

THE “INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE”

The International Village is a proposed luxury apartment complex to be built on the Water Street property on E Michigan Ave, catering to international students, mostly from China. The city plans to use controversial **EB-5 Visas**, which go to extremely wealthy foreign investors. Recipients have to donate \$500,000 to US infrastructure projects, although scams plague the program, and it appears the money tends to end up in the pockets of middle men, not in our roads and bridges.

In the late 90s, the Ypsilanti city representatives started taking out bonds to buy up the land at Water Street and use eminent domain to oust the existing factories and businesses on the property. However, every development project they’ve tried to create since then has failed or somehow fallen through, leaving the city with a lot of debt accumulated on the property. Knowing this, last year, the city voted for and passed a millage to slightly increase taxes of residents to pay off the debt on the property. An **affordable housing development project** for Water Street was proposed--it even got past the purchase agreement--in 2014, but fell through once the pollution problem there was brought to the city’s attention.

Now, in 2017, Ypsi residents (67% are renters) are threatened by International Village. The Human Relations Commission (HRC), which has been working to combat gentrification, proposed that the City Council hold a public meeting to discuss the project and affordable housing prior to the purchase agreement. The HRC voted unanimously on this, and it was added to the agenda for the City Council’s September 5th meeting, but Mayor Edmonds, without explanation, struck it from the agenda. She and council members Vogt and Bashert consistently opposed discussing affordable housing in relation to International Village.

Two meetings were planned for September 18th and 19th. Mayor Edmonds claimed that she only knew of a “presentation” by the developers to be given on the 19th, but, suddenly, it came out the *purchase agreement* would be presented on the 19th, just one day after the public meeting. It was essentially a done deal. Even so, the city council repeatedly changed the time and location of two events, making it more difficult for opponents to show up.

The HRC, the organization Defend Affordable Ypsi, and other Ypsi locals fought bravely against the development at the city council hearing and meeting on September 18th, 19th, and the small hours of the morning on the 20th. People shared their experiences with eviction and houselessness, shared their anger at the lack of transparency in this process, and cited facts and demographic statistics on Ypsi’s racial and socioeconomic makeup to combat the proposal. The potential presence of **Native cultural artifacts at the Water Street site** was also brought to the council’s attention. Despite the public outcry, the city council decided to enter the purchasing agreement for the Water Street Development. The vote was 4 yes, 2 abstaining, and 1 no; regardless of their decision, when the vote was cast, **none of the councilmembers** could look up at the crowd.

Ypsilanti city officials, Mayor Edmonds, and the police chief are going on a prepaid trip to China on the 21st, one day after the purchase agreement was to be finalized. The money came from a Wayne State student group, but where did they get the money? It was *tens of thousands of dollars*. The City Council has had no transparency on what’s really going on with this deal. They are snakes!

CLASS INTEREST

Some will claim that gentrification isn’t happening in Ypsi, or that it’s inevitable, or that it’s a good thing. They ignore the experiences of working class folks and argue in favor of things like “growing the tax base” or “attracting investment.” Why? They are driven by their **class interest**. They have an economic stake in new businesses, in property values going up. Their goals are in direct opposition to those of the working class, whose interest is, of course, to keep their homes and livelihoods in Ypsi. This contradiction results time and again with cities forcing out their low-income residents and courting wealthy newcomers who they can make a much bigger profit from. The city council, too, is allied with business needs, not with renters and workers. That’s why the city wants UM grads to come colonize Ypsi, and that’s why they want International Village built. They are representatives of the exploiter class, the *bourgeoisie*, and it doesn’t matter who we elect to the council because they are controlled, financed, and, as we see with the trip to China, outright bribed, by the bourgeoisie. Elections are ruled by money, and Ypsi renters don’t stand a chance in that game.