

**Ann Arbor Discovering Downtown
Downtown Zoning Advisory Committee**

10th January, 2006 Meeting
4th Floor Conference Room, City Hall

Members Present: Fred Beal, Bonnie Bona, Bob Johnson, Carol Kuhnke, Brad Moore, Sonia Schmerl

Staff Present: Wendy Rampson, Lindsay-Jean Hard

Guests: Ethel Potts (Planning Commission)

1) Review of Core Boundaries

The Committee picked up their discussion from the previous meeting's ending place, at which point they were exploring the boundaries of the Core area. Committee members continued a dialogue regarding the North Main Street area, and noted that this area contains a mixture of scales; from newly approved high-density projects, to retail and offices in converted houses, to a variety of lower-density residential uses. At the last meeting, the Committee had agreed that this area serves as a transitional area between the Core and residential neighborhoods to the north and west, and felt that transitional areas shouldn't be solely concerned with use, but also density and the size of structures.

The committee continued a discussion of a potential L-shaped extension of the Core area along both faces of North Main Street, as that stretch seems to have a different character than surrounding edges of the Core. Staff mentioned that the Thomas Earl House is on the National Register and is within this stretch of North Main, noting that it contributes to the historic pattern of that traditionally residential area just north of Catherine/Miller. One committee member observed that there has been a lot of investment in historic preservation within the North Main area, and this should be respected by keeping it a lower-density Interface area. Another committee member expressed a preference for using the Downtown Plan boundary for the Core, which would extend two blocks further north than the boundary for the Huron Corridor in the Calthorpe report.

The committee reviewed approved projects going into this area, both by height and by floor area ratio (FAR), in addition to a proposal for a 9-story residential PUD that was presented to Planning Commission earlier in the week. One committee member said that it was possible to still meet FAR requirements and end up with tall buildings. Another committee member noted that it depends on the size of the parcel as well, observing that a tall tower in the center of a large parcel has a different feel than a large blocky building going from lot line to lot line. Other issues raised include the topography, which drops down at Kingsley, and the potential shading impacts of tall buildings on adjacent residential areas. One member commented that they were discussing what would happen on the north side of existing or approved tall buildings, and felt there was some question as to whether or not defining that area as an Interface zone would 'save' the residential areas.

- In general, there was not a consensus among Committee members about whether or not to extend the Core area north along Main Street, so this was left as an open issue.

2) Proposed Changes to Underlying Zoning in Interface Areas

Staff proposed a scenario to streamline and simplify the downtown's base zoning for Committee review. The Core of downtown (the area generally contained between William Street to the south, Ann Street to the north, First Street to the west, and State Street to the east) would be uniformly zoned to C2A, and the remaining

Interface areas would be zoned C2A/R. Text changes to the regulations of each district, particularly premiums, would provide additional development guidance under this scenario. The four Interface areas would include the Kerrytown area, the west side of the downtown, the south side of East William Street, and a stretch of Division Street, which falls in the East William Historic District.

Kerrytown

These zoning changes would most directly impact the Kerrytown area and the parcels currently used for automotive services. The Kerrytown area is currently zoned C2B/R, which makes it slightly more difficult to do residential projects in that area, and the parcels with automotive uses would become non-conforming. Staff added that people who live downtown expect the facilities necessary to meet their daily needs, including gas stations and auto repair shops. The Committee reviewed the concepts of special exceptions and conditional use permits as possible ways to keep the auto-oriented uses with a zoning change.

- The committee agreed that there is a need for auto-oriented uses downtown and that these uses should not be zoned out.

East William

One Committee member noted that the transitional area is one to two blocks deep on the north side of the downtown, and suggested repeating a transitional area of this depth on the south side of the downtown. While some committee members did agree that allowing denser residential and mixed-used developments south of William Street would be beneficial, staff clarified that it would be beyond the scope of this committee's work to extend recommendations outside of the current downtown district, and further, that the Central Area Plan recommended against expanding commercial zoning into residential neighborhoods surrounding downtown. Several committee members commented that they would support zoning changes that would remove non-conformities in the Jefferson Street neighborhood to support higher density residential infill in this area.

South Division

Staff noted that the East William historic district extended north on Division, almost to Liberty. One committee member said that the residential buildings did not fit with the rest of the Core around it, and that they are not easily adapted to commercial use. There was discussion about the continued desirability of historic district protection on this block and the small district on East Liberty. The procedure for removing a district designation will be included in the update of Chapter 103 (Historic Preservation Code), but will require strong evidence that the original reason for designation is no longer valid. Staff noted that one approach to limiting development pressures in historic districts was to keep the zoning regulations consistent with existing development. Another approach being study is a transfer of development rights.

- The Committee agreed that the historic districts located in the Core should be zoned C2A, consistent with surrounding property outside of the districts.

One Committee member questioned whether existing PUDs in the core would also be zoned C2A. Staff explained that PUDs are unique in that their zoning designation can only change if the owner initiates a change, but added that staff will likely meet with the owners of these properties, because in many cases it might benefit the owner to change. Additionally, staff had not envisioned getting rid of PUDs, as they have the benefit of creating unique buildings. Staff noted that while PUDs have generally been used in the downtown to create more intense developments, revamping the downtown zoning might discourage the use of PUDs to accomplish that goal, and they might be used in the future to allow for the creation of a truly distinctive project. One of the benefits of PUDs in the downtown, affordable housing, could be incorporated into floor area premiums.

- The Committee was generally in acceptance of the C2A and C2A/R areas for the downtown and briefly discussed the South University area. Committee members agreed that as it has recently been rezoned to

C2A, and is almost entirely surrounded by University property that it was appropriate to leave this area as it is.

3) Potential Addition of Height Limits

The committee reviewed a table that compared the height recommendations from the Calthorpe report, the Downtown Plan, with the C2A and C2A/R zoning. The Calthorpe Report had suggested implementing maximum and minimum height limits, and noted that current zoning is based entirely on FAR and does not have height limits. One committee member indicated that height limits can result in blocky buildings, since developers will maximize FAR by building lot line to lot line, and advocated for variations in height to avoid a uniform canyon effect. Another member wanted to preserve the option for creating tall towers and suggested that lower FARs might be more appropriate than height limits.

Committee members discussed setback requirements. One committee member expressed concern that the lack of side setback requirements will affect light and ventilation access for upper stories. Another member suggested requiring a three story front setback as a potential tool to avoid "the canyon effect," and expressed a desire to craft requirements in a way that allows what has been done well to continue being done. Staff said that these types of "form" requirements would be a topic for discussion with the Design Guidelines Advisory Committee to determine where they would be best included.

- On the whole, the Committee was in agreement that FAR was a better option than height limits in the Core, but felt that height limits should be considered in the Interface areas.

4) Public Involvement Schedule / Joint meeting with Urban Design Committee

Last session, Committee members indicated a desire to have a joint meeting with the Urban Design Committee, and staff suggested a potential schedule based on the Committee's progress. The committee agreed that a second Committee meeting will be scheduled for January; the Committee will plan to have a joint session with the Urban Design Committee in February; and the Committee will reconvene in March and determine a public involvement schedule at that time.

5) Public Comment

Ms. Potts expressed apprehension that the committee is coming to consensus rather quickly without necessarily thinking about the consequences. She noted that the committee must already be in consensus about what they want to see in the downtown, or they are not looking in depth enough.

6) Next Meeting

The committee's next meeting will be Wednesday, January 24th at 4:30 in the conference room on the 4th floor of City Hall. A committee member asked that the zoning approach to structured parking be included in upcoming discussions.

Prepared by Lindsay-Jean Hard