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Matt Kowalski  
City Planning Commission

Re: *Near North PUD Zoning District and Site Plan*

Dear Mr. Kowalski:

I write to register with the Planning Commission my strong opposition to the “Near North PUD Zoning District and Site Plan” (a/k/a “NeNo”) submitted by Three Oaks Development. I have lived in the North Central neighborhood for nearly a decade, and have, for the last five years, owned a home at the corner of Beakes and 5th Avenue where I live with my fiancé. In short, and as the multitude of zoning variances needed demonstrate, a building of the size and character proposed simply does not belong in this *residential* neighborhood.

Let me begin by being clear that I do not oppose the project based on the proposed demographics it will serve. I spend my days teaching at the University of Michigan Law School, where, with the aid of students, I represent low income people primarily in housing matters. They, like all Ann Arbor citizens, deserve affordable housing in all parts of Ann Arbor.

My opposition to the project is simply based on its size. As a matter of aesthetics, a building of the size and character proposed belongs downtown, not in a *residential* neighborhood. It dwarfs the surrounding two story, mostly turn of the century structures. It grossly violates height, setback, and size limitations for this neighborhood. It is also contrary to the Central Area Plan’s goal to “protect, preserve and enhance the character, scale and integrity of existing housing in established residential areas” and is contrary to the Plan’s objective of ensuring that infill development is consistent with the scale and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

And, please, make no mistake, this is a *residential* neighborhood, no different than the “Old West Side,” “Burns Park,” and all the rest. Surely no one would entertain the thought of building a 52,000 square foot apartment complex in the middle of one of these neighborhoods, but, somehow, the developers think it plausible here because of the economic situation of the proposed tenants. In fact, to my mind, this counsels against such a large structure. My experience in representing low income tenants in and around Ann Arbor is that low income housing works best when done on a small scale, infill basis. Social science studies of low income housing support this conclusion, and tend to demonstrate that *small scale* infill development reduces crime often associated with *large scale* low income housing and cuts against the “us and them” mind set that larger projects typically foster. Indeed I believe Avalon Housing’s most successful projects integrating low income people into neighborhoods have been with small structures, typically converted one and two family homes (which, by the way, is what the developers here propose to tear down).

Finally, allowing this “downtown” size project in a residential neighborhood sets a stunningly poor precedent. It will no doubt invite more developers to propose further destruction of turn of the century residential housing in and around the North Main Street corridor by giving them a ready example of what is “allowed” in the neighborhood. Simply put, Three Oaks made a poor choice in purchasing this property at the height of the real estate market. And while I feel for them, they knowingly engaged in a business that has risks. They gambled and lost. The neighborhood -- and the people living in it -- should not now be required to suffer for their mistake.

Sincerely,

David A. Santacrose

cc: Sabra Briere