

Connected Communities response: David S. Arends, AIA OAA (Beechwood Avenue)

Description



May 8, 2024

Clerk of Council

ATTN: Melissa Autry

RE: Response in Opposition to Cincinnati's Proposed "Connected Communities" Zoning Amendments

North Avondale Rose Hill Neighborhood

To Members of Cincinnati City Council and Mayor;

I am writing to express my sincere concern and extreme opposition to the proposed and overreaching "Connected Communities" zoning amendments for the North Avondale Rose Hill Neighborhood.

I would like to begin by establishing my qualifications to speak authoritatively on this subject with the facts of both my personal and professional experience and credentials;

- My wife and I are residents of a c. 1921 Century Home located at 4107 Beechwood Avenue in the single-family zoned Rose Hill Historic Neighborhood of North Avondale. The home has a market value of almost 4 times the average single home value in this Cincinnati market.
- I am a Licensed Architect, licensed in all 50 US States, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, and most of Canada with almost 40 years of professional practice experience.
- I am the Chairman, CEO and Owner of a national architecture firm, headquartered in Cincinnati and with 5 US office locations.
- Both my firm and myself, personally, have extensive professional experience in multi-family housing design and related zoning issues in Cincinnati and across the US in condo and market rate as well as moderate income housing. We have designed everything from low-income HUD properties to market rate rentals to high end residential condominiums in Cincinnati as well as across the US. We have designed and built in excess of 20,000 housing units locally and

nationally. (Local projects include The Banks Development, Adams Landing, Newport Kentucky HUD Hope 6 Project, YMCA Moderate Income Seniors Housing, to name just a few).

- I spent almost a decade serving on the Planning Commission for the Village of Mariemont, an internationally recognized Urban Planned Community designed in the 1920's by John Nolen, and a community with tight zoning and resulting high property values, desirability, and walkability.
- Lastly, and frankly ironically, my Architectural Master's Degree graduate thesis from almost 4 decades ago focused on the life-cycle decline of high-end neighborhoods, with a specific focus on Cincinnati's Dayton Street Neighborhood, once known as "Millionaire's Row" and original homes to many of Cincinnati's most notable.

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There are several points of factual opposition that I would like to share:

Opposition Point One: Zoning Code Restrictions & Quality

In my professional experience, there is a direct correlation between property values and the quality of zoning laws. The stricter the zoning, the higher the property value and desirability of the neighborhood. One can only compare issues of quality zoning and opportunities such as form-based codes with that of the property value. As an example, one can locally compare communities such as the previously mentioned Village of Mariemont, or on a national level, communities such as Seaside, Florida – both offering tight zoning law and resulting higher property values. Communities with minimal or unrestricted zoning show quite the opposite result. I know from my own experience serving on a planning commission, once precedent is established through loose zoning in an established cohesive community, there are few if any options for reversal.

Opposition Point Two: Housing Unit Density

Interpreting the proposed draft "Connected Communities" regulations as it pertains to housing density, it appears that there could be options for unlimited housing unit density. The Rose Hill neighborhood is an existing single-family home, historic neighborhood with large half acre lots and homes that are generally 5,000 sf and greater. The proposed amendments, as interpreted, could provide avenues for unlimited housing units on these same lots and would have a detrimental impact on both the visual and physical character and function of this neighborhood.

Opposition Point Three: Off Street Parking

Interpreting the proposed draft "Connected Communities" regulations, there would be no requirements for off-street parking. The average US Household owns 1.88 cars. The Rose Hill neighborhood has an average property street frontage of 100 feet, with available parking on only one side of the street. This would afford only a maximum of 4 parked cars per street lot frontage, and half of that given that there is parking available only on one side of the street, without widening the street right of way. This would only reasonably support two housing units per lot without creating an undue burden on the ability to park in the Rose Hill Neighborhood.

This will also impact the value of the Rose Hill Community and Neighborhood appearance as in this

attractive historic neighborhood.

Research with the American Planning Association (APA) suggests that parking demands in residential areas surge overnight, especially in areas that are not immediately served by convenient and efficient public mass transit. The APA also points out that contrary to some opinion, there is an increasing demand in the US for the reliance on the automobile.

Opposition Point Four: Building Setbacks

Interpreting the proposed draft “Connected Communities” regulations will allow the existing setback requirements to all but be eliminated. This will affect the average alignment of homes on the street and have a negative impact of the beautiful view corridor afforded in this historic neighborhood of signature architecture and gas lamp streets. This will ultimately impact home values and homeowner’s investment, as the neighborhood will become less desirable.

Opposition Point Five: Neighborhood Single-Family Property Values

I would like to invite the authors of this proposed zoning amendment to offer just one example of a neighborhood in Cincinnati, or any other city, where the zoning in an established higher income neighborhood with established property values between 4 and 6 times the average market home value has been increased, or even remain stable, through zoning amendments that allow multi-family rental units to be built in such neighborhoods.

I cannot think of any examples and this proposed zoning will do nothing but cause the existing home values to decline.

Opposition Point Six: Cincinnati Economic Growth & Sustainability

I would like to invite the authors of this proposed zoning amendment to show how these kinds of changes will contribute to the economic growth and sustainability of tax revenue that supports the city operations and services. By intentionally or unintentionally imposing such changes that may result in lower income households and reduced short- and long-term care of properties, I find it difficult to understand the economic model where this is helpful to the city tax revenue generation and the City’s ability to fund services for its citizens.

Opposition Point Seven: Property Maintenance & Investment

In my career as a multi-family housing architect, I have personally toured hundreds of housing units, both occupied and unoccupied, of all types from subsidized public housing, to student housing, to market rate rental and condominiums in Cincinnati as well as many other cities. With very few exceptions in any of these examples, and at the risk of sounding offensive to some, my personal observations conclude that there is a clear differentiation and correlation between the care and maintenance of units that are owner occupied and those that are not.

One need not look any further than the home immediately adjacent to our home. This home at 4019 Beechwood Avenue, I understand it to be the only home in the Rose Hill neighborhood that is a single-family rental home. An objective observer will immediately note the abandoned cars in the driveway, the unkept lawn, peeling house paint, visible garbage and debris on the front porch, animal feces on

the rear deck, discarded window air conditioning units on the ground, abandoned swimming pool in the back yard, and evasive plants that are taking over the neighboring properties.

Opposition Point Eight: Beechwood Hypothetical Development Example

Based upon an initial review of the proposed “Connected Communities” zoning changes for our neighborhood, which are not entirely clear, and using our home and property as a hypothetical example for purposes of this letter, and assuming that there are some reasonable setbacks and no off-street parking requirements, a developer could essentially purchase our property at market rates, have it raised and within the reasonable setback requirements outlined in the draft recommendations build a three (3) story, 45,000 square foot, multi-family building with more than thirty (30) 1,500 sf units. The land cost per unit would be less than \$30,000 and a project such as this could generate more than \$1.2 million in market rate rental revenue per year. Don’t think that this would not be an attractive business opportunity for local or out of town developers.

This is not only out of character for the historic neighborhood, but would create more problems than benefits with parking issues, increased sewage output, reduction of permeable surface areas resulting in increased run off and potential flooding, increased trash removal and non-homeowner related maintenance issues. In both my personal and professional experience and opinion, this “Connected Communities” initiative can be a good opportunity and perhaps beneficial in some Cincinnati neighborhoods, but for the historic Rose Hill Neighborhood it is inappropriate, ill-conceived, damaging to the community and will only serve to have an intact and historic single-family neighborhood and put it into economic decline. This will work against the City’s opportunity to attract and retain higher income residents and will be at the expense of city and county tax revenues. This is a poorly developed idea in my professional opinion and experience and will result in unintended consequences, causing the Rose Hill neighborhood to fall into economic and physical decline.

There is an interesting intersection in this matter between the “ideology” of these zoning amendments and the “reality” of the unintended results that I don’t believe are thoroughly considered and understood by the authors of this proposed City zoning legislation.

As a resident, business owner, employer and both personal and corporate tax payer in the City of Cincinnati, I am invested in the success of our city. We have the benefit to have chosen to invest, live and work in the City. I trust that the elected officials of this city share those same beliefs and values. That said, I struggle to find how the imposition of these amendments in a well-established historic neighborhood will help improve the value and lifestyle of the homes and residences in the North Avondale Rose Hill neighborhood. I encourage the City to take a closer, surgical look at the areas that are proposed for these amendments and apply them where they will add benefit to the community and exclude them from where they will create a detrimental effect on an already well-established neighborhood such as the North Avondale Rose Hill neighborhood.

History repeats itself if not well managed. Affluent residential homeowners will walk, because they can, and history proves that they will.

If you want to see the future of the North Avondale Rose Hill neighborhood when legislation such as this is imposed, I invite you to take a walk down Dayton Street, Cincinnati’s former “Millionaire’s Row”.

Sincerely,

David S. Arends, AIA OAA, Chairman & CEO

Cc: Jan-Michelle Lemon Kearney, Victoria Parks, Anna Albi, Jeff Cramerding, Reggie Harris, Mark Jeffreys, Scotty Johnson, Seth Walsh, Meeka Owens, Aftab Pureval

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