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Sent: Thursday, April 26, 2018 10:13 AM

To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>

Subject: Cottages at Barton Green

Dear Commissioners:

The Cottages at Barton Green site plan is again before you. So much has already been said and written about this plan, and I really appreciate all the time and thought you have dedicated to the many issues it raises. The sole purpose of this letter is to correct the public record after some recent false and misleading statements by the developer and its engineering contractor. It's a long list. Since my goal is just to correct the record, not to directly address the site plan, please don't feel obligated to read through the whole letter (or any of it).

Sincerely,

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1. Last month the petitioner wrote, "The site plan has gone through significant modifications over the past year." (April 13 city staff report.) A glance at the current plan shows that it's virtually identical to the original May 25, 2017 site plan. The number of units, bedroom counts, floor plans, parking spaces and physical layout of the site have barely budged.
2. Cottages will include 12 six-bedroom and 46 five-bedroom duplex units. On March 6 commissioner Ackerman asked Trinitas to consider adding some single-family homes and/or reducing the bedroom count in the larger duplex units, while possibly raising unit density to compensate. Damian VanMatre of Trinitas answered: "It has to make financial sense. It has to be financially feasible, Right? So you have certain returns based on how many beds and units you have." However, at the Annex, Trinitas's new 202-unit student housing development in Oxford, Ohio, there are no units with more than four bedrooms. (Source: Annex website and phone call to Annex management office.) The Annex also includes 22 single family homes. Trinitas's refusal since October to lower bedroom counts or to add single family homes in Ann Arbor is a choice, not an economic imperative, since it has done both at the Annex, which is presumably generating an acceptable return for the company.
3. At the April 17 Planning Commission meeting, project engineer Scott Betzoldt (Midwestern Consulting) said, "To be very honest with you, this is the best traffic situation you could possibly have for this site." He based this statement on the more varied daily schedule of student versus working families, which will reduce peak traffic hour pressure. Mr. Betzoldt is correct about that. But that will be more than compensated for by the high bedroom count of this project and the fact that every bedroom will house a potential driver, unlike a normal residential development. This is reflected in the 559 parking spaces, 117 more than required for a 221-unit development.
4. About the campus shuttle, Mr. Betzoldt on April 17 said, "We think we've underestimated how much it's going to be used." We think shuttle use has instead been overestimated. In its Feb. 6 traffic impact study (TIS), Midwestern estimates that 27% of trips from Cottages will be by transit (page 31). However, in its original May 25, 2017 TIS, Midwestern estimated that only 17% of trips would be by transit (page 14). It based this estimate on Trinitas's experience at its 8N Lofts development in Lincoln, Nebraska, which is at 17%.
Then, in its December 14 TIS, Midwestern raised the Ann Arbor transit allocation from 17% to 27%. Why? The city's traffic consultant correctly pointed out that Midwestern's 10% allocation to pedestrians was unrealistic at this location (Nick Nicita September 14, 2017 letter to Luke Liu, page 3) , so Midwestern reduced the pedestrian portion to 1% and tacked 9% (plus 1% from bike use) onto transit (Dec. 14 TIS, page 29). Trinitas didn't add any shuttles, or make any other changes. It simply altered the numbers so it wouldn't have to increase the car estimate.

We know of no data from Trinitas's actual experience showing anywhere near 27% transit use at any of its developments. Huron Highlands asked for such data in a Jan. 24, 2018 letter to Jeff Kahan, which Mr. Kahan forwarded to Mr. Betzoldt and Mr. VanMatre. They never replied. We conclude that the 27% figure was pulled from thin air, in order to minimize total estimated vehicle trips from the site.

Even 17% is too high, because parking at Trinitas's 8N Lofts development is off-site, and residents must pay for it. (Source: phone call to 8N Lofts management office.) This encourages shuttle use. Residents here will park for free in front of their apartments. So transit use here will probably be lower than the 17% achieved in Lincoln.

The transportation "modal split" is critical, because all downstream traffic estimates follow from it. Midwestern is greatly overestimating transit use and lowballing total vehicle trips.

5. Equally dubious is Midwestern's contention that Trinitas's single shuttle serving Central Campus can achieve a 30-minute turnaround time (Feb. 6 TIS, page 34). This schedule includes a circuit through the Cottages development to pick up and drop off passengers (Feb. 8 site plan, sheet 24) and two stops in the heart of Central Campus. Given this itinerary, a 30-minute round trip is completely unrealistic, at least at peak traffic hours. Trinitas's shuttle at its Bloomington, Indiana development (sold in April 2017) has been unable to stay on schedule, leading to many online complaints by residents at <https://www.yelp.com/biz/the-village-at-muller-park-bloomington-3> . (Many interesting reviews on this website.)
6. In justifying its total transit modal split, Midwestern states that "the site will have convenient access to AAATA public transit stops both north and south of the site on Pontiac Trail" (TIS page 29). This is not true for the southbound direction. AAATA's Julia Roberts told me that there will be no southbound stop for the Pontiac Trail bus at Cottages, with the nearest southbound stop some distance north of North Sky's Polson Street, now under construction. The next southbound stop to the south is even further from Cottages (the current stop near Cloverdale).
7. In response to a traffic question from commissioner Weatherbee on April 17, Mr. Betzoldt said that "The model actually conservatively predicts more trips than generally occur with a student population," adding "If this was an apartment complex of working young adults or what have you, I think they predict that 93% of them is going to go to work." This isn't even close. According to the 8th edition of the ITE Trip Generation Manual (page 328), trips per dwelling unit for Apartments (category 220), the land use category applied here, average 51% per dwelling unit for weekday morning peak hours. This makes sense, because many apartment residents are young children, seniors, disabled, nonworking spouses or people who work from home, and do not leave to go to work in the morning.

Maybe Mr. Betzoldt meant to say, rather than 93% of residents would leave for work, that 93% of *trips* would be by *vehicle*. The ITE TGM 8th edition figure for apartments is 96%, which Midwestern is discounting down to 69% (page 2 of Feb. 6 TIS). While this is consistent with the ITE student housing database, in which student apartments, on average, generate fewer vehicle trips than standard apartments, the vast majority of the student developments in the ITE database—projects that determine the average—are adjacent to campus, where most students just walk. The 30% discount shouldn't apply to an outlier development like Cottages where few if any students will walk to campus.

All told, we think vehicle trips from Cottages have been greatly underestimated. Cottages will add much more than Midwestern's estimate of 8% to current Pontiac Trail traffic volume.
8. Mr. Betzoldt also said on April 17, "With this particular development, 80% of your people are going to evaporate for four months out of the year." While some units may vacate in the summer, we expect most will remain occupied, by year-round residents or by subletters. And Mr. Betzoldt did not mention that shuttle service will be cut back in summer. In Oxford, during summer semester, Trinitas runs one shuttle instead of the usual two, and it serves only one campus location instead of three. (Source: phone call to Annex management office.) The net effect may be an increase in summer car trips, not a decrease.
9. In response to a March 6 Commission request that Trinitas re-examine its transportation mode share assumptions, Trinitas writes, "It should be noted that at the request of the Huron Highlands community, Trinitas weighted the traffic study to reflect less bike use." (See April 13 staff report, page 3.) This is an outrageous statement, and completely false. We did ask, in a December 4 letter to Jeff Kahan and Luke Liu, that the estimate for *pedestrian* use be lowered from 10% —city staff agreed, and the developer complied ten days later-

-but we have never questioned Trinitas's biking estimate (originally 4%, later reduced to 3%). In fact, we specified that it should not change (Dec. 4 letter, page three).

10. In a response to a March 6 request from Commissioner Briggs that the company explore ways to limit off-site parking, Trinitas writes, "Considering the self-contained nature of the Project, the number of on-site parking spaces being provided, and the lack of access from single family residential streets to the Project, simply stated neighborhood parking will not be an issue." (April 13 staff report, page 3.) We hope Trinitas is right, but it's unlikely. The plan includes walkway access from Skydale Drive into the project, with student dwellings sited just a few yards away. It will be convenient for Cottages residents and visitors to park along Skydale and Hilldale and walk to their units. And with 162 fewer parking spaces than units, a parking shortfall is likely, given the likelihood that residents choosing to live so far from campus will self-select for car use. They are far less likely to want to share vehicles at this location compared to being close to campus, where cars aren't used as much.
11. In a response to Commission's March 6 suggestion that Trinitas meet with neighbors, the company responded as follows (April 13 staff report, page 4): "Trinitas has met with the surrounding neighborhood on two separate occasions in the winter of 2017 and the fall of 2017. Trinitas listened to the recommendations of the surrounding neighborhoods and incorporated neighborhood recommendations into the Project." This is false. The two meetings were the Feb. 2, 2017 citizen participation meeting, required by ordinance, and the Oct. 5 meeting, which followed three previous refusals by Trinitas to meet with us. Following the Feb. 2 meeting, despite hearing our concerns about noise, Trinitas relocated the swimming pool and deck from its original placement in the center of the site to its current location, right up against Skydale homes. (So its boast about adding soundproofing around the pool rings hollow to us.) At the Oct. 5 meeting, we asked Trinitas to add 22 single family homes, an interior park, and sustainability elements including solar panels on the clubhouse, some permeable pavement, and Zipcars. They have not agreed to do any of this. Trinitas did add additional landscaping and a berm. We're glad they did, but we didn't ask for them—we'd prefer a more diverse community that we could embrace as neighbors, rather than more buffering from a noxious project.

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