

September 8, 2021

Dear Historic District Commission Members,

There has been a great deal of discussion around development in Ann Arbor, and what we want the city to be in the future, and rightly so. There has been a big push, a successful push toward high-density development, with the hopes of more units of affordable housing. We all hope for more affordable housing in Ann Arbor. But if you read any of the old articles or studies written about the 415 W. Washington, the city has known for years that affordable housing could not be on this site due to the flood-plane and proximity to the railroad tracks, and yet the SmithGroup presented the “preferred option” to the public as if it might be used for affordable housing. And again they have come back to you in their revised presentation stating one of their goals is to increase unit count to meet affordability goal. There is no affordable goal for these units. It cannot be and that has been established over and over.

In addition, this is the only site of the high density proposals that has been designated as historic and protected by the HDC. I ask the Commission stay true to the vision of the HDC.

Costs of renovation has been cited as reason to bring the buildings down, but we who live in the Historic District have had to navigate those extra costs when we have wanted to do any renovations to our properties. Yes, it is hard to bite the bullet and spend the extra money, but it is an investment in the future for both neighborhood and the City. And an investment that some developers have wanted to make.

The “preferred option” you are reviewing again this evening does not integrate itself into the neighborhood. Houses on this side of town are on average 20’-25’ tall. Yes, the SmithGroup came back with a modification of a slight set back in one area, but the building is still 60’ tall (and I am guessing it will be taller with things added on top like the Y), that is 40’ looming over the neighborhood. Slides 13 and 14 presented completely ignore the houses on both sides of 3rd Street and neighboring streets.

The revised plan also added an additional 25 units and parking spaces making it even larger then the proposal from July. This building would create a gigantic barrier between the neighborhood on the West and downtown to the East. Their solution for parking using parallel parking is not well thought out. There are cars and people traveling up and down Washington all day long, many with children

being picked up and dropped off at the Y. It would be very dangerous and congested.

What makes the most sense for this spot is something that transitions between the OWS neighborhood and the busy downtown area. While I appreciate that the city is looking to finally do something with the 415 W. Washington lot, for years there has been talk about preserving most of the buildings on the site and using them for a creative and sustainable space... with work space and living space, a second generation of use, and also a green park anchor. I hope you take this under consideration. I ask that the HDC follows the mission: To Protect the Integrity of the Neighborhood.

I appreciate the hard work and thoughtfulness of the HDC.

Thank you,

Muffy MacKenzie



