

PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE

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PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE

AN INTRODUCTION

The publication that you have in your hands was initially conceived during the peak of the fight against International Village in fall 2017. A number of us at Defend Affordable Ypsi decided at the time that one way to fight the development would be to publish a series of perspectives on International Village, compiling essays and transcribed public comments from folks resisting the project.

Since then, the International Village team has fallen apart, with crucial members of Amy Xue Foster's team backing out of the development. While this zine was originally intended as a part of the campaign against International Village, documents, essays, recordings, and other media compiled at the time can offer crucial perspective on questions of development, equity, and economic democracy going forward. This zine documents what folks were saying at the time about International Village and a whole host of related issues. Now that it's 2018 and International Village is behind us, the lessons learned through the community's mobilization around International Village and the "China trip" can instruct us as we move forward. 2018 promises much engagement around development, housing, and civic processes in Ypsi. In 2018, the City of Ypsilanti will hold elections for Mayor and City Council, the Planning Commission will lead the formation of a new

citizens' advisory committee on housing affordability and accessibility, and efforts will take place to develop a robust and participatory Community Benefits Ordinance to ensure that residents have a say in future developments within the City of Ypsilanti.

The zine is divided into three sections and is largely centered around the months of September and October of last year. It contains public comments made at City Council meetings during those two months, as well as essays written during that period (with the concluding essay in this volume written more recently, at the turn of the new year).

The first section, titled *International Village and Ypsi Today*, offers perspectives on International Village and the Ypsilanti we find ourselves in currently. This section covers a discussion of Ypsi's present demographics, the changing faces of Ypsi neighborhoods, possible impacts of International Village, and the emerging conversations happening in the wake of IV.

The second section, titled *Water Street and Ypsi: Looking Back, Looking Forward*, includes some historical perspectives on Water Street and Ypsilanti and offers thoughts on moving forward for a more equitable and democratic city. This section includes discussions of Ypsilanti's indigenous history, as well as histories of segregation, urban renewal, and resistance. This section also invites us to consider ways of relating history to ecology, sustainability, and equity, opening up discussion about what it would mean to build community processes that are both sustainable and democratic.

The third and final section, *Holding City Hall Accountable: the China Trip and Transparency*, contains critical discussion of the "China trip" and asks important questions about government accountability. The section offers timelines of events leading up to the trip, questions emerging regarding the funding of the trip, and concerns about equity,

ethics, transparency, and public participation in democratic processes. It concludes with a call for various segments of the community to come together and build a better Ypsi.

The first entry in this zine comes from Amber Fellows, a member of the City of Ypsilanti Human Relations Commission. It is adapted from remarks that she made at the Freight House on September 18th at a special session on International Village and affordable housing. The Human Relations Commission was instrumental in making that meeting happen, particularly Fellows and fellow commissioners Ka’Ron Gaines and Kyle Hunter, who all gave presentations that evening. This zine contains remarks from all three commissioners.

The meetings at the Freight House on September 18th and 19th were some of the most well attended City Council meetings in Ypsi history, with the overwhelming majority of people speaking out against the International Village development. While the Council ended up approving the purchase agreement for the property on the 19th, the development team for International Village fell apart in October and November and the City decided to let the purchase agreement expire on December 31st and put the property back on the market on January 1st. While there is still the possibility that Amy Xue Foster could come back with another team and proposal in the new year, through the resistance to International Village, members of the community have mobilized to begin building people power to ensure that development in Ypsi is done democratically and with public participation through and through.

After Fellows’ entry is a pair of remarks that lifelong Ypsilantian Bryan Foley made at City Council on September 19th at the Freight House and October 17th at Council chambers. One week prior to the Freight House meetings, on September 11th, Foley hosted a panel discussion on gentrification at Parkridge Community Center. Titled *Gentrification and the Changing Faces of Ypsilanti’s South Side*, it fea-

tured Fellows and Gaines, as well as Ypsilanti resident Lee Tooson and Detroit-based journalist Aaron Foley, nephew to Bryan Foley. The discussion was moderated by Michael Simmons.

Foley has since hosted a number of panels at Parkridge Community Center, with topics ranging from gentrification to the school-to-prison pipeline. That initial September 11th panel, which happened in the lead-up to the Freight House meetings, was an early public gathering where it became clear that there was a budding opposition to the International Village project. While that panel discussion was not planned initially to address International Village, the topic came up because many panelists regarded the development as a continuation of processes of gentrification already in place in Ypsilanti.

Following Foley is Ka’Ron Gaines, who has participated in several of Foley’s panels and is the second of the three Human Relations Commissioners whose remarks are included in this zine. In the weeks and months leading up to the signing of the Purchase Agreement, members of the Commission had expressed numerous concerns over how the City had pushed International Village through without due consideration of both pros and cons, and without adequate communication between the City and residents. In Gaines’ remarks here, he asks what might have been if Foley didn’t host his September 11th panel, or if Commission members and others hadn’t done the work they did to bring people out to the Freight House.

Both Gaines and Karlie (whose transcribed public comments follow Gaines’ remarks) address the criticism that people against International Village were “too emotional” during their public comments at the Freight House meetings. Underscoring both Ka’Ron and Karlie’s remarks is an acknowledgment that emotion has validity and has an important place in public discussion, especially if that emotion is coming from people who have much at stake in the matters being dis-

cussed. Gaines mentions the controversy over memes that arose during the fallout after the Freight House meetings. During the time, members of the community set up the Facebook page *Ypsi Really?* as a platform for sharing memes that critiqued public officials who had been unresponsive to public concerns over International Village. While many have questioned the validity of both emotion and memes in local political discourse, there is no doubt that both have elicited strong responses in these debates and have initiated conversations that might not have happened otherwise.

Closing out the first section is an entry from Erica Mooney, a self-described “community pollinator” who has since the fall been active in the formation of a coalition to develop a Community Benefits Ordinance (visit *Rising for Economic Democracy in Ypsi - REDY* on Facebook to learn more about this coalition). We include Mooney’s remarks from the September 19th Freight House meeting, as well as an infographic Mooney made to illustrate local issues, community infrastructures, and participatory processes.

The second section, *Water Street and Ypsi: Looking Back, Looking Forward*, begins with a piece by the pseudonymous author Belted Kingfisher, who discusses Water Street from an ecological perspective. It is necessary that we go beyond talking about Water Street simply as a vacant or contaminated parcel of land. Water Street is so much more and home to diverse wildlife, including birds like the belted kingfisher.

In addition to what’s going on now at Water Street, the site has a deep history, explored here by Matt Siegfried. During the International Village controversy, many voiced concerns over the Indigenous burial grounds the site is home to. After Siegfried is Lee Azus, who writes about resistance to “urban renewal” on the Southside. This is salient to discussions of gentrification today, as gentrification is often framed as a kind of “renewal.”

Up next are entries by Desir  Simmons and Brett Zeuner.

Simmons is an Ypsi resident who organized a series of conversations in people's homes to discuss International Village and what community members might want from developments and from community processes. After Simmons' transcribed remarks from an October City Council meeting is a short essay by Brett Zeuner, who is a member of the City of Ypsilanti Sustainability Commission. To quote Zeuner's public comments from the Freight House on September 18th, "this development may contribute to environmental sustainability through remediation, and it may boost the city's economic health, but if development disenfranchises residents, displaces anybody, and does not respect the views of the majority of citizens of Ypsilanti or those most vulnerable, then it is not sustainable." Zeuner's essay here expands upon these themes.

The final section focuses on the questions of accountability, equity, and transparency in City government. It begins with Ypsi resident Quinn Phillips, who discusses the China trip and possible ethical and legal violations pertaining to the financing of the trip. Phillips lays out a number of details surrounding the trip, discusses Amy Xue Foster's questionable qualifications, and expresses concern about the judgment of people working in City Hall.

Following Phillips is Kyle Hunter, who is the third Human Relations Commissioner to be featured in this zine. In August, Commissioner Fellows introduced a recommendation to hold a special public meeting on International Village prior to the signing of the purchase agreement. The intent was to ensure that there be greater public input in the development process. Commissioner Hunter proceeded to add the recommendation that the special meeting include a discussion affordable housing. The rest, as they say, is history: this recommendation (which passed unanimously by the Human Relations Commission) ended up

bringing about the first of the two Freight House meetings, both of which had historically high public attendance.

Included in this zine is a transcription of Hunter's public comments during audience participation at an October 17th City Council meeting. For his remarks that evening, he read a series of messages exchanged between him and Mayor Pro-Tem Nicole Brown in the days after Brown voted on the purchase agreement (and just before Brown headed off to China).

Next, Katy (an Ypsi resident) touches on the China trip and questions the extent to which people in City government actually care about all of Ypsi's residents, particularly people of color, renters, low-income folks, and people resisting International Village.

Finally, this zine concludes with an entry written by Ypsi resident Amy C.S. during the turn of the new year, inspiring residents of Ypsilanti to build a caring and democratic future together: "As our community moves beyond the decaying International Village proposal and into the next chapter for Water Street, we invite you to sit with us at the table."

As we move into 2018, we hope that the discussions generated over the period covered in this zine provide insight into how to best move forward in building a better, more equitable city.

INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE AND YPSI TODAY

WHO WE ARE

On September 18, 2017 Amber Fellows, along with fellow Human Relations Commissioners Ka’Ron Gaines and Kyle Hunter, presented remarks at the opening of a special public meeting on International Village and affordable housing. In August, the Human Relations Commission took the first steps to make that meeting a reality by unanimously passing a recommendation to Council to hold such a meeting. The piece below is adapted from the text that Fellows read during her public remarks that evening, which lasted somewhere around 20 minutes. During her presentation, Fellows stressed the importance of centering low-income renters and residents vulnerable to displacement in the City’s decision making: “Until the City and County choose to center low-income renters and longtime residents who are vulnerable to displacement, then officials cannot say that they are concerned about affordability in any meaningful sense.” For Fellows, this means understanding the makeup of Ypsi demographically.

The centerpiece of Fellows’ Freight House remarks was a discussion, adapted in this piece, of the demographics of the City of Ypsilanti, which is a majority-renter town: “The reason why we are here today is to discuss the project at hand, but also how this project and others are set to impact our community as it relates to many things, including housing. In order to begin this discussion, we need to talk about who we are as a city.”

In preparing her Freight House remarks, Fellows drew upon estimates from the US Census Bureau’s 2015 American Community Survey. Since then, the Census Bureau has released 2016 figures. Fellows’ text has been updated to include 2016 numbers. This allows us to present the most up-

to-date numbers to be of use in ongoing discussions about housing equity in Ypsilanti. While having updated figures, the text below offers a snapshot of many discussion points that were salient in September, particularly the need to center Ypsilanti as it is, which is “largely a young, low-income, racially and economically segregated, working-class town.”

Alright, so who are we?

According to the latest census data, of our 20,000 or so residents,¹ we are 64% majority non-family households.² We are of many ages, but the median age of Ypsilanti is around 24,³ and millennials comprise somewhere above 40% of the population here.⁴ We are around two-thirds white and one-third black.⁵

70% of Ypsilanti households are renter households.⁶

Ypsilanti's median household income is \$33,055,⁷ and the median income of non-family households (which, again, make up 64% of households) is \$27,675.⁸

According to the HUD definition for “low-income” in our county, which is \$47,600 and below for a single person household,⁹ more than half of Ypsilantians would be considered low-income. \$47,600 is well above Ypsilanti's current median income of \$33,055, and a little less than double the median income for non-family households of \$27,675.

66.2% of people in Ypsilanti make less than \$50,000. 52.5% of people in the city make less than \$35,000, meaning that a solid majority of Ypsilantians would be considered low-income by HUD's definition.¹⁰

Around a third (31.3%) of the population in Ypsi City live below the federal poverty level, which is more than double the national figure of 15.1%.¹¹ Of that third of us living under the poverty level, black folks in Ypsi are over-represented, with 41.9% below the poverty level in Ypsi,¹² and people ages 18 to 34 are also notably represented, with 36.4% of us living below the poverty level in Ypsi.

The county's new *Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing* report points to income disparities along the lines of race and neighborhoods in Ypsi.¹³ Folks who live in Normal Park and College Heights Neighborhoods in Ward 2 and folks living in the Prospect Park Neighborhood in Ward 3 tend to be white homeowners, with greater amounts of wealth and opportunity in the city, while folks on the eastside of Ypsi, downtown, and Southside represent higher amounts of unemployment, poverty, and have less opportunities for attaining higher education.

But if you live in Ypsi and interact with the community you know of all of this. You already understand that Ypsi is largely a young, low-income, racially and economically segregated, working-class town which is economically depressed in comparison to its very affluent neighbor. But we have a lot of pride here in Ypsi. I'm proud of the people we are, the core values that we have, and I'm proud of our heritage, our enduring black neighborhoods, and as a working-class community, we have made this city what it is today, with all its deep and complex history.

Now let's talk about housing and rent.

Despite what some homeowners think, renter households comprise 70% percent of the occupied units in Ypsi City, and this is a legitimate conversation to have.

The guideline for "Fair Market Rent" is benchmarked on the county Area Median Income and HUD's guidelines for affordability. The median income for the county is \$61,900 (for single-person households), just shy of double the median income for Ypsi (which, again, is around \$33,000). HUD's guidelines stipulate that if you spend 30% or less of your income on rent, then your housing is affordable; unaffordable if you spend more than 30% on rent.

Now, the county's guidelines for fair market rents are \$797 a month for an efficiency (affordable to someone making \$31,880 or

more year), \$850 a month for a one- bedroom apartment (affordable to someone making \$34,000), and \$1,025 for a two-bedroom (affordable to someone making \$41,040). In other words, you have to make somewhere above Ypsi's median income of \$33,000 for a one- or two-bedroom to be affordable to you at fair market rate . Even an efficiency at fair market rate is unaffordable to most folks with incomes below Ypsi's median.

And again, these rates are for *fair market* housing, not market-rate. A simple Craigslist search will pull up rates in the neighborhood of \$850 to \$1,000 (and sometimes more) for a shady little one-bedroom, which again would be unaffordable to those making at or below median income for Ypsi.

According to HUD standards for affordability, if a person works a \$10/hr wage job for 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year,¹⁴ affordable for you, at maximum, is \$520 a month. \$520 is probably a very familiar amount to a lot of folks in this room, as just being outside of affordability. And so how in the heck are we supposed to afford almost twice that amount?

According to a county Barrier Busters report, from January to April of this year, of the 550 requests it received for assistance with utilities, eviction prevention, moving expenses, 372 of them were from Ypsilanti. That's more than three times as many as the 114 from Ann Arbor.¹⁵

I know these numbers intimately both as a renter and a social worker in housing.

It's when we are thinking about how to respond to the needs of our city, that we have to keep in mind who we are as a city, and the historical factors and institutional inequities that have reinforced certain barriers like acquiring property and generational wealth, and which communities are affected by these barriers.

You can't just say you care about affordable housing. What you say has to mean something: residents have to see that you are making the moves and doing something toward making policy and regulations around housing equity and affordability. Referencing an outdated OCED housing report¹⁶ or stringing a list of buzzwords in talking points, or recommending a three-month taskforce that you dreamt in your head¹⁷ (and was not anything any resident came to you and asked for) is not being responsive to the issues. Being responsive is to engage residents impacted by this issues and to have them included in the process of developing a plan for preserving affordability.

Until the City and County choose to center low-income renters and longtime residents who are vulnerable to displacement, then officials cannot say that they are concerned about affordability in any meaningful sense.

NOTES

1. American Community Survey (henceforth abbreviated as ACS) 2016—Ypsilanti City, Michigan—total population (estimate): 20,577

2. Of the estimated 7,987 occupied housing units in Ypsilanti City, 63.9 percent of those are non-family households (ACS 2016 estimate)

3. 24.4 (ACS 2016 estimate)

4. Percent of total population ages 20 to 34: 43.1 (ACS 2016 estimate)

5. Of those who listed themselves as one race (which is 94.8% of total population), the ACS 2016 estimates estimates are 62.9% white and 27.2% black or African American. With race taken alone or in combination with one or more other races, Ypsilanti is 67.3% white and 30.5% black or African American.

6. Of Ypsilanti City's estimated 7,987 occupied housing units, 5,588 (or 69.96%) are renter occupied (ACS 2016 estimate).

7. ACS 2016 estimate

8. ACS 2016 estimate

9. This HUD definition is used to determine eligibility for housing programs and is based on a county median income of \$61,900 for single-person households. bit.ly/washtenawincomelimits

10. ACS 2016 estimate

11. ACS 2016 estimate

12. ACS 2016 estimate. Compare to 25.8% for white folks in Ypsilanti.

13. bit.ly/furtheringfairhousing

14. That is, \$20,800 a year

15. bit.ly/barrierbusters

16. The report that Fellows is referring to is a 2014 report on affordable housing put out by the Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED), titled, "Housing Affordability and Economic Equity." The report states, "Ypsilanti cannot remain the de facto affordable housing policy for Ann Arbor and Pittsfield; continuation of this default way of operating will ensure further decline of property values and fiscal stability." The report calls for Ann Arbor and Pittsfield Township to "grow the supply of affordable non-student rental housing" by adding 3,139 non-student affordable rentals over the next 20 years. The report recommends that Ypsilanti grow demand for "working and college-educated households to live and reinvest in Ypsilanti," to a tune of 4,178 college educated HHs [shorthand for "households"] over the next 20 years. bit.ly/ocedhousingreport

This report has caused alarm amongst members of DAY. In a piece that came out in the week prior to the Freight House meetings, DAY member Nathanael Romero writes,

While it is true that Ypsilanti has a disproportionate amount of subsidized housing units relative to population, this does not mean that Ypsilanti doesn't need more housing units that are affordable to low-income residents. Moreover, the drive to induce demand for more moderate-to-high income people to move to Ypsilanti sounds like the recipe for gentrification. The report recommends that "Ypsilanti make [...] progress towards growing demand by investing in livability," which raises con-

cerns that efforts to increase the desirability for people with moderate-to-high incomes to move to Ypsilanti will eventually lead to the displacement of low-income renters, many of whom already find Ypsilanti to be unaffordable enough as it is. This is a prime worry with International Village, namely, that the development is not intended for the already diverse population of Ypsilanti that is struggling with housing insecurity and that it will induce demand for people to move in who will eventually price out low-income residents. Perhaps the development would simply fill an already existing demand, but it seems likely that it will induce just as much as (if not more than) meet pre-existing demand, a matter that needs to be deliberated if officials are to take seriously the retention of low-income Ypsilantians.

bit.ly/damnarbor

17. At the previous City Council meeting on September 5, Mayor Edmonds discussed her proposal for a taskforce on housing affordability. According to minutes for that meeting,

The task force would include representation from the Ypsilanti Housing Commission, Planning Commission, Human Relations Commission, a city business owner, a landlord, and two other at large members. If Council decides to move forward with this task force it would begin meeting in October for three months to research best practices in maintaining housing affordability. The task force would present to Council after three months their findings with a recommendation to Council.

At the end of the meeting, according to minutes, ward 2 Council member Beth Bashert "stated a member of the Sustainability Commission should be a member." The formation of this taskforce was expected at the time with a presentation before Council in October by the Office of Community and Economic Development of its newly released *Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing* report, mentioned above.

The taskforce never materialized, as the “China trip” controversy ended up consuming much time, energy and discussion that October.

While this taskforce never materialized, the Ypsilanti Planning Commission approved on December 20, 2017 the formation of a Citizen’s Advisory Committee on housing affordability and accessibility, which is in many ways more robust and participatory than Edmonds’ proposed taskforce. The Committee is expected to begin meeting at the beginning of 2018 and continue through the larger portion of the year, and will recommend updates to the City’s Master Plan. Read more about the committee here: bit.ly/ypsiplanningcommission. Additional information is available here: bit.ly/ypsihousing.

BRYAN FOLEY

GENTRIFICATION IS VERY REAL

Bryan Foley is a lifetime Southside resident and has organized a series of discussion panels at the Parkridge Community Center on gentrification and systematic racism. Panelists have included City Councilmembers, Human Relations Commissioners, lifelong and longtime Ypsilanti residents, writers, scholars, educators, and clergy. Below are remarks he made regarding International Village at Council meetings in September and October, the first from the Freight House on September 19th and the second is from October 17th at City Council chambers. We have transcribed Foley's remarks and edited them for readability.

SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2017

YPSILANTI FREIGHT HOUSE

Good evening Council. Bryan Foley, lifelong, born, Ypsilanti resident.

There is one thing I've noticed that, most of the people making these major decisions in Ypsilanti are not indigenous Ypsilantians. And what we're doing right now is compromising our heritage for capital ...

Living on [Ainsworth Circle], I've lived there all my life. The police did not patrol my neighborhood, because they did not have to. It wasn't necessary. But now the police are in my neighborhood at least once a week now, and particularly on Fridays. We have a band that has been performing in a garage for close to 50 years. But now all of a sudden we have white people moving to our neighborhood, the police have to come and tell us to turn our music down. We live a way we choose to live, which is best for our culture. But now that we have a few white

people move into our neighbourhood we have to change everything we do. Our whole lifestyle has been disrupted . . .

Gentrification is very real. As people are being displaced, they don't have anywhere to go. If you go downtown in Ypsilanti right now you'll see a bunch of people just wandering around, with nowhere to go . . . As these people begin to be displaced they are gonna have no place to go. And you know where they'll wind up wandering around? In your neighbourhood. You're going to wonder where these people came from, get upset, get mad and call the police. And then we got a lot of police trying to displace those indigenous to Ypsilanti and that's what's going on, then you got potential for a Ferguson situation. I implore the City of Ypsilanti to slow down.

OCTOBER 17, 2017

Good evening Mayor, Council, staff, Mayor Pro-Tem, Councilperson Richardson.

I know it's on the agenda, it's on there, about a Police Citizens Commission and I think that's a great idea. There's one thing I can say about the City of Ypsilanti Police department from interacting on both a professional and on a citizen level, is that they're a pretty good, pretty fair police department. But with this International Village coming on in here right now, we're already experiencing gentrification and it's affecting our community right now.

Where I live at, I live at Ainsworth Circle, and I've been living there all my life, and we're seeing a whole bunch of people from out of the area moving in, but we're also seeing a lot of people displaced, and they're just moving in and out, back and forth, back and forth, with nowhere to go. If you go outside and you leave this meeting, you'll go down by the bus station right now and you'll see tens of people homeless. They have nowhere to go.

One of the things I suggested, whether I'm for or against the International Village, have you done a crime study? Because as we begin see homeless start to increase more and more, you're gonna see an elevation of crime. You're gonna see property break-ins, you're gonna see robberies. It's going to happen. I'm not sure, cause I haven't heard, has there been a crime study? You'll start seeing people being displaced? You're gonna start seeing strange people showing up in your neighborhood in the third ward, people that you're not used to seeing hanging around because they have nowhere to go. And what's gonna start happening is you're gonna start getting police complaints from people who have been here all the time. Then all of a sudden you're going to have police officers who're not familiar with the culture.

Because even though the police department in my opinion is very good, there are not very many black police officers. And a lot of people come from out of the area who work for the City of Ypsilanti and as that begins to increase, you're going to start having conflicts more and more. Then it's going to start escalating and what's gonna happen pretty soon there's going to come a push to a shove and an officer who's not familiar with the community and the culture is going to do what we been seeing going all around this United States right now. You're going to have a Ferguson-type situation.

So I encourage, one of the things I said was, whether I'm for or against International Village, slow down. Take a look at what's really going on. And I heard you mentioned it, Councilperson Richardson, is the community benefits agreement, that has to be in place, it has to be. This is why why we said, "slow down, you're going too fast." And get some public input, invite us in, let us know what's going on. This back-up or what you wanna call it or force, is because of one thing: nobody is communicating with us and letting the citizen know what is going on. Thank you.

KA'RON GAINES

WHAT IF . . .

Ka'Ron Gaines is a member of the City of Ypsilanti Human Relations Commission. Below are remarks that Gaines made during audience participation during an October 10th City Council meeting. In the remarks, Gaines touches on a number of key events: Bryan Foley's September 11th panel on gentrification, the Freight House meetings, and the subsequent fallout. We have transcribed Foley's remarks and edited them for readability.

Hello everybody, my name is Ka'Ron Gaines. I am a Human Relations Commissioner here in the City of Ypsilanti and I simply just wanted to say, I saw people for one come to a lot of meetings. We saw people cry, speak sincerely. Without no one really giving any empathy back on how people were feeling.

Now all of the sudden we're seeing memes and all these things on Facebook, and everybody's complaining like that's unprofessional, and everybody's sensitive now.

But it's like what about when the people spoke? It wouldn't have got to that point if certain questions were answered in the beginning.

If people showed that they cared, people wouldn't have actually came here and at the Freight House and cried, shaking while they're talking. And I haven't saw one status from nobody aiming at this saying look, "we're working hard, we're sorry you feel this way. It's very important to us. We're trying to do..." Nothing!

We just keep getting turned on each corner, lie after lie. This has been going on. And now people are reacting in a certain way.

Now they're trying to reverse it, and saying you guys were wrong.

That's not right.

That's unethical and that's not professional.

Another thing I think of "What if?"

What if the Human Relations Commission never put in a motion to have a specific meeting of International Village? What if Bryan Foley and Mike Simmons hadn't had a meeting on the southside about gentrification?

What if we didn't decide that we were going to put flyers on cars?

Me and my son got up on a Sunday and put flyers on hundreds of cars in the heat letting people know about the meeting.

So if we think it's bad now, what if all of us didn't act on the things that we did? We really would have been in bad shape, and it's scary to think about what if we didn't act.

So like I say, it's just sad that people are trying to reverse things now, when the whole time all people was asking was what's going on. Now all of the sudden, like I said, people are trying to reverse it and to me that's so unfair, and that's all I can say. Thank you.

KARLIE

CRIPPLED AMERICA IS WORTH INVESTING IN

This entry is taken from the public comments at the September 19th Freight House meeting, which we have transcribed and edited for readability. Karlie's entry and Erica Mooney's below were delivered that evening after Wayne Hoffman, the representative from Spence Brothers construction (a member of Amy Xue Foster's International Village team) gave a presentation on the development. During the portion of the presentation where he spoke about the EB-5 visa program, Hoffman made the following remarks about the EB-5 investors:

Investors are also seeking a relatively lower rate of return, close to zero compared to other developers that would do a project in your community. So they're not here making money off Ypsilanti. They do want a visa. They still admire the United States. They still see real estate in the United States as a good investment. Infrastructure in the United States, real estate in the United States remains a strong investment. What rhetoric you might hear, "crippled America," which I think is BS. This is still a good investment. United States is still a great investment.

Hoffman is likely referencing Donald Trump's 2015 book, Crippled America: How to Make America Great Again. During City Council meetings, it is expected that people speaking during audience participation give their name and address. Sometimes people elect to use pseudonyms when they came up to the podium to speak. Karlie decided to adopt "Crippled America" as pseudonym for their impromptu remarks before Council.

Reflecting on their remarks that evening, Karlie has subsequently explained,

I introduced myself as Crippled America. [Wayne Hoffman] said “This is NOT the crippled America we think it is” or something similar. He was talking about economics, saying that IV is worth investing in since *America is Not Crippled*.

I find it interesting that he chose this word [CRIPPLED] this slur that has been historically used to disenfranchise disabled people. How many times have I and other disabled people been told we are not worth investing in? Disabled people are posed as burdens, drains on the system and Not Worth It. ALL. THE. TIME. And these same disabled people are disproportionately low-income and housing insecure—the same folks who would experience the direct negative impacts from the gentrifying impacts of IV. All this paired with the fact that such little attention is ever paid to the needs of disabled people.

We exist at all intersections of identity. You might not hear from us because we are trying so hard to survive but I am here to say that I think Crippled America is worth investing in. And that means creating practices that are supportive and mindful of low-income and housing insecure folks.

The intersections between housing justice and disability justice are many, and one hopeful development is the Planning Commission’s recent resolution to establish a citizen’s advisory committee addressing affordability and accessibility (accessibility in a disability rights sense).

The convention during Council meetings is to introduce oneself by giving one’s full name “I am [first] [last] and I live at [address].” Here Karlie bucks that convention and in so doing makes a powerful political statement. Here are Karlie’s September 19th remarks.

My name is Crippled America and I live in Ypsilanti and I’ve been here five years. I don’t have really anything to add too much other than to say

that (call me self destructive but I visited the Ypsilanti discussion page last night after the meeting and) I saw a comment that was just disturbing to me, because it was, basically saying that they believed that this was already won because one side was emotional and one side was logical and reasonable. So I would just like to say that when you're making this decision please just recognize that emotion does not negate the severity, the validity, of what these people are saying and basically I just would urge you to vote no and I support everyone who is a part of Defend Affordable Ypsi.

ERICA MOONEY

PARTICIPATORY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Erica is a very active Ypsilanti citizen who advocates for the Huron River watershed. Erica made the following speech off-the-cuff during the public comment section at the September 19th public hearing on the International Village purchase agreement. We have transcribed and edited Mooney's remarks for readability.

Thanks everyone for still being here. I am so grateful that this development has offered a catalyst for this community to speak to each other. I don't think that this is a time to say yes. This being a new development offers a new opportunity to design a new platform that can systematically engage and equitably empower people who are already working on existing efforts in this city. They [the developer] said in their slide that they would put 4.5 million towards a community center. That's great...

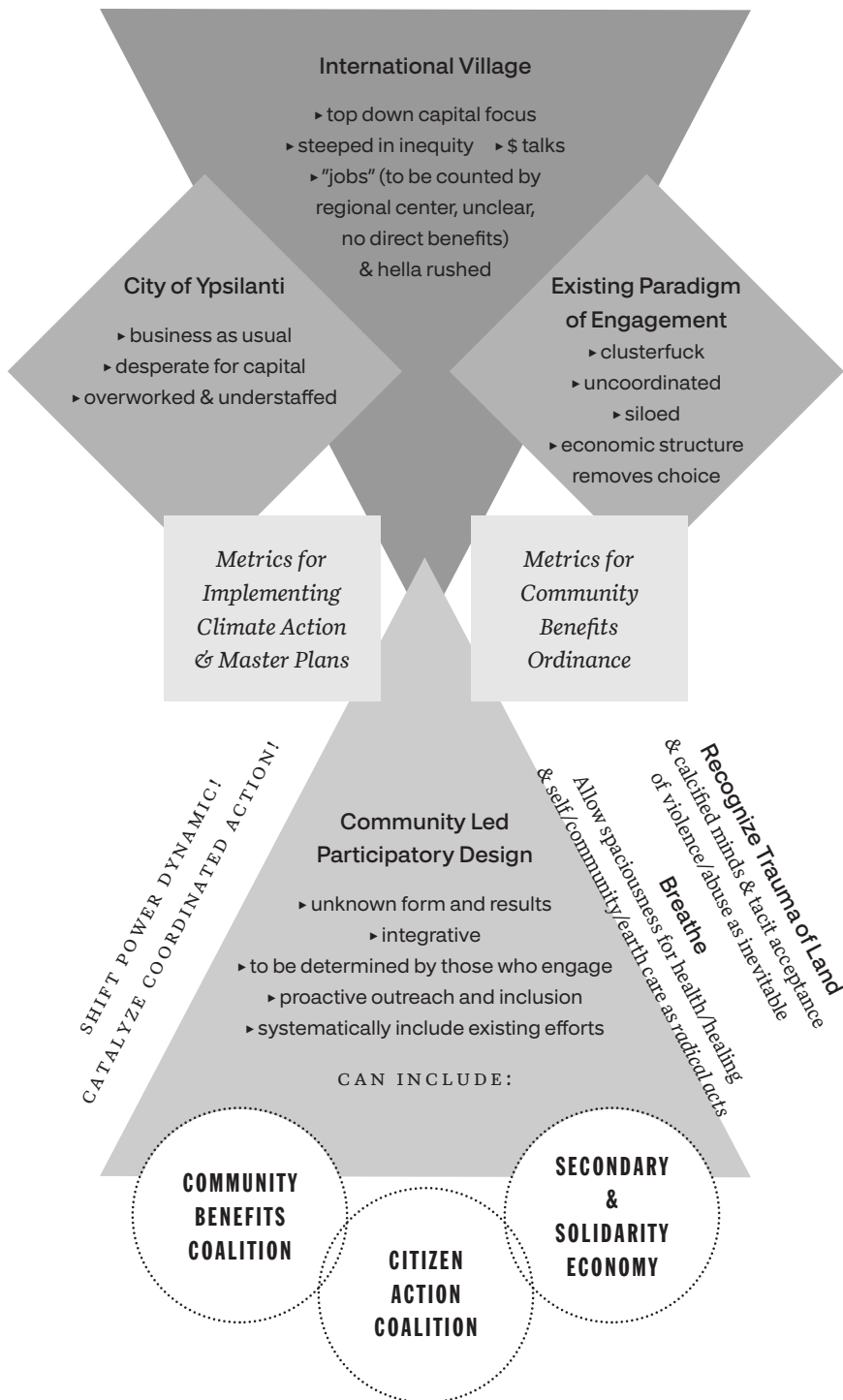
But, I think that there is more time to think about if you [City Council] are gonna invest in a plan that is already developed that as many people at the Freight House tonight have expressed is contradictory to the scale and the needs of our community. That you could take the time instead of putting forward a plan you've already drafted without our input, into hiring a firm that is leading the entire globe in designing different sorts of ways of participatory engagement with citizens so that you're actually empowering what's going on. If you're investing in Ypsilanti we ARE an asset, but part of that asset is our PEOPLE and our skills

and all of the people doing good work who are focused on different issue areas. We're working class, we don't have time to take care of the things that maybe we could if we were paid to sit around and dream of a plan and pay people to design and engineer things then maybe we would raise the money ourselves—but we are doing more than that to take care of ourselves and each other.

Two years ago, when I worked at Beezy's, there were two other developers from Troy who showed up mysteriously who wanted to develop a Tiny House village on Water Street, and they pumped me for all kinds of information as a current urban planning student and I was happy to share with about how much was going on. The point I am trying to make is that, although this development appears to be a valuable thing, there are definitely other investors interested in developing the property. Not to mention that the EB-5 program is definitely shady.

The other point I'd like to share is that I've brought these flowers from Water Street, and I'm just trying to say, that the peace that you can achieve and experience by being there, in that place now, is missing from this conversation and I think that saying no and allowing more time to figure out how we can work together to actually engage people in participatory design process is much more worth it. Thank you.

Graphic by Erica Mooney



WATER STREET AND YPSI

LOOKING BACK,
LOOKING FORWARD

BELTED KINGFISHER

WATER STREET

AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The pseudonymous author of this piece brings in a much welcome perspective on Water Street as not simply a “vacant” parcel of land, but as a wild-life habitat. This essay is the first in a series of essays in this zine written in October and early November expressly for this zine. With the exception of the transcribed public comments by Desirée Simmons, all entries in Section 2 are essays written during this period.

Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, Mother Earth has taken back the 36-acre parcel in downtown Ypsi known as Water Street. In the time it has been sitting vacant, an incredible wildlife habitat has emerged! This land is now home to eagles, hawks, falcons, belted kingfishers, cormorants, herons, monarch butterflies, fox, deer, swallowtail butterflies, and a large number of bees and other pollinators among others.

These animals are not on the Endangered Species List, but some have numbers that are significantly dwindling in the US due to loss of habitat, pesticide use and other issues. A large development on Water Street would wipe out this incredible habitat, leaving these animals without the safe haven from “progressive” development that they have now.

The belted kingfisher is an incredible bird! They fish for a lot of their food, just as their name indicates. To do this, they need a very specific habitat along a river that is not groomed or developed. The kingfisher needs to be able to perch on unobstructed branches that hang over the

water at exactly the right height so that they can dive down and catch small fish and other water creatures. They are very territorial and will fight other Kingfishers that try to enter their habitat. There is only so much food in one stretch of river! Their territory is about 1500 to 3000 feet of riverbank. They mate in early summer and make nests in holes near the river bank up to one and a half kilometers from the river.

When was the last time you saw a fox? Have you EVER seen a fox? They live at Water Street! You can often see young deer romping and playing in the fields there too. Monarch butterflies are significantly dwindling, though they are fairly abundant at this property.

Without bees pollinating plants WE WOULD HAVE NO FOOD! Ypsilanti is an official Bee City with Bee City USA (<http://www.beecityusa.org>). This is an incredible distinction, marking Ypsilanti's commitment to keeping our city safe from excessive pesticides (which have been proven to kill bees) and more. These and other pollinators are so ABUNDANT at Water Street that you can often see up to ten different kinds of pollinators feeding at the same time on a single small patch of goldenrod or catnip!

Instead of a city putting money and development first, we need to refocus our priorities on HEALTH and leave a healthy ecosystem for all future generations!

MATT SIEGFRIED

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

In this essay, historian Matt Siegfried discusses Water Street and how it relates to Indigenous people who've lived alongside the Huron River for centuries. This essay was written in the fall of 2017, shortly after Indigenous Peoples Day, and provides depth to discussions about Water Street as an Indigenous burial site and how questions of land and development intersect with deeper questions of Ypsi history and responsibility to that history.

People have been living and dying along this Huron River for as many as ten thousand years.

In that very long time, a number of groups with different cultures, languages and ways of living have made this area home. Mounds, burials, habitation sites, broken pottery and a huge variety of tools and the detritus of living were ubiquitous in the landscape when first settled by Americans. Racism and uneducated curiosity on the part of the dictators of settlement meant destruction and looting of many of these sites in the decades following the American conquest. Mounds on the bluff over the river were still being opened, looted and leveled on South Huron Street as late as the 1850s.

The Anishinaabeg people living on this part of the Huron River in the 18th century were mainly Potawatomi who first settled along the Detroit River when that place was founded in 1701 by a few hundred French and several thousand Indigenous people. The upper Huron River was part of the Detroit-area Potawatomi estate before they moved permanent villages here sometime around the beginning of the "British-era" in the

Great Lakes, or 1760. Potawatomi villages and associated fields were located along the Raisin and its tributaries, the Huron and the upper Rogue at that time. This community was politically distinct from other Potawatomi communities in Michigan, Illinois and Indiana. These vil-



lagers would play a role in the major events of the time, from the "French and Indian War" through the "American Revolution" to the time of Tecumseh and the Prophet.

The village here was probably referred to as Moguago's Town (named for a line of leaders in the village, Mo-Gua-Go). It was located on the east side of the Huron just south of present Ypsilanti, within sight of the cemetery found on the Water Street site.

Indeed, some of those who

fought the British at Detroit and later the Americans at the Wabash and Fallen Timbers may lie there. Those graves were looted by Ypsilanti citizens a number of times in the twentieth century. Some of the items ripped from those graves, like trade silver and a Spanish medalion, strongly date the cemetery to the so-called "British period" in Michigan history from around 1760 to 1815, precisely when Moguago's Town and other villages were in this area.

Some of the descendants of the village where Ypsi is now live a mere one hundred miles from Ypsilanti as a federally recognized tribe, the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, on a 120-acre plot

near Athens, Michigan. They remain in Michigan because they were able to evade forced removal, hiding in the swamps and river valleys in the 1830s and 1840s. John Moguago himself led an escape from the soldiers driving them west and returned to the Athens, Michigan area where he is now buried. They emerged after the end of the native removal period with the State holding their land in trust, in part due to their white neighbors offering support.

Reading the accounts of the desecration of these graves which has happened multiple times over the decades should shame Ypsilanti into saying "never again." Remediation of the site and its protection would be the most basic demands of justice. The City recently passed a resolution changing Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day and we as a community for the first time are in ownership of the burial site along with the Water Street area. This is now public land and we can make a decision to act responsibly for the first time by facing the hard truth that Ypsilanti's birthright is predicated on the denial of the birthright of the Potawatomi people. However, the City is prepared to have millionaire developers desecrate and destroy the grave site yet again, continuing that denial and erasing from the earth the historic claim made to this land by indigenous people.

Even if, and it is a big "if," all the remains have long been destroyed, we still know it to be the site of a cemetery belonging to the ancestors of people we can identify today; people who are our neighbors. We are bound to protect and respect the site as its current occupants. Ypsilanti, until you are prepared to take responsibility for the past, act responsibly in the present and be responsible to the future. Please repeal "Indigenous Peoples Day" as in this case it would only be a tasteless joke. Until then, your words are hollow. You cannot claim, as in the past, that you did not know. And history will damn you for it.

LEE AZUS

THE PARKRIDGE URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

During Bryan Foley's September 11th panel on gentrification, he kicked off the discussion with a simple dictionary definition of "gentrification" from Merriam-Webster: "the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents." A number of panelists drew parallels between gentrification today and "urban renewal" efforts in the mid-20th century. In this essay, historian Lee Azus touches on some of the same themes and histories as Foley's panelists. Here Azus discusses urban renewal on the Southside, and in so doing points us to important parallels between then and now, both in terms of the political moves behind and resistance to these forms of "renewal."

Long ago, decades before the City of Ypsilanti condemned and leveled thirty-some acres for the Water Street Development, Ypsilanti City Council hired experts to determine that hundreds of parcels in another part of the city were "blighted" or "substandard" and needed to be demolished. The City cleared the properties of people and structures, then offered to sell the parcels (at a considerable loss) to developers. The City Councilmembers reasoned that the scheme would pay for itself, and that, after issuing millions of dollars of bonds, the city's property values would rise. It would be a "win-win" for the city's tax base, builders, and future property owners.



Ypsilanti, 1961

It was called “The Parkridge Urban Renewal Project,” a redevelopment scam on the Southside, between Harriet Street and I-94, first considered in 1952, approved in 1961, and formally completed in 1997. Hundreds of homes and businesses were demolished and 415 families were displaced. There were crooked deals and an Urban Renewal Director who was convicted of fraud (ultimately becoming a used car salesman). More importantly, as it relates to our present moment, Ypsilanti’s urban renewal program could only have succeeded by displacing low-income renters, who were the overwhelming majority of people affected, and replacing them with lower-middle, and middle-income people. Newly-built homes inhabited by higher income residents would be the economic model on which the project depended.

In other words, its success depended on what we now refer to as *gentrification*.*

From the first informational meeting at what is now called Perry Elementary School in January 1961, neighborhood residents voiced skepticism and opposition. Dr. Thomas Bass, a respected leader of the Southside, voiced concern about the relocation of residents, calling the issue a "stumbling block." Affected households received assurances that City Council would approve a plan only if residents voted for it. Opponents, led by Mattie Dorsey of Jefferson Street, organized The Ypsilanti Property Owners' Association (YPOA), to gather petitions and testimony against urban renewal in advance of the vote. A pro-urban renewal group, led by Southside contractors and a major realtor/property owner organized in favor of the project.

When neighborhood support appeared doubtful, the *Ypsilanti Daily Press* front-page headline read, "'Terrorist Tactics' of Urban Renewal Fight Leads to Police Probe." The article reported on "'widespread intimidation and terror' against supporters of the city's proposed urban renewal program." At the City Council meeting on August 15, 1961 to approve the project, the mayor declared that because "... the city council and city administration were subjected to a continual bombardment of tactics aimed at distortion of the facts, attempts to scuttle the program and misinform the people of this city concerning this vital program ... the city council, after due consideration has determined such a [neighborhood] vote will not be taken." The Council then voted 5 to 2 to apply for federal funds to begin the urban renewal project.

Mattie Dorsey and the opposition consistently took a maximalist, anti-compromise stance against urban renewal. The YPOA's five-point

*A term coined by Ruth Glass, an urban sociologist, in 1964 regarding the transformation of London.

stand stated that the program was “segregated,” did not require an “open occupancy” ordinance, lacked majority support of residents, failed to secure relocation for displaced residents, and promoted housing insecurity for home owners forced to take new 40-year loans on their improved properties. Dorsey recognized the inherent failure of the Federal urban renewal program to account for racist lending practices, stating at a Council meeting in October 1961, “How can urban renewal help if some of us are unable to qualify for mortgage loans now? Certainly, lending institutions are no more liberal with granting mortgages under urban renewal than they are without such a program.”

Opponents used a range of tactics to slow or derail the implementation of the program, beginning with a successful lawsuit against the City—the first of three—for “illegally and improperly” holding a required public hearing before the vote. The suit stalled the City’s application for months, with the aim of missing a required filing deadline with the federal government. Dorsey spoke almost weekly at the more than 200 consecutive Council meeting she attended. When City Council prepared to vote to apply for a \$710,996 federal loan for urban renewal, Dorsey declared, “Mr. Mayor, we’re just going to have to be disorderly. We don’t think we’ve been treated fair,” and led fifty protesters in a spiritual song.

Dorsey ran unsuccessfully for City Council in 1962, and was arrested in 1963 with her husband James and neighbor Henrietta Moore for tarring urban renewal boundary signs on Harriet Street and First Avenue. (They declared their innocence in two different trials.) The urban renewal office caught on fire shortly after the tarring. Dorsey continued to present opposition petitions to Council, organized a neighborhood newsletter, and protested the siting of ten new public housing duplexes on the Southside as racist. Opponents picketed in front of City Hall and the urban renewal office, and once picketed a workshop on financing,

maintenance, and building codes for Southside residents, with Dorsey calling it a "complete flop."

Judged by the City's own criteria, the Parkridge Urban Renewal Project was a different sort of flop. The Council seemed genuinely surprised that the majority of Southside residents were hostile to the civic improvements and didn't know why builders failed to rush to develop housing on empty parcels. It was easy for them to *not* see the structural and racist problems underpinning urban renewal. Apart from African-American councilmember John Burton, let's imagine the unspoken assumptions of those in power: Official terminology such as "blight" and "slum-like conditions" were code words for *"the poor Negro part of town."* The local boards of realty were only upholding the rights of white property owners who didn't want to sell to African Americans (actual sentiment of a white Ypsilanti realtor who was a member of the Human Relations Commission). And, anyway, "it's impossible to legislate morality."

City officials along with the local banks, realtors, and industrialists could not acknowledge what people on the Southside knew: hundreds of residents had been driven from their homes, and unless they had equal access to housing, credit and well-paying union jobs, they couldn't come back.

DESIRAÉ SIMMONS

WE SHOULD BE SEEN AS AN ASSET

These remarks are transcribed from Simmons' comments during audience participation during the October 17th City Council meeting. These remarks were made around the same time many of the essays in this volume were written. Simmons is an Ypsi resident and has been active in facilitating discussions within the community about what residents want from developments and from civic processes. Simmons' remarks were preceded by public comment by Dave Heikkinen, a downtown business owner who expressed support for International Village. We have transcribed Simmons' remarks and edited them for readability.

Hello my name is Desiraé. I am a homeowner and I agree with [the previous speaker, Dave Heikkinen] that we have a property that has a lot of value and we should get the most that we can from it. We should do it right. I'm not seeing that happening. We're talking about [the citizens of Ypsilanti] asking questions. We haven't had time to do so. I have started doing talks in neighborhoods trying to have people host conversations about International Village to see what people want. It's not about thinking you know what your neighbors want. It's about talking to them directly.

So here are a few notes from the most recent meeting I had, mostly with homeowners. Some questions that they had for Council: What have we already tried? Who can pay for these apartments [at International Village]? Has there been a market feasibility study? Does Water Street count as a Superfund site [these are EPA designations]? Whose job is it to do due diligence? Is there a possibility for natural rehabilitation—even if to only

make the process easier or cheaper down the line? What are some available grants?

Here are some things that they want from a process: They want whatever development happens to be integrated into the community. They want people who move there to add fabric to our community, because we love our community. They want a process that asks the community what they want. They want a process that uses assets of the community members to do some of the due diligence. They want community members to fill in some of the gaps where folks don't have the time to do due diligence, which is already happening. They want more transparency. They want a holistic process which looks at all the different properties we have. And to have an actual strategic plan for what we might want to build.

We should be seen as an asset to this community and to any process for development. We are not so large a community that we can't have a better process than what is considered a normal best practice. We can see from other places around the country what these look like. I've moved here from living in Boston, Chicago, and Cleveland. I've seen what these kinds of developments can do to cities even that large, so think about what it will do here. It will raise prices for some of our small businesses, which will not be able to afford their spaces in downtown. We haven't talked about what raising rents will do to them too.

Others are interested in participating in any of these community conversations. These are not all people who are all thinking one way or another, but we should be part of the conversation. This has energized me. This is my first time in the City Council chambers. I have been working full-time at the University of Michigan. I have an eight-month-old daughter. And I'm coming here, and working nights and weekends on this issue. We should be seen as an asset. Thank you.

BRETT ZEUNER

YPSI CAN DO BETTER

Brett Zeuner is a member of the Ypsilanti Sustainability Commission and has (both in his capacity as Commissioner and as an Ypsi resident) taken up the issue of International Village, particularly as it relates to questions of sustainability. On October 2nd, the Sustainability Commission unanimously passed a resolution (also mentioned by Quinn Phillips in the essay following Zeuner's) to delay the International Village development agreement, a resolution that was never taken up by Council.

When I was appointed to the City's newly founded Sustainability Commission this past spring, I was excited to be involved in helping make the future of Ypsilanti more sustainable. This catch-all buzz word would not just mean some solar panels, a bike share program, and a city-wide compost program, either.

No, sustainability would be much more than that; it would be ensuring that development in Ypsilanti are feasible, equitable, and environmentally responsible. Decisions would be made with community inclusion, valuing the strength that comes from slow and honest work that has the broad, verified support of the larger community.

Water Street was the property that really could be something. I remember back at the first Sustainability Commission meeting when we did our brief introductions and background, and gave an example of what projects or topics we were most interested in. One of my statements was focused on the prospects of bioremediation and citizen science on Water Street.

Could we get creative and find funding, from both public and pri-

vate sources, to support citizen science that would help reduce environmental hazards and risks to public health and city property? This was one idea from me, a local resident. Knowing the character and brilliance present in this city, I knew that my fellow Ypsilantians had many more ideas for community development, we just had to provide a platform for sharing those ideas.

When the Water Street millage was then passed this fall I was excited that the city could now collectively take a well-deserved sigh of short-lived relief, all the while knowing that we would have to hammer back down on the issue of repurposing Water Street sooner than later. As a renter, I would bear a greater cost from this millage while my landlord took on some its cost as a property owner. We were in this together, and the community would work together to continue our fight for repurposing Water Street in the best possible way. This was our chance to regain some sense of civic resilience while we figured out what to do with Water Street.

This excitement faded as I watched the City Council approve and sign a purchase agreement with an off-putting “development team” for the Water Street property the following month. Pushed through with clear shortcomings and incomplete reasoning, the purchase agreement failed to address the concerns I had about ensuring sustainable development in the city.

It is now January 2018, and I have watched issue after issue bubble up from the depths of this development idea. Was this a demonstration of civic learned helplessness? Coming to accept this grand proposal for fear of missing out? Or was it that those in power actually believed this was the best choice for Water Street, and for Ypsilanti?

My hope is that we can take trust ourselves, the community of Ypsilanti, to come together and solve this issue. Now is our chance to recognize International Village as our wake-up call to get engaged and work together. We are Ypsilanti, and we can do so much better than this.

HOLDING CITY HALL ACCOUNTABLE

THE CHINA TRIP
AND TRANSPARENCY

QUINN PHILLIPS

WILL COUNCIL LISTEN?

This essay was written in response to the “China trip” controversy. The first half was read as a public comment at a City Council meeting on October 17th, 2017. This past fall, the City hired the firm Plato Law to investigate the source of the funding for the trip and any possible legal or ethical violations pertaining to the financing of the trip. This investigation is ongoing as of the publication of this zine.

The mayor, mayor pro-tem, chief of police, and economic development director went on an all-expenses-paid trip to Beijing and Shanghai, where they met with the purported developers of the International Village project.

On her first day back from China, Mayor Amanda Edmonds officially stated, “My understanding since before departing was that our trip was funded through a scholarship the City delegation received from the Wayne State University Chinese Student and Scholars Association [CSSA], and that those funds originated from the Chinese consulate. If the investigation uncovers that not to be the case, I, too, have very serious concerns.” The City of Ypsilanti has provided no evidence that the Chinese Consulate was involved in this trip. The emails released by the City in response to a FOIA request show no evidence. The consulate denies funding this trip.

On September 12th (10 days prior to her flight leaving), Mayor Edmonds received a LinkedIn message from a representative of the Wayne State student organization who claimed to be awarding a

"scholarship" for the cost of the trip. It stated, "It is worth noting that these 'scholarships' [quotation marks from original message] are mainly funds from a company called Global Capital LLC. based out of Michigan." Mayor Edmonds was informed during the September 19th presentation to Council that Global Capital LLC is developer Amy Xue Foster's company. It's also in Xue Foster's email signature which she used to communicate with Mayor Edmonds prior to the trip.

The mayor may not have checked the message before leaving for China (which she still has not provided evidence of), but she certainly read it before telling Council under oath she had no evidence that the developer paid for the trip. At this point the email chain linking the airline tickets sent from Xue Foster to the construction contractor, then to our city's economic development director (Beth Ernat) had been released. No one from Wayne State was in the email chain. The mayor had also been provided with the emails where Ernat seemingly deleted the evidence that Xue Foster originally sent the plane tickets.

Xue Foster sent Ernat the award letter for the Wayne State CSSA "scholarships." Why was the award letter dated September 6th when the tickets were sent from Xue Foster on September 5th? Why didn't someone from Wayne State send this letter and the check directly to the City? Why was the CSSA in contact with the developer if the developer wasn't paying? How did the CSSA find out Council needed money for this trip to China? Where is the invoice showing where they reached the \$16,000 figure for the costs? Why is there only a cashier's check documenting the path of the money?

Wayne State's Dean of Students told the press, "We checked both accounts for this organization. They do not have the funds that they would have to have to pay for this kind of travel. Historically ... there wasn't a big deposit, or withdrawal, either." A FOIA request sent to

Wayne State returned no evidence of communications between the City and the CSSA about funding the trip.

Court documents show Xue Foster was sued over \$33,000 in unpaid debt in 2012. That LLC went under. She had a judgement lien against her property in 2016 for unpaid debt. In April of this year, she founded International Advisory LLC and International Village LLC. She is still the head of Global Capital LLC, which is based out of what has been described as an "LLC farm" in Troy. Did the City look into her credentials fully? Apparently not, since Ernat learned while in China that Xue Foster's team includes no actual developers. The project still has no developers.

City Manager Darwin McClary spoke to WEMU last week also repeating the untrue statement, "I have not seen anything that indicates anything, other than the fact that CSSA paid for the trip. I have seen no information to the contrary so far. Nor do I have any information to the contrary." He stated this after receiving the packet of emails where the CSSA said the funds came from the developer. He repeated this falsehood under oath.

McClary was fired from two previous city manager positions in 2010 and 2012. According to the Macomb Daily in 2010, "McClary had come under increasing criticism in recent Council meetings after failing to meet deadlines for information on various issues as elected officials worked to address a multi-million dollar budget deficit." McClary released a statement that he is authorizing Plato Law firm to investigate this scandal. Yet McClary is himself under investigation for the scandal. If that's not a conflict of interest, what is?

Mayor Edmonds and many other members of Council think we should continue to do business with a woman who led staff to believe she is a developer. Xue Foster misled our city leaders about the funding

source while knowing that paying for the trip is “unethical and illegal,” according to the city attorney.

Voting yes on the International Village purchase agreement was the quid pro quo for this illegal trip. I believe that the members of Council and city government who want to see this development go forward believe this is what’s best for Ypsilanti. But pushing this development through despite community outrage and deepening scandal would be a huge mistake. The Ypsilanti Sustainability Commission voted unanimously to delay the vote on International Village. Will Council listen?

KYLE HUNTER

“I HAVEN’T GOTTEN A RESPONSE. I WOULD LIKE ONE TONIGHT.”

These remarks are transcribed from Kyle Hunter’s public comments during the October 17th City Council meeting. For his remarks that evening, Hunter read a series of messages exchanged between himself and Mayor Pro-Tem Nicole Brown, beginning with a message he sent at 9:07 a.m. on the morning after Mayor Pro-Tem Brown voted “yes” on the International Village purchase agreement. We have transcribed Hunter’s remarks and edited them for readability.

I’m not going to take up too many minutes. I’m just going to read a message between myself and Nicole Brown after the International Village purchase agreement hearing.

This is dated September 20th 9:07 a.m. This is from me: “Wow! Just wow.”

Then on September 21st 9:12 a.m. This is from Nicole Brown: “I get that you may not agree with my decision [to vote yes on the purchase agreement] but my reasoning was for further exploration as I do, and many other community members feel, this development would be viable if negotiated correctly. If our recommendations are not heeded or we do not come to agreement that is best for city, this development will not have my support in the next phase. To have shut it down on Tuesday would’ve left no room for change or discussion. And again I

understand that you and others may not agree and I take no issue with that. I respect that."

This is my response. September 21 9:30 a.m.: "I take issue with there be no transparency on the China trip and no clear information on who funded the trip. The public deserves better than that. Council did not respect the community's overwhelming opposition to moving forward with the purchase agreement. It wasn't your decision to make. It was theirs, and they were ignored blatantly. And that I do not respect. Especially in light of the behind the scenes pushback from Amanda [Edmonds] in particular towards having the special hearing on the 18th. I find her to be culturally incompetent and overconfident in her ability to perform basic duties to inform members of Ward 1 on these matters. As I've said before, I question her motives and allegiances. Not to mention her telling City Commissioner [Ka'Ron] Gaines she was going to vote yes regardless prior to the hearing on the 19th. Seems like the money had already decided for her. What was your reason for not being up front about the trip and its potential impact on your decision making process? And who funded your trip?"

I haven't gotten a response. I would like one tonight.

KATY

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS CITY COUNCIL'S INCOMPETENCE—CULTURAL AND OTHERWISE—AND UTTER DISREGARD FOR PEOPLE WITH LESS MONEY THAN THEM

This essay was written by an Ypsi resident named Katy. It was written in October of 2017 during the height of the “China trip” controversy and presents wide-ranging critiques of public officials’ handling of the International Village project, bringing into question officials’ capacity to make good decisions on behalf of all Ypsilantians.

Not too long ago, I remember telling a friend who lives in another state, “As weird as this sounds, because Ypsilanti is small, it’s the kind of town where some things can actually get done at city council.” oops. Never have I been more wrong. For many months now, the mayor, other members of Council, and some members of Council-appointed commissions have been doing what appears to be everything in their power to obstruct public input, destroy transparency, and sell off the largest publicly owned parcel of city land to a private developer so that

they and their friends can all get richer while the rest of Ypsilanti gets priced out and arrested.

Every single person on Council and many City employees, **ESPECIALLY BETH ERNAT**, have made it perfectly clear where they stand and what their values are. Despite working for a city of majority renters, they give absolutely no fucks about the well being of those renters and would be perfectly happy, elated even, if those renters were forced out of their city and newer, richer, more able to pay renters moved in to take their place. Amanda Edmonds, a person of principle when it comes to not entering a Starbucks while on her all-expenses-paid vacation, is morally bankrupt and devoid of any semblance of ethics when it comes to selling off her city in the face of intense public outcry. Beth Bashert, a woman who postures herself in support of affordable housing when it is for mostly white elderly people, does not want to talk at all about affordability with regards to this development and sees low-income renters as a "burden" on the city. Beth Ernat, inexplicably working as the director of community and economic development, didn't know what gentrification was until a few months ago. Pete Murdock and Brian Robb paint themselves as progressive hard-hitters that are responsive to their constituents while they bumble through each meeting failing to ask even the most blatantly obvious, basic questions about affordability and totally dropping the ball on the critically important investigations into the ethics violations.

These people do. not. care. They do not care about people of color, they do not care about renters, they do not care about low-income folks, they do not care about the history of Ypsilanti, they do not care about the indigenous people buried in the land they are proposing to develop, they do not care about you or me or anyone who came to Council to make a public comment. They care about one thing: growing the tax base. Okay, maybe two things: growing the tax base and

raising property values. We have a case of white, home-owning, neoliberal Council members throwing over half of Ypsilanti under the bus while they yawn and tell us about how they are "tired" and have "colds" and are "taking time off of social media for their mental health." That is violent and it is utterly outrageous that they expect to be treated with any amount of respect as they continue behaving in this way.

* QUIT YOUR JOB AMANDA * DARWIN: FIRE BETH ERNAT * IV OUT OF
YPSI * PUBLIC LANDS FOR PUBLIC GOOD * PUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING
IN WARD 2 * JAIL THE SLUMLORDS *

AMY C.S.

DEMOCRACY REQUIRES ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE PEOPLE

This essay was written in the closing hours of 2017, as the purchase agreement for International Village was set to expire. It reflects on the meaning of democracy and how it relates to community processes within the City of Ypsilanti. This essay is both personal and philosophical and closes with an invitation for residents to build power and connection together.

The meaning of "Democracy" in its purest form comes from the Greek word *δημοκρατία*, *dēmokratía*, which means "rule by the people." It describes a system of government in which the residents of a specific land mass elect representatives among themselves to form a governing body.

Democracy was designed to be a system of processing conflicts in which outcomes depend on what participants do, but **NO SINGLE FORCE IS TO CONTROL WHAT OCCURS AND ITS OUTCOMES.**

Democracy implies that the [hu]man[s] must take the responsibility for choosing rulers and representatives, and for the maintenance of said "rights" against the possible and probable encroachments of the government which [they] have sanctioned to act for [them] in public matters. —Ezra Pound, "ABC of Economics," 1933
[pronouns updated]

We can all likely agree that we'd prefer to see our elected officials represent us in a way that is ethical, transparent, and leads with love.

In Ypsilanti, we are literally part of a Watershed (turning point).

Ypsi is a small enough place that we can easily keep our eye on what's going on.

We have the potential to be a completely transparent community, one that has broken away from the status-quo "business as usual" development process that is so often violent.

Being engaged in a compassionate and observant manner, we can ensure our elected officials do not ignore the needs of the people (and place) they represent.

John F. Kennedy once said:

The very word "secrecy" is repugnant. No president should fear public scrutiny of his program. For from that scrutiny comes understanding; and from that understanding comes support or opposition. And both are necessary. I not only could not stifle controversy among your readers—I welcome it. This Administration intends to be candid about its errors; for as a wise man once said: "An error does not become a mistake until you refuse to correct it."

We intend to accept full responsibility for our errors; and we expect you to point them out when we miss them. WITHOUT DEBATE, WITHOUT CRITICISM, NO ADMINISTRATION AND NO COUNTRY CAN SUCCEED, AND NO REPUBLIC CAN SURVIVE. That is why the Athenian lawmaker Solon decreed it a crime for any citizen to shrink from controversy. And that is why our press was protected by the First Amendment—the only business in America specifically protected by the Constitution—not primarily to amuse and entertain, not to emphasize the trivial and sentimental, not to simply "give the public what it wants"—but to inform, to arouse, to reflect, to state our dangers and our opportunities, to indicate our crises and our choices, to lead, mold educate and sometimes even anger public opinion.

We might not always see eye to eye (it's almost certain that we won't), however, through the power of dialogue, we can rise to meet each other at the table.

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Going back to our Greek roots, *Agape* (Greek ἀγάπη, *agápē*) is a term referring to love, "the highest form of love, charity" to be precise. *Agape* embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance.

We've likely all witnessed this type of love at work in a variety of circumstances.

Volunteering on Lesbos Island, Greece in 2015 is where I have to-date most clearly observed the values of *Agape Love* at work for all beings present. Cooking tea and soup on the northern Lesbos Island shore (the frontline of what was being called "The Refugee Crisis") with a refugee solidarity network was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life.

The solidarity group (with eventual cooperation from the mayor of a small fishing village called Skala Sikamineas) occupied a portion of the shore where the majority of the refugee boats were landing for almost one year. There is where we provided dry clothes, a small warming station, hot tea, soup, sandwiches and an info station for refugees who were confused about where they had just arrived. We also worked to ensure needs were met as much as possible. A portion of the camp worked directly with the locals to ensure their needs were met and that they felt heard in the process. We did this in solidarity, filling in the gaps where aid agencies had not shown up.

The reason I ended up in Camp Platanos is closely related to Ypsilanti. I was inspired after spending time at a place called the Harmony

Collective. This house is filled with food that friends involved with the Hare Krishna movement cook every single day and give away at their home (108 N. Adams) behind the downtown Ypsi bus station. I cooked with the Harmony Collective while I was staying in Ypsi with my mom over the summer before traveling in 2015, helping them serve at Yoga-Fest in Northern Michigan. After this experience, I felt qualified to follow the call to a solidarity kitchen on Lesvos that I heard about while traveling through Greece.

There's something magical that happens when we come together over a shared set of values.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into, however I figured we never really know what we're doing anyway. I ended up staying on Lesvos for 3 months, and am still involved with solidarity networks in Europe and Turkey that were born out of the peak of the crisis in 2015.

This experience quickly taught me what's possible when you come together with the bottom line of filling the gaps wherever it's needed, which is why I've been so motivated to be a part of what's happening in Ypsilanti.

We are in the middle of a unique opportunity to distill the values of Agape Love into our democratic process.

When we are rooted in Agape Love style loving-kindness, it means
WE DO NOT SIT PASSIVELY ON THE SIDELINES WHILE OTHERS ARE
ACTIVELY NEGLECTED AND ABUSED.

Instead, we step up to the plate, knowing the love we lead with is our armor. Together we can look those that benefit from the distress, consciously or not, directly in the eye—aiming to dig out the root of why these dynamics are there in the first place.

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We're working towards uncovering pathways to a healthy, holistic approach at loving-kindness in our community. What does that look like? Taking care of our basic needs, while also taking care of those around us. Being there when someone needs a listening ear, showing up for a conversation even when it's uncomfortable, learning from each other, working side by side with each other. Realizing everyone is of equal value. We all deserve the opportunity to experience and give loving-kindness. Every being has valuable lessons to bring to the table. Many of the resources we need are so often there, yet they can also be difficult for people to access, (and/or there is a sense of shame and guilt behind accepting "charity").

As our community moves beyond the decaying International Village proposal and into the next chapter for Water Street, we invite you to sit with us at the table.

The more people step up to balance the power dynamics by communicating with our elected representatives, the greater ability we will have to grow this city in a way that considers all of its residents.

We need you.

Thank you for leaning in, whatever way you are inspired.

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