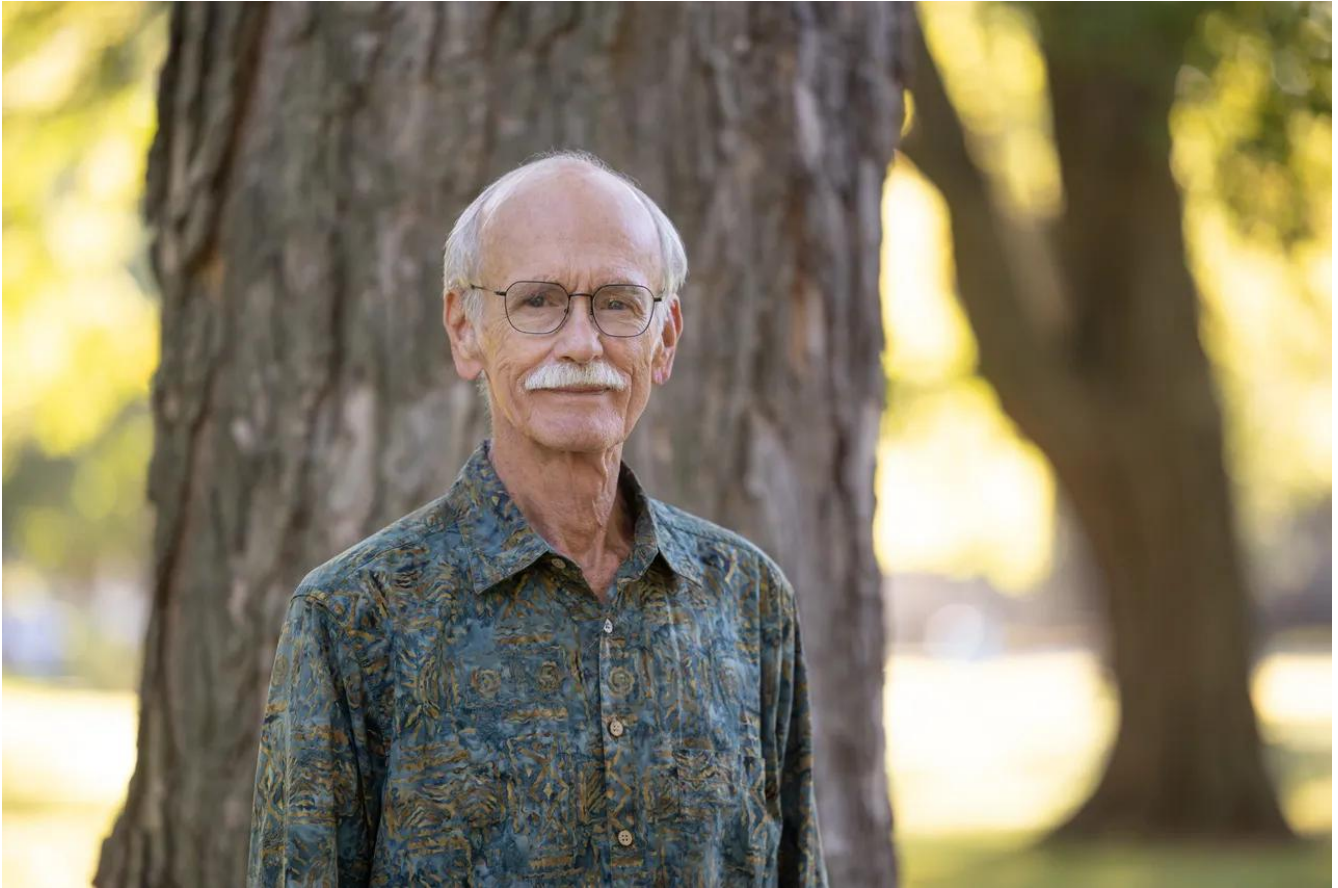


The New Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan: An Expensive Disaster

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This analysis was written by Chuck Ream.

Look toward downtown to see who controls Ann Arbor. Now these developers are coming for your neighborhood. The new Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan gives control of Ann Arbor's future to developers. City Council wants to help them!

The Ann Arbor City Council is putting forward a plan for our future that is absurd, unnecessary, and destructive. Research proves that its ostensible goals of “equity and affordability” cannot be accomplished. We will get gentrification, with older homes (and people) cleared away, and prices and taxes going up. Traffic congestion will greatly increase, while parking will decrease.

The central mistake of this plan is for city council to think they can change the most basic values of Ann Arbor voters. ... who strongly relate to Ann Arbor's beauty and “character” and the fact that it really is “Tree City”. Now we are being told to sacrifice these core values in order to uphold other values like equity, affordability, sustainability and dynamism. The report states that we must focus on these goals **“rather than”** worrying about old-fashioned things like “protecting the existing character and natural environment” (trees) “of Ann Arbor”. Sorry, any “value” they can think of is secondary to the trees and character of Ann Arbor. The defacement of Ann Arbor could go on until they “kill the goose” that laid our golden egg.

On August 4, 2026 the voters must replace some of this city council that thinks that trees and character are obsolete, and elect council members who will love and protect tree city. We still can enter the future dynamically and provide needed mid level housing to satisfy legitimate needs. It's not our job to satisfy the greed of developers or to recruit new residents.

Why is this comprehensive plan so dangerous?

1) It will make our great city congested and funny looking.

City planners want to plan enough housing to double the population of Ann Arbor. This is absurd. Three story apartments will be able to be built next to any residential home, and triplexes on any lot, with no requirement to provide parking.

New zoning will be done for the benefit of more housing; what will that look like? Building setbacks will be changed and many trees will come down. When land is turned over to developers no city council in the future will be able to reclaim it.

2) It is not needed!

The population graph of Ann Arbor, shows that the population of Ann Arbor has gone up very little since 1975, if at all. It has “plateaued”, it is “stagnant”. “Ann Arbor households have actually declined in recent decades”. Any new population has been students, and plenty of new buildings have been made for them. More mid-level housing is needed, and can easily be provided without the excess included in this “Comprehensive Plan”.

Referring to the housing situation as some sort of “crisis” or “emergency” is analogous to President Trump saying that immigration is an “emergency”. They are both problems that need to be solved, not exaggerated.

3) This plan could take out much of the tree canopy of Tree City.

This plan cannot go forward until we have a strong tree ordinance, like Evanston, Illinois, or Cambridge, Mass., which actually protects trees on public and private land. In this new Ann Arbor plan trees are an afterthought, not a goal.

Trees are not respected in Ann Arbor anymore. On Winchell Street, on my morning walk last year, a gigantic healthy sycamore tree was cut down right in front of me. I honestly wondered where I was, this could not be Ann Arbor! This perfect huge tree was in the way of no road or sidewalk, it was in violation of some city rule by 1 foot, and it was destroyed. It should be alive! You can still see the trunk of that tree in the owner's front yard. She says it is “my silent protest”.

The more I investigated the more real became the quote from Hamlet, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”. We learn that the chairman of the Planning Commission, [the authors of the Plan], is the development director for a local Real Estate investment company. The vice chair of the Ann Arbor Planning Commission believes that its mission is to enable development and growth “at a rate to

be determined by investors, capital, and the market”. Where did this guy come from? The mission of the Planning Commission is to decide what is best for Ann Arbor. At least 5 planning commissioners make money from real estate development!

In the new plan all residential zoning districts are combined into one. The city will not say whether building setbacks will be reduced in this new residential district. That’s the key for trees, if the city diminishes the setbacks in their new residential district, then much of “tree city” will be lost for good.

Current city council members want “growth”, they want more people to come here, on purpose! Voters hate that, we already have congestion and pay enough taxes.

Most of Ann Arbor’s trees are in residential areas. The new plan “replaces” the “Natural Features Master Plan”, but with nothing. There is no tree protection strategy whatsoever! The city claims to have “strong natural features protections that mitigate the impact of development”. Sorry, not true! They will cut trees and plan to try to take parkland!

6) Parks – They want to take Ann Arbor park land. This plan enables them to attempt it.

The Plan repeatedly makes it clear that they plan to “leverage” space out of Ann Arbor public land to be used for “growth”.

This will be a 25 year raid to take land from our open green spaces. They say “quality (of land) is more important than quantity” as a pretext for taking parkland. They plan to “introduce new residential opportunities in parts of the city that have never had permanent residents”.

7) Infrastructure – There is no way to pay for this but us!

Two thirds of Ann Arbor’s revenue comes from property taxes. If the implementation of this plan will lead to a major tax increase the city should be honest about it. No way to pay for all this is ever explained, except that you and I will pay for it. The comprehensive plan does not try to hide the amount of infrastructure investment that would be needed.

A public comment: “We keep building but our infrastructure cannot hold all these people without terrible traffic and overcrowding”.

And another, “There is concern over the high tax burden - that additional density would strain city infrastructure, or require unrealistic investment”,

Infrastructure expense will be huge, that is made clear:

- * “public investment in infrastructure will also be required”,
- * “the city will need to upgrade infrastructure and city services to support new uses and density”,
- * “infrastructure investment is required” to “shift transportation modes”,
- * “new infrastructure investment will be needed to accommodate anticipated growth.” This means water, sewer, streets, police, fire, schools, libraries, community centers, waste management, plus equipment, and vehicles...
- * “investments are needed to achieve future land use vision”,
- * “shopping centers and office parks will require significant redevelopment and infrastructure

investment”.

* “upfront investment may be necessary to support the increase in growth”.

All this will entail a massive amount of money, spent for people of the future. It is ludicrous to present this plan with no way to fund it except from the taxpayers pocket. It doesn't benefit the current taxpayer.

It is legal for the city to charge “impact fees” to developers to cover the infrastructure cost of new building, which is about \$100,000 per new residential unit. This plan never mentions it. This plan, is simply “more more more” (residential units) (that is a quote from a planning commissioner!)

8) Future disaster for Ann Arbor will be locked in, “by right”.

This plan will be firmly in place for 25 years! When planning principles are codified in a master plan, it can be very difficult for citizens to influence anything. We must stop it now! For the next 25 years City council members could say “the comprehensive plan calls for this infrastructure and you get to pay for it” or “the plan said to use public land”, or “this 38 foot tall 16 unit apartment building will go next to your house”, or “those trees will have to come down”. There would be nothing you could do.

Council members can say that anything they want for “growth” is implied in this plan. Citizens will be shut out, just like they lately have been shut out in terms of reviewing site plans; and just like the “design review board” (a group of expert design professionals working for free) was just disbanded...since it might delay developers. Citizens will be effectively removed from the planning process if this comprehensive plan succeeds.

9) The city is so dominated by developers that City Council thinks we need to spend tax money to help them!

Citizen comment: “We distrust developers and city government”

Another citizen said: “It is a top priority to preserve natural features and especially tree cover”

Instead, this comprehensive plan implies that developers are the new “oppressed class” in Ann Arbor. Therefore, we must “streamline the development and review process to make it easier”, and, the city will proactively develop a strategy to “incentivize” contractors. Your taxes will also pay for the city to do “entrepreneurial training” as well as “company development” for private developers. Is this a joke? This isn't right, I was in government for 20 years and never saw anything like it.

This plan was written by people with mostly good motives and we should adopt the good parts. But, these planners together “drank the Kool-Aid” of “new urbanism”. Then, in their plan, with developers as strident and constant cheerleaders, they leapt overboard with plans for more than 100% housing growth while population is “stagnant”.

Many planning commissioners have direct real estate connections, and lobbying by real estate oriented folks has been an constant drumbeat of self interest, (...they often talk about affordable or middle income housing, not about “milking” huge profits from A2). This plan is a “wolf in sheep's clothing”. Their plan would trigger the next Ann Arbor land rush, with bulldozers on your block; and

radically raise your taxes.

ACCEPT THE ESSENCE!

We do need to adapt to meet new realities... to move forward equitably and sustainably. Kids are growing up and leaving older homes. Many modern people are single or have small families. We do need more mid range and lower income housing, and we can accomplish this. We can make our neighborhoods more diverse, allowing apartments within homes, more residences on a single property, apartment blocks in residential areas, as well as small, neighborhood commercial opportunities and amenities. We can have more “complete communities” where people can get most of their needs met without driving.

We can create “nodes” of walkable communities, building upon locations where they are already forming naturally. We can allow small businesses within neighborhoods if they are clean and quiet.

We could allow three story apartment buildings in residential neighborhoods, and four story apartment buildings along bus routes. All this housing would be plenty to meet any objective that the city or housing advocates have stated, without trashing Ann Arbor.

Allowing absurdly big buildings, and reducing building setbacks, are the “bulldozer magnets” touching off the feeding frenzy of developers. And, city council needs to figure out a way to finance this social engineering that does not fall on the back of the homeowner.

Renters will be “collateral damage”, tossed right out.

If the city will make the changes to the comprehensive plan that citizens are demanding, it could work . If city council insists on passing their current version of a “comprehensive plan” voters will revolt. Members of city council will be voted out. People who love trees and the character of Ann Arbor will serve in the next city Council, and they are being recruited. Ann Arbor can move skillfully and equitably into the future and still forever be “tree city“.

PLEASE WAKE UP ANN ARBOR!

If we lose our city now to the investment companies we will never restore its character!

Please fight back! Run for city Council in 2026! It’s time to SAVE TREE CITY!

There will be no second chance. This big mistake could control Ann Arbor's future, and wreck the magic. Ann Arbor has been rated #1 for “Quality of Life”, why throw that away?

ChatGPT says that “new urbanism” is very difficult to do in a city that is already built.

To make it work, you would need strong mandates about affordability, and strong protections for individuals to be able to remain in their homes ...along with financing.

The Ann Arbor plan contains nothing of this, since it is largely a gift to developers.

Save Tree City! I will run for City Council in 2026 from ward 3. Please find a person from your ward who will run and win!

Chuck Ream 5/20/2025

From the anonymous essay by “Need not Greed”:

“We should demand that our city stop promoting an exploitative, extractive business model and instead pursue authentic solutions that treat housing not as a commodity but as a human right”.

I fully supported the mayor and city council until I read this plan.