



# OLD FOURTH WARD NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION (OFWA) NEWSLETTER *Fall 2025*

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## NEW LIFE FOR THE ANN ARBOR PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

*In response to recent developments, representatives of the Ann Arbor historic districts and others who value historic preservation are reviving the organization to provide education about preservation and advocate for the conservation of the city's historic resources. These articles discuss the history of the Alliance and recent activities in its revitalization.*

## HISTORY OF THE ANN ARBOR PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

**By Ilene Tyler**

The Ann Arbor Preservation Alliance was initially conceived in 2006 with our first meeting held at Kempf House on February 2, 2006, and attended by 26 people. That roster of attendees included residents of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Milan, and Toledo. Other attendees represented County and State preservation organizations. Many were current or former EMU students from its historic preservation program. At that meeting Louisa Pieper and Ilene Tyler agreed to co-chair the new organization.

Together we crafted statements defining who we were, why we came together, and what we hoped to accomplish. Succinctly stated by Ray Detter, our purpose was “defending and advancing the cause of historic preservation.”

Part of what triggered this coming together was the state-mandated revisions to our historic district ordinance. Other challenges included City Council and HDC approval of a proposed hotel on Glen Avenue.



**AERIAL VIEW OF THE OLD FOURTH WARD**

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## HISTORY OF THE ANN ARBOR PRESERVATION ALLIANCE Continued

One year later, in January 2007, Louisa and Ilene drafted the following four principles and welcomed anyone wishing to take an activist role in their support to join the Alliance.

Principle 1: Support historic districts in Ann Arbor.

Principle 2: Defend the protection of designated historic properties.

Principle 3: Encourage adherence by the city to relevant sections of approved city plans, studies, and reports.

Principle 4: Support a permanent staff position for a preservation coordinator trained in historic preservation.

By May of 2007, members of the Alliance expanded this into a mission statement to promote the cultural

and economic benefits of preserving the historic resources of our community. We believed this could be accomplished by focusing on Education, Advocacy, and Collaboration. Committees were formed to implement projects within each of these areas.

We received a Michigan Architectural Foundation grant in 2008 to hold a series of lectures by speakers recognized nationally in their field. These lectures attracted large audiences and media coverage. We produced a brochure in 2011 that, with minor edits, is still relevant today.

Why did we stop meeting? Busy schedules and shifting personal priorities resulted in difficulty recruiting new leadership. The last meeting took place on September 9, 2009.

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## RESTORING THE ANN ARBOR PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

By Jeff Crockett

Recently, historic districts have been challenged as an impediment to increasing density in Ann Arbor. Some people classify them as exclusionary. While people in the preservation community consider this interpretation invalid, it has been challenging to effectively counter their arguments. Researchers like Donovan Rypkema and his team at Place Economics have demonstrated time and again that preservation makes good economic sense. Due in part to increased pressure for redevelopment and increased density, supporters of historic preservation and historic districts have taken steps to reactivate the Ann Arbor Preservation Alliance.

In the Spring of 2025, in response to release of the first draft of Ann Arbor's Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), Jeff Crockett with help from Christine Crockett, Norm and Ilene Tyler, Christine Brummer, and Tom Stulberg planned and moderated a meeting on March 5, 2025, with Historic District Coordinator Jill Thacher and City Planner Michelle Bennett to discuss the potential impact on historic districts. According to Michelle and Jill, no changes in the status of historic districts were expected in the CLUP. The first draft contained the following statement: "Historic district boundaries will be maintained, and development will continue to adhere to the existing standards and design guidelines approved by the Historic District Commission." The notes for that meeting can be accessed at the following link: [https://](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jLjJoDG2JlaJx8snmQuUuyGqxwcvCJDdtgftakOIFU/edit?usp=sharing)

[docs.google.com/document/d/1jLjJoDG2JlaJx8snmQuUuyGqxwcvCJDdtgftakOIFU/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jLjJoDG2JlaJx8snmQuUuyGqxwcvCJDdtgftakOIFU/edit?usp=sharing).

With the release of the second draft of the CLUP, we became concerned. The historic district statement on p. 60 failed to mention any of the benefits that historic districts contribute to our city. These benefits are clearly articulated at <https://www.placeeconomics.com/resources/twenty-four-reasons-historic-preservation-is-good-for-your-community/>. The Planning Commission also made it clear that it would oppose the formation of any new historic districts.

In response, the Old Fourth Ward Association, the Old West Side Association, and the Broadway Street Historic District Association held a meeting in late July and decided to reactivate the Ann Arbor Preservation Alliance with the goal of educating the public about the value of historic districts and creating a network of historic preservation supporters.

To join the network, residents of Ann Arbor may complete a survey at <https://forms.gle/RTRMwg3T1EtyxrDJ9>. Those who complete the survey will be on the distribution list for future communications and meeting announcements. We believe that united action is the best way to educate ourselves and to promote and preserve our historic districts.

## THE NEW HISTORICAL MARKER AT 415 W. HURON

By Susan Wineberg

As the 2024 Ann Arbor Bicentennial approached, a group of residents were considering ways to celebrate. Patricia Austin, President of the Ann Arbor Historical Foundation, was particularly interested in correcting the information on the plaque mounted on a stone in front of 415 W. Huron, which told an incorrect story about the naming of Ann Arbor. In the hundred years since the plaque was erected to commemorate the Centennial, a substantial amount of work on Ann Arbor history has revealed the actual facts about the city's name. What should we do? Pat contacted Jeff Crockett, Chair of the City of Ann Arbor Bicentennial History Subcommittee, and he created a Special Committee to tackle this problem. The committee members were Jeff, Pat, Grace Shackman, and me.

To our surprise, we learned that the plaque and rock are not the property of the city! It belongs to the owner of the building, Mr. Robert Helber Jr. Did we need his permission to proceed? He did not object. Then we toyed with the idea of moving the stone to City Hall and placing more correct information on it—or flipping the stone around and putting the correct information on the back. We eventually decided to put a second plaque underneath the original one and leave the rock in place.

The original plaque read: “Erected by the citizens of Ann Arbor 1924 commemorating the founding of the city 100 years ago. Near this spot stood a rustic arbor covered with wild grape vines. Here Ann Allen and Mary Ann Rumsey, the wives of John Allen and Elisha Walker Rumsey met frequently for rest and recreation. The Arbor was called---Ann’s Arbor---and from it in

honor of these pioneer women, the city received its name.”

The new tablet reads “On May 25, 1824, John Allen of Virginia and Elisha Walker Rumsey of New York registered the name “Ann Arbour” at the land office in Detroit when Michigan was still a territory. The “Ann” portion was named after their wives, Ann Allen and Mary Ann Rumsey. The ‘arbour’ was later changed to ‘arbor’ and referred to the groves of oak trees which formed natural arbors. The text from the Centennial plaque of 1924 paints a more romantic explanation of the name based on an 1850s story in *Godey’s’ Lady’s Book* magazine. In 1962, after more research by Russell E. Bidlack, a pamphlet titled *Naming of Ann Arbor*, set the record straight.”

With help from the committee, Pat spent many hours composing the text, mocking it up, getting it to a foundry, finding someone to mount it on the stone, and looking for money to pay for it. We were pleased that the Ann Arbor Historical Foundation was willing to cover the \$3000 cost of the project. The Ann Arbor Bicentennial Logo appears at the bottom of the plaque. It was installed in June 2025. On July 7, 2025 Pat Austin addressed City Council to inform them about the new plaque. Each council person was given a copy of the new text with a photo of the subcommittee standing by the rock. This was just days after we learned the building was up for sale and a large new development was being planned for the site. What will be the future of our new plaque and the rock upon which it stands? Stay tuned.



THE NEW HISTORICAL MARKER AT 415 W HURON AND BICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE: GRACE SHACKMAN, SUSAN WINEBERG, PATRICIA AUSTIN, CHRISTINE CROCKETT, JEFF CROCKETT

## MORE THAN A BOWL OF GRITS

### UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF SUE NISHI, NUTRITION IMPROVES, AND SOCIAL SERVICES EXPAND AT THE ST. ANDREW'S BREAKFAST PROGRAM.

by Peter Osler

Every day for the last 43 years, people in need arrive at the fellowship hall at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church to be served a hot breakfast by a small group of volunteers. Previously headed by church deacon Svea Gray, the effort is now led by Sue Nishi, who assumed the director's position in 2023.

Following a fast-paced fourteen years as an attorney representing high-tech companies, Sue transitioned into another fast-paced occupation—that of wife and mother of three active children involved in a variety of pursuits, including competitive sports and theater. It was through her children's involvement in youth theater that Sue began honing her food preparation skills for large groups. Thirteen years of planning, preparing, and serving meals to ravenous teens and discerning parents transformed a from-the-hip effort into a well-oiled machine of culinary delight. Approaching empty nest status following the COVID epidemic, she began to volunteer at St Andrew's and immediately recognized potential improvements to what was already an established, vital service.

Beyond significantly diversifying and enriching the menu—over the past year there have been 50 new entrees—Sue has initiated improvements to kitchen furnishings and functions, food preparation, and serving practices. She has increased the number of available volunteers to 1200 (yes, 1200!), and perhaps most significantly, she has expanded outreach and coordination with many of the area's social service providers. Imagine a “soup kitchen” offering gumbo with Gulf shrimp, homemade breakfast burritos, and penne with marinara, potatoes, and green beans, that also provides a bi-monthly foot care clinic, periodic vaccines, life skills coaching for the benefit of returning citizens, and season-appropriate shoes and clothing.

To confirm her belief that everyone deserves to be seen, known, and treated as a human being, Sue opens the door each day, greets each guest individually, and looks them in the eye. Even with a typical day's count of 125-150 guests, she's on a first-name basis with about 80% of the guests—and she often knows their nicknames too!

Social service organizations are facing significant headwinds, as the federal government—and perhaps state government too—slashes or altogether cancels longstanding funding programs that support education, housing, general and mental healthcare, and, indeed, food and nutrition programs. It's difficult to imagine these pressures not negatively impacting the Breakfast Program, but it's even more difficult to imagine finding a better person to guide it until those headwinds, hopefully, return to normal. St. Andrew's, Ann Arbor, and indeed, the Old Fourth Ward are very lucky to have her.

If you're interested in learning more about the Breakfast Program at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, or are interested in joining Sue's army of volunteers in any capacity, you can go to [www.breakfastatstandrews.org](http://www.breakfastatstandrews.org) and if you see Sue on the street, please introduce yourself and give thanks!

*[OFW resident Peter Osler began volunteering at The Breakfast Program in the early 1990's; you can find him washing dishes there on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday mornings.]*



SUE NISHI IN THE ST. ANDREWS KITCHEN

# THE ANN ARBOR COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

by Julie Ritter

*[Julie Ritter is a long-time resident of Ann Arbor, Vice President of the Old Fourth Ward Association and was appointed to the committee that recommended the consultant for the Land Use Plan. She has participated in city committees and planning task forces for almost forty years. Julie worked for eleven years in commercial real estate, managing shopping centers and office buildings. She is an active member of the community and continues to work at a challenging job.]*

**Learn about the Comprehensive Plan, how it affects you, the place you live, and your city.** These are some of the facts and my take on them. Let the city administration know what you think. October 7th is the beginning of a 63-day public comment period. This is the time to make your thoughts and feelings known! (links at end of the article).

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**The City of Ann Arbor needs money, and the City of Ann Arbor wants more money.** The budget has many legacy costs for pensions, retirement, etc., making up a sizable percentage of the city's budget and it has only grown since then. The city has added significant staff and increased salaries. The legacy costs will continue to rise. The city wants to do many new, innovative and what it believes are interesting things that will draw more people to move to Ann Arbor. Including the expansion of the protected bike lanes, taking over the MDOT streets of North Main, Washtenaw, Jackson and Huron, adding resilience centers and roaming resilience hub trailers that are powered by solar energy, etc, along with all the usual repairs and upgrades that are required of a heavily used city.

**The city administration is using an update of the Comprehensive Plan as a vehicle for upzoning (densifying) the entire city.** The increase in density will, they hope, bring in the tax revenues needed to fulfill their plans. The planners knew this city-wide increase in density would be unpopular so they have limited their outreach for public engagement to a negligible amount. Additionally, the city is using form-based zoning (<https://www.planetizen.com/definition/form-based-codes>) for the first time in its efforts to streamline the development process and exclude public comment from the same process. As

long as a building adheres to the specified form, size, and zoning, there is not much people can object to. There is a much broader variety of uses allowed in each category in this kind of zoning. For example, in a current residential area designated as "Transition" in the new format, a business, an industry, or a short-term rental would all be legal.

**The resulting plan (<https://www.a2gov.org/planning/comprehensive-plan/>) is one that lays the whole city open and vulnerable to speculative real estate development on a scale not seen or imagined before.** Example: Historic districts, or parts of them, are being upzoned to Transition Zones that can accommodate up to 80-foot-tall buildings. Even if the height is limited by the historic designation, if the city changes the zoning, then the height and form will change. And the city has hinted more than once that it wants to do away with historic districts altogether. A minimum of triplex residential units can be built in every existing single-family zoned neighborhood. Even more units or uses could be allowed as a "secondary use." High-rise buildings will be allowed along most major streets. Existing residents will be displaced throughout the city as real estate speculators build denser, more expensive housing wherever they can. Future residents will be excluded unless they can afford what will be market-rate (luxury) rents and sales prices.

**The city is basing its need for this massive upzoning on numbers that are not supported by anything factual.** The city claims that 80,000 vehicles a day commute into and out of Ann Arbor. But no survey or study has been done and no supporting evidence has been given. The city claims, again without factual basis, that at least 30% of these commuters (sometimes 50%, depending on what meeting you go to) want to move into an apartment or condominium in Ann Arbor. The claim is that the city needs 45,000 new units in the next 15 or 20 years. Again, with insufficient facts to support that claim.

**The entire county of Washtenaw, including Ann Arbor, will only need 15,000 new units in the next 15 to 20 years.** This is based on the factually supported Washtenaw Housing Survey, done by Charles Buki for the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation with support from the Song Foundation

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## AN UPDATE ON THE 530 N. DIVISION DEVELOPMENT

By Doug Selby

Hello OFWA Neighbors! The Bridge Condominiums continue apace. We will be drywalling starting in October. For those of you who haven't heard, The Bridge is a 4-unit condo building at 530 North Division that is designed to be Michigan's first positive-energy, carbon-neutral multifamily building. We anticipate having one more Behind the Drywall Tour the weekend of October 18th. If you are interested in seeing what happens inside the walls of one of the world's most sustainable buildings, please check out the website, and you can sign up at [TheBridgeA2.com/events/](https://TheBridgeA2.com/events/). Also check FB and Instagram.

I'll continue having Building Technology Tours into next year. There's lots of really cool stuff happening in this building, and some of it will be best sampled after the drywall is installed. So, check back if you are interested in home technology or building science! I'm also excited for the finishes we'll be installing. We're making a ton of built-in cabinets and other custom work to make these units really stand out. The condos will be super comfortable inside, with radiant floor heating and cooling, and the best quality indoor air available due to the Swiss-made ventilation system in each unit.

Each unit takes in fresh air 24/7, triple filters it to near-HEPA quality, and then distributes it perfectly around the condo, monitoring the air for pollutants and adjusting its operation based on feedback. All of this while recovering 92% of the energy. And those are only some of the things this equipment does. I get nerdy about this stuff because it's so cool! We'll be nearly finished with the outside by winter, with the only exception being that we may wait to pour the driveway itself until spring, so it doesn't get degraded over winter.



RECENT PHOTO OF THE BRIDGE

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## THE OLD WEST SIDE ASSOCIATION IS THRIVING AND COLLABORATING WITH THE OLD FOURTH WARD ASSOCIATION

By Sue Kaufmann, President

The Old West Side Association is taking decisive steps to revitalize following a COVID-induced period of diminished activity. We are working on organizational improvements that include expanding outreach by building and using a neighborhood email list, creating a new logo and website, meeting with residents interested in becoming active with the Association, and taking steps toward recruiting additional Board members.

In May, we convened a community forum on the draft Comprehensive Land Use Plan featuring speakers from the Ann Arbor Neighborhood Network. In June, we organized an ice cream social in Wurster Park with free Washtenaw Dairy sundaes for all comers. We are currently planning a fall forum that will focus on

historic preservation, both the policy implications and the practical nuts and bolts.

In addition, we have been active in the comprehensive land use planning process, informing neighbors of opportunities to participate and addressing the City Planning Commission with our concerns. We are also taking a leadership role, along with the Old Fourth Ward Association and others, in recreating the Ann Arbor Preservation Alliance to advocate for the importance of preserving historic districts and maintaining the fabric of other historic, but not designated, neighborhoods. There is a long history of collaboration between the Old West Side and Old Fourth Ward neighborhood associations, and we are pleased to maintain and expand our joint efforts.

# REDEEMER CHURCH UPDATE

By Bart Bryant

Renovation and construction continue at 525 Detroit Street, the past home of the Treasure Mart and the future home of Redeemer Ann Arbor. Sadly, the process is taking longer than any of us had expected, but we are happy for the progress that is now visible. When will we finish? Probably mid-2026.

Redeemer Ann Arbor began back in 2015. We are a non-denominational Reformed congregation, seeking to make historic Christianity relevant to our generation. We are a diverse and intergenerational church, with about 1/3 of our attendees being students. Attendance averages about 150 for Sunday worship. Years ago, we purchased and renovated the historic building at 611 ½ E. William Street, but after outgrowing that building, we have been meeting in the Michigan Union and, more recently, in the Graduate Hotel.

Due to all our delays, our Special Exemption Use permit is set to expire before we will be able to occupy the building. The city is requiring us to go through the process again. So, you will receive notification again of a neighborhood meeting, which will give you an opportunity to tour the building and observe our current state of progress, as well as to ask any questions you may have.

We would like to serve our neighbors by offering to rake your leaves in early November. Interested? Please email Bart, letting us know your address, at [bbryant@redeemera2.org](mailto:bbryant@redeemera2.org). We look forward to joining the neighborhood soon!



REDEEMER CHURCH, SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

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**2025 Old Fourth Ward  
Association Membership Dues**

If you have not yet paid your 2024 dues, please do so soon. Your support is important to us and makes possible the activities of the association and the publication of this newsletter

Please make your payment online at:  
<https://old-fourth-ward-association.square.site/>

If that is not possible, contact Jeff Crockett ([jeffcrockett8@gmail.com](mailto:jeffcrockett8@gmail.com) or 734-657-4326).

Membership Categories:  
Individual -- \$10                      Family -- \$20  
Business -- \$50                         Sustaining -- \$100

## *A Note from Clay Briegel, People's Food Co-op General Manager*

Hello neighbors,

My name is Clay Briegel, and I'm honored to step into the role of General Manager at the People's Food Co-op. I've been part of the Co-op team since 2021, when I joined as Grocery Division Manager, and I'm excited to carry forward the values of cooperation, community, and good food that make this place so special.

Before coming to the Co-op, I spent many years working in the natural foods industry in both purchasing and managerial roles. That work meant everything from building relationships with local farmers and producers, to balancing the day-to-day needs of a grocery operation, to ensuring customers can count on finding the staples they loved alongside new and exciting products. Those experiences have given me a deep appreciation for the balance of running a sustainable business while supporting a thriving community food system.

As a fourth-generation Ann Arborite, I was born and raised here, and the Co-op has always been part of my world. It's been inspiring to see how this neighborhood has grown while keeping such a strong sense of community, and I'm proud to be contributing to that tradition.

Looking ahead to fall, I'm especially excited about the seasonal produce arriving from local farms—apples, winter squash, root vegetables, and hearty greens that remind us of Michigan's agricultural richness. This time of year always feels like a celebration of what our local growers work so hard to bring to our tables, and it's a great reminder of why the Co-op exists: to connect people with good, healthy food and with one another.

I look forward to seeing many of you in the store or at community events in the months ahead. Thank you for continuing to make the Co-op such a welcoming and vital part of Ann Arbor.

Warmly,

Clay Briegel

General Manager, People's Food Co-op



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# SAFE SIDEWALKS AND STREETS

by Jeff Crockett

I frequently walk my dog downtown. I have to remain extremely vigilant because, on several occasions, I have had scooters and bikes pass by me without any warning. I have also witnessed bikers and scooter operators ignoring stop signs and traffic lights. Last year, I posted my experience on Nextdoor, and it started a conversation that generated almost 300 responses on a variety of related safety subjects, including right-of-way confusion among drivers, cyclists, and scooter operators as a result of the new bike lanes. To be clear, I have observed most cyclists to be responsible and courteous. Still, the threat posed by irresponsible operators of bikes and scooters needs to be addressed.



**BIKER CUTTING ACROSS WITH NO WARNING**



**CYCLIST GOING THROUGH RED LIGHT**



**BIKE ON SIDEWALK NOT BIKE LANE**

Regarding pedestrian safety, I learned that the City of Ann Arbor has a website about Transportation that includes a section on biking. See links at end of this article.

Unfortunately, the biking guidelines and personal mobility vehicle regulations are not well-publicized. No one in the Nextdoor conversation was aware of the regulations. Additionally, based on my experience and that of many participants in the Nextdoor post, there appears to be virtually no enforcement of the personal mobility vehicle regulations.

Concerned, I contacted Suzann Flower, Transportation Program Manager for Ann Arbor. She helped facilitate a panel discussion on Safe Sidewalks and Streets at St. Andrews Church, on April 2, 2025. The panelists included Suzann, Cynthia Redinger (Transportation Engineer), Susan Casey (A2 Police Community Engagement Unit), Lt. Corey Mills (Ann Arbor Police Community Engagement Unit), and Sgt. Renee Bondy, Ann Arbor Police Traffic Division Supervisor.

We learned the following:

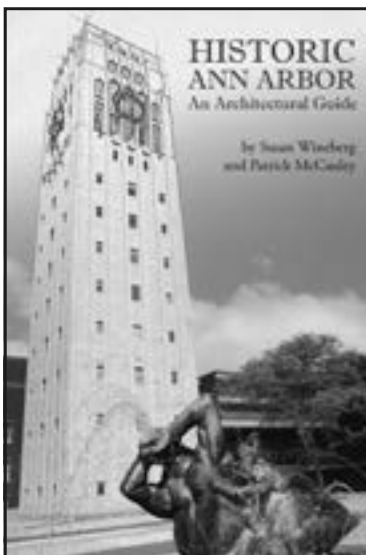
1. During the 2023-24 period, 375 crashes were reported, with 16 involving pedestrians and 12 involving bicycles. During the 2024-25 period, 379 crashes were reported, with 14 involving pedestrians and 10 involving bicycles. Fridays have the most crashes. Midday is the likeliest time for an accident. More crashes occur in the fall than in other seasons. Packard, Washtenaw, and Jackson Rd. have the most crashes. No crashes were reported between pedestrians and bikes. However, bike accidents with pedestrians are challenging to report since bikers tend to leave the area quickly, making it very difficult for the pedestrian to identify the biker. Over the past two years, driving speed in the downtown has declined. Lack of attentiveness appears to be the primary cause of many crashes.
2. Report safety concerns with a Traffic Enforcement Request at <https://www.a2gov.org/police-department/traffic-enforcement-request/>.

## SAFE SIDEWALKS AND STREETS Continued

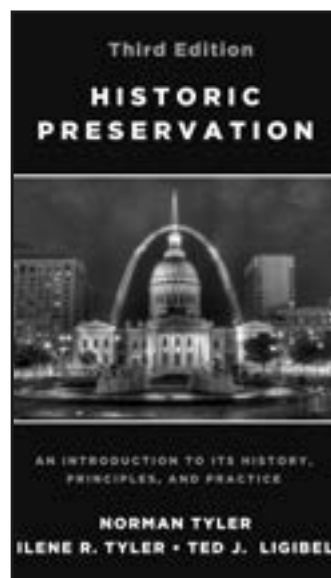
3. Drivers should always be on the alert for bikers in bike lanes, especially at night. Slow down at intersections.
4. Bikers can optionally decide to ride on sidewalks or bike lanes on streets but they need to alert pedestrians when passing by on sidewalks.
5. There is no regulated speed limit for bikes. SPIN contracted scooters' max speed is around 15 mph (12mph downtown), while SPIN contracted E-bikes' max speed is around 22mph, slower downtown.
6. Local bicycling organizations should promote biking safety guidelines on sidewalks and encourage members to warn pedestrians when passing by.

### Sidewalk and Street Safety Links:

1. Ann Arbor Vision Zero <https://www.a2gov.org/engineering/ann-arbor-moving-together-towards-vision-zero>
2. City Website on Biking <https://www.a2gov.org/engineering/transportation/biking/>
3. City Code: Article XII- BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE [https://library.municode.com/mi/ann\\_arbor/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=TI\\_TXTR\\_CH126TR\\_ARTXIIBIPEIN](https://library.municode.com/mi/ann_arbor/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TI_TXTR_CH126TR_ARTXIIBIPEIN)
4. Crosswalk Design Guidelines [https://www.a2gov.org/media/ln2ebzte/guidelines-quick-sheets\\_20190115.pdf](https://www.a2gov.org/media/ln2ebzte/guidelines-quick-sheets_20190115.pdf)
5. Ann Arbor Bike Lanes Map [https://www.a2gov.org/media/qlfp5xa1/2022bikemapupdate\\_04292022.pdf](https://www.a2gov.org/media/qlfp5xa1/2022bikemapupdate_04292022.pdf)
6. Crash Stats for the Old 4th Ward and Downtown <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1P22UK9wSllz9NYEHBtxrxBQhilro3sXrqiik-roTtA0/edit?tab=t.0> MARCH 26, 2023 – MARCH 26, 2024



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# Tree Town Tales

## Slices of Life In, Around, and About Ann Arbor

### MODEL RAILROADING

By Norman Tyler



If you are fortunate enough to receive an invitation to visit the towns of Ausemy and East Ausemy, you will find them at the Judge Wilson house in Ann Arbor. Old Fourth Ward resident Norm Tyler has been a life-long modeler, beginning as a youngster in the 1950s with a Lionel steam engine running through basement rooms. In his retirement, he has created a model railroad layout in the basement of the home he and his wife Ilene have shared for over twenty years. It is a fully operational layout remotely controlled from the “engineer’s stool.” Each session offers options—to run the trains, focus on adding more scenery, or develop another accessory.

The layout is supported on one side by the basement’s stone wall and on the other by a 22-foot-long steel channel spanning the length of the room. The basement’s stone wall was left exposed, and the free-floating layout has a hidden power supply and interface units. Remote control units run operations for the three steam engines, as well as for turnout commands, lighting and accessories, whistle, horn, bell, headlight, smoke, and simulated announcements.

Scenery is a collection of purchased and handmade elements. Norm scratch-built many of the structures, including a workmen’s rooming house, a two-story



residence, a small cabin, a fisherman’s tackle shop, a furniture repair building, a storage shed, and a freight platform. The Ausemy Manufacturing complex uses a mirror to create the illusion of extending the layout through a solid stone wall; he painted the mirrored side of these structures a different color to look like separate buildings. He also weathered the rail cars to look more realistic.

Blue Lake divides the layout into two sections, the towns of Ausemy and East Ausemy. East Ausemy has a rail storage yard. It also has Bud’s Tackle Shop, and its dock is a favorite spot for fishermen.



An evening’s operations session may be a single task taking a short time or a series of operations taking up to an hour or more. Each session becomes unique, and Norm likes the creative challenge to come down in the evening to run the engines or just do a little model building. He is proud of his layout and feels model railroading offers rewards in many ways.

# ENTRY STAIR WHIMSY ELICITS PUBLIC DELIGHT — AND AN ONGOING MYSTERY

By Peter Osler

The house at 325 Catherine Street is referred to as the Sage House, named after original owners J. Royal and Maude Sage. Betsy Williams and I purchased it from Rhoda and Elmer Wurster in 1992. The Sage House porch is recessed and covered but open to the street; it deftly mediates between both public and private and indoors and out, and its stairs flow continuously and graciously to grade, like a broad waterfall. This generous width, however, is not without its problems; with the handrail biased to one side, a large area of the stair has an elevated risk of falling and injury.

Decades ago, to encourage an approach close to the handrail while maintaining the stairs' spacious appearance, we made use of some terra cotta planting pots sitting idle in our garage. Pretty much on a whim—although definitely reflecting interest in Baroque-era perspectival trickery—we arranged the empty pots in five rows of three, starting with the largest pots on the top step, and the smallest pots at the bottom. From the sidewalk, locating the smallest pots in the foreground, and the largest pots in the background, works against optical logic. Whether it's the pots being empty, the trick of perspective, or both, or perhaps some other unknown reason, the composition has always elicited enthusiastic commentary from a surprising number of pedestrians. We've become used to hearing "Oh, look at the pots," "Aren't those pots cute?" "I love those pots," etc., and it's common to see smiling viewers photographing the array. Who would have imagined such a small gesture would garner so much attention? Granted, those comments aren't weighty epiphanies, but providing even a small dose of delight these days shouldn't be completely dismissed, right?

Periodically, the empty pots—especially the smaller ones—have been toppled by the wind or distracted visitors, sometimes resulting in damage and subsequent removal. Unexpectedly, unknown interlocutors have replaced missing pots three times without notice and without claiming responsibility. On one of those occasions, someone replaced all three missing pots of the lowest row! But another particular instance of a missing pot's replacement took the cake, or perhaps, more accurately, the *lumber*. Approximately twenty years ago, a pot shattered and was removed. About a week later, we were flabbergasted to find a section of 2" x 6" wood with a hand-painted version of the missing pot, sized to match its neighbors, even accurately depicting the angle of view from the sidewalk. Again, no notice nor claim of authorship. Yes, it would have been nice to keep the wooden portrait (or should we say "potrait"?), but we couldn't bear nature wearing away such a wondrous gift, nor erasing such a heartening story, so it hangs inside and abreast our front door, where pots both sitting and hung can be seen in a single glance.

End Note: If any of the aforementioned interlocutors are in the reading audience, please don't be misled; we welcome your continued anonymity!



PORCH POTS



POT PORTRAIT

(<https://www.aaacf.org/news/housing-study>). The presentation of the report concluded that there is not a housing crisis in Ann Arbor, but there is an affordable housing crisis. It concluded with the fact that **there are already 44,000 empty bedrooms in Washtenaw County**, most in homes of empty-nest seniors who cannot afford to downsize because the tax structure traps them in homes larger than they need. The best thing the city could do is to provide an affordable alternative for seniors. That would free up space which would, in turn, provide more properties for first-time buyers who are currently priced out of the market. **The report's other conclusion was that the city needs to be careful about overbuilding.**

**Density will not necessarily result in affordability.**

At this site (<https://tylertopics.com/housing.pdf>) you will find a list of the many reasons why density will not ensure a great increase in affordability claimed by the city.

**The Plan will provide a conduit for wealth to leave the city.** A large amount of the construction will mostly be done by developers from other parts of the state and country, funded by monies coming not only from other parts of the US but from other parts of the world. The profits from the operations of these new, luxury-priced units (they will have to be luxury-priced units to be built in the current economic climate) will leave the city and go to points unknown. Tens and up to hundreds of millions of dollars a year will be siphoned off out of our local economy.

**As for the city's goals to be sustainable, affordable, equitable, and dynamic, if the plan is adopted as is, it will mean no NetZero sustainability by 2030, or even into the foreseeable future.** The amount of carbon generated in the construction process of these many units would overwhelm any carbon savings the city could come up with any other way. The operations of these buildings, which, by state law, cannot be mandated, will add emissions from whatever natural gas-powered appliances or HVAC end up being installed, and whatever emissions come from the power plants that provide the electricity.

**If the plan is adopted as is, it will mean no inclusive, equitable demographics, because there is nothing more exclusionary than luxury-priced high-rise buildings.** These are vertical, gated communities. Even the dreamed-of triplexes sprinkled through

the existing neighborhoods of single-family housing would need to be priced at market (luxury) rates.

The story that people living in the outskirts of Ann Arbor want to move into town in large numbers is just that, a story. Realtors in Ann Arbor are saying that people who can afford single-family homes in Ann Arbor are now looking to live in Saline, Chelsea, Dexter and the other 19 townships within the county, where they can get more product for their money, much lower taxes, and better schools. The length and expense of their commutes does not deter them from their choices. Nor do they place enough relative value on the carbon footprint of their commute to make a different decision and move into a high-rise in Ann Arbor.

The real estate market in Ann Arbor is already getting soft. The most expensive units on the market are sitting there for months. There are no longer the same bidding wars that still exist in the out-county municipalities. This softness is moving down the expense ladder to houses in the \$600,000 zone. The rental market is likewise suffering with an estimated 10% vacancy rate. These changes are due to the shrinking demographic of college-aged students, to the Republican administration's pullback of money for research and development at the University of Michigan, and the government's new shrinking number of visas for foreign students, researchers, faculty, and travelers. The University has a hiring freeze in place as it figures out its options. A certain number of students, faculty, and staff are starting to look and move elsewhere, including overseas.

**All this adds up to strong negative forces for the current Comprehensive Plan to result in a vibrant and dynamic community, the city's fourth goal.**

As we are already seeing, Ann Arbor's unique local businesses are being replaced by national chains that can afford the high rents and high taxes. We will see only the wealthiest slivers of the population moving into the certainly expensive living units. The city has nothing in its plan to specifically call out places and methods of providing affordable housing by any measurement. There is no mechanism to support local businesses.

**The current Comprehensive Land Use Plan seems to be for one thing only - to increase property tax revenue for the city.** This single goal is disguised

## THE ANN ARBOR COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN Continued

in appealing presentations about trickle down affordability. That may happen (it is not guaranteed) but it will be a long time coming and will not be anywhere near the scale needed. It is disguised in appealing presentations about equity (which is not supported in a luxury market). It is disguised as a sustainable future, when the very fact of all the envisioned construction will overwhelm any sustainable steps the city could make in other ways. There is no discussion of what programs to cut or to scale down. There is no discussion of how services can be reorganized, or how savings can be found. No question of whether or not the city actually needs a lot of the additional frills and trappings they are proposing. The city's answer to its cash flow problem is to get as much new property tax revenue as possible. Period. **And the current city administration is willing to sacrifice the qualities that make Ann Arbor the kind of place we all value and appreciate.**

When the extent of the current Comprehensive Plan was shared with planning staff, they raised the concern that the city's infrastructure was inadequate for this amount of new construction. <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2025/06/can-ann-arbor-handle-significantly-more-growth-city-staff-have-worries.html> and <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2025/05/ambitious-housing-growth-goals-for-ann-arbor-called-into-question.html>.\* Concerns were noted, and the city moved ahead anyway. No one from the city has been able to provide a count of the number of new units or number of square feet that would be created if the entire upzoning was carried out. There is no provision in the current plan to address development once the limits of the city's infrastructure are approached, especially the water and sewer services.

**Continuing development past the limits of the current systems will require the city to upgrade all utilities**, not only water and sewer, but also the electrical and gas infrastructures. All utilities and services will be impacted. It is very safe to say that the increase in property tax revenue generated by all the new developments will not be enough to pay for all the infrastructure improvements and their maintenance. Money would have to be raised by special assessments, or bonds, or some such method. The city is currently trying to get developers

to improve these systems for their own properties as they are developed. A bits-and-pieces approach results in higher prices for the ultimate residents of these properties. Increased prices result in increased property taxes. **Whatever manner the city chooses to raise the additional money for upgrades to all the infrastructure, it will be the residents of Ann Arbor who will end up paying for them in increased property taxes.**

This article does not even try to address the issues of transportation or the environmental impact that results from the envisioned plan. I do want to make the point that all this density will not reduce the number of commuters, and will only add more cars to the city. Please see the end of the article at this link for more information. (<https://tylertopics.com/housing.pdf>).

**Everyone interested in a livable Ann Arbor is encouraged to become informed and become engaged in this process.** Let your city council representatives ([citycouncil@a2gov.org](mailto:citycouncil@a2gov.org)) and the planning commission ([planning@a2gov.org](mailto:planning@a2gov.org)) know what you would like to see Ann Arbor look like in the future.

Goals:

- That the city will slow down its process to allow meaningful engagement from a large, truly representative sample of citizens.
- That the city will genuinely consider what residents express is important to them.
- That the city will add enough detail to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan to confirm the shared vision to be developed by the city and the citizens (see the first and second goals above).
- That the city will change its far-reaching plans and scale back to something that will effectively invigorate the equity, sustainability, affordability, and dynamic qualities we all want to see.

**October 7 is the beginning of a 63-day comment period after which the plan will be finalized. Now is the time to get involved!**

[MLive links are behind a paywall but you can sign up for a free account to access them. The free account will also bring you a newsletter and limited access to their offerings. You can cancel any time.]

# OFWA Treasurer's Report

## September 30, 2024

### Stephen Hudolin, Treasurer

Cash Balance 9/30/2024	\$3,102.54
Q4 2024 Membership Dues	<u>\$486.30</u>
Cash Balance 12/31/2024	\$3,588.84
Q1 2025 Membership Dues	\$335.34
Print Tech – Fall Newsletter	- <u>\$650.58</u>
Q1 2025 Net Cash	-\$315.24
Cash Balance 3/31/2025	\$3,273.60
Q2 2025 Membership Dues	\$0.00
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church	-\$125.00
FedEx – Printing for Sidewalk/Street Safety Mtg	- <u>\$86.28</u>
Q2 2025 Net Cash	- <u>\$211.28</u>
Cash Balance 6/30/2025	\$3,062.32
Q3 2025 Membership Dues	\$348.06
IRS Form 1024 A Filing Fee	- <u>\$600.00</u>
Q3 2025 Net Cash	- <u>\$251.94</u>
Cash Balance 9/30/2025	\$2,810.38

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### **CITY OF ANN ARBOR**

Go to <https://www.a2gov.org/contact/pages/contactus.aspx>

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<http://www.a2gov.org/services/Pages/Report-a-Problem.aspx>

1st Ward Council Reps:

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Cynthia Harrison [charrison@a2gov.org](mailto:charrison@a2gov.org)

Ann Arbor GIS Maps and Resources:

<https://www.a2gov.org/services/GIS/Pages/default.aspx>

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