

Submission to the 1/18/05 Ann Arbor News “Your World” column:

Infill Development—an efficient use of resources

Infill development is the building of homes, businesses and public facilities within already developed areas. Accommodating growth through infill helps an entire region: underutilized urban areas are revitalized (through increasing the tax base, creating jobs, providing housing and mass transit options, etc.), while in turn, the pressure to develop agricultural land and open space in outlying areas is decreased.

Today’s society has diverse housing needs. Infill development can provide a variety of housing types—second units (small single residences attached to primary residences, such as for an elderly relative), townhouses, bungalows, studios, and cooperative “cohousing” communities. These can range from affordable housing, to high-end luxury units which are less expensive than oversized housing at the urban fringe. Building in already developed areas allows efficient utilization of the existing infrastructure of schools, commercial areas, and utilities.

Some worry that increased crime accompanies higher housing densities. But according to the Greenbelt Alliance, “No study has ever established a link between crime increases and housing density. In fact, density and design can enhance safety by ensuring visibility and creating a sense of community through natural interactions and shared spaces.”

Increased traffic congestion is another potential concern. But infill can actually alleviate congestion by reducing trips and encouraging alternative transportation. “Mixed-use” projects place residences, schools, recreation, and businesses near each other, so car trips are shortened and walking and bicycling become viable options. And only high densities can support transit like light rail.

Washtenaw County, the second fastest growing county in the Detroit Metropolitan Area, recently completed *A Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County*—holding over 45 public meetings involving residents and elected officials. To achieve the goal of providing a sustainable future, one of the *Comprehensive Plan’s* highest priorities is infill development within our cities and villages. It is estimated that 180% of the projected 2020 housing demand can be met by infill development.

Of the eight cities and villages in the County, the City of Ypsilanti was chosen as the model for infill development due to its limited tax structure, its need for improvement in basic services, its lack of expansion ability, and the high growth pressures surrounding it. Ypsilanti also lends itself well to infill because of its ability to integrate transit—ATA routes already run through the locations identified as potential infill areas.

An example of infill development is the converted “Flour Mill,” adjacent to the Ypsilanti City Hall. It illustrates the concept of mixed use, with both businesses (a bank and a

salon) and housing (loft apartments). An infill project in progress—just north of Eastern Michigan University on Huron River Drive—will replace a defunct paper mill with student housing.

Through its efficient use of resources, infill development has both social and environmental benefits. For more information, see the *Comprehensive Plan* at www.ewashtenaw.org.

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