nearby, thereby enhancing the walkability and overall vibrancy of the community. However, they need dense housing within a 1/4 mile walk of dense housing (2,500 units, minimum) and be located along transit lines that connect multiple housing and employment centers to the retail districts.

The update also expressed concerns over housing being permitted in employment, retail, and innovation zones.

I believe this should not be a critical concern, since Ann Arbor has nearly the highest center of job density in the state, second only to Detroit. Ann Arbor is a "net importer" of jobs — meaning during the day, more people are commuting to work in Ann Arbor than are leaving. We have a long, long way to go before housing development is adversely impacting employment development.

Hope this helps.

Brian Chambers
Ward 3