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Sent: Thursday, June 01, 2023 11:37 AM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>; City Council <CityCouncil@a2gov.org>
Subject: SouthTown Multifamily Housing Project

To the Ann Arbor City Council and Planning Commission, Regarding the Proposed SouthTown Development:

In my work as an architectural designer and observer of the field, I've found that some architects providing services wait for their clients to ask for sustainable options, wait for those clients to discuss adding affordability in their projects. However, waiting for demand is not an okay response to the simultaneous crises of affordability and climate change in our built environment. Promoting projects that tackle such goals is necessary for the health and longevity of our communities. In addition, the existence of such projects--shall we call them case studies?-- become data-driven examples for other municipalities, future developers, financing institutions, and private clients, creating and generating the demand needed to build a better future.

The Southtown project is ground-breaking in many of these areas. It has the potential to put Ann Arbor on the map as a leader in sustainability, including mass timber construction sequestering approximately 1740 metric tons of CO₂; geo-thermal heating and cooling system; solar panels producing up to 114,000 kWh; and all-electric using no natural gas. Not only does this project tackled the embedded energy of the building, the energy demand of the future, it also aims to improve the quality of living of city residents through the increase of shared public space, as well as birds through the use of fenestration that protects local birds from the dangers posed by reflective glazing. The increase of density and access to bus routes and protected bike parking create the infrastructure for residents to make the sustainable life choices that build a vibrant city. The ground floor retail spaces will establish amenities in the neighborhood, making a car-free life more attainable, and a walkable city more enjoyable. Limiting curb along this city block protects drivers, pedestrians, and bikers, alike. The housing development will increase density, and the presence of smaller-sized units make it one step toward affordable housing options throughout the city.

All of these are wins, not only for the city of Ann Arbor as it attempts to meet affordability and sustainability goals. But, also as a beacon of what is possible in a contemporary city.

This project is important to me, not only as a professional, but because I've personally benefited from past efforts within the city to create and maintain affordable housing. I'm not certain the same help would be available to me today if I were in the same situation. And that is a collective failure of the social agreement we share as residents of this city.

Twenty years ago, when I was a young adult first starting out in life and career with a young child and simultaneously working my spouse through grad-school, I was a resident of the University Townhouses. This affordable, cooperatively owned housing community was the only place I could afford to live within the city of Ann Arbor at the time without sacrificing space for my young and active toddler or access to the city. Begun in the mid-1960's as a special arrangement low-interest loan with HUD, the University Townhouses became one of five developments in Ann Arbor which were cooperatively owned, providing affordable housing to

low-income residents. In the early 2000s each of these communities had a choice to make as their 40-year low-interest mortgage was paid-off: convert to market rate, or re-borrow, make improvements, and continue to provide affordable housing. Each of the five developments made a slightly different choice, some preferring to benefit the individual over the collective, and some maintaining their social responsibility to affordable housing.

Today, waiting lists are closed or prohibitively long for the same units as the prices of houses and rentals have increased significantly. Today, I could not afford to buy the same house that I have owned now for 17 years. As a city resident who has benefitted from the availability of affordable housing, I find the lack of availability to be unconscionable. It is imperative: Ann Arbor must work to increase the number of available units for rent or ownership, maintain affordable choices, preserve a vibrant and diverse culture through those myriad options, and align those options with the city's sustainability goals for the future.

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