

Emily Gordon - Historic Districts

From: Ann Nichols <anniegnichols@gmail.com>
To: <council@cityofeastlansing.com>
Date: 4/8/2019 1:03 PM
Subject: Historic Districts

526 Forest Street
East Lansing

(517) 290-3962
April 8, 2019

Dear members of Council,

I am writing to encourage you not to remove historic districts in the City of East Lansing.

My family lives at 526 Forest Street, where we have resided for nineteen years. We have raised our children in this house, and bought it partly because there is a large ground floor bedroom with a bathroom that could easily let us "age in place."

My interest in preserving the historic districts goes far beyond the sentimental. The historic district is the sole protection for us against looking out to see American four-squares replaced by cookie-cutter townhouses. We are one of only two houses on this street that is *not* a student rental. The Oakwood Historic District Overlay does not in any way protect us; when it was created it could not be extended to Forest Street because it was already mainly rental properties.

It seems that maintaining the value of our property and preserving our enjoyment of living in a 1912 house in an historic district is at least as important as whether or not residents of Glencairn and the Oakwood Overlay are protected.

Finally, it might matter that we were "pioneers" in bringing our young family to live on a block of student rentals, and that we have put major time and effort into building relationships with every crop of new students in ways that have made this street civilized, and engendered mutual respect. The landlords know we're here; we make a practice of introducing ourselves and asking our student neighbors about themselves, and we take some pride in having created this model of town-gown relationships after being told by everyone from our realtor to ELPD officers that we might not be able to stick it out here.

If landlords are permitted to tear down the existing houses and build more modern structures on this street, we are faced (as we enter our senior years) with numerous blocks to sustaining our relationships with student renters. The porches on those houses (and ours) are frequent spots for conversation, or even just smiles and waves on a hot summer evening. More densely populated structures with no natural point of contact beyond the minutes spent walking from apartment to driveway means disconnection. It means students won't see us nearly as much, interact with our dog, grandkids, the young couple down the block with a baby, or remember that they live near a family and owe them the same respect they would show their own families.

We would have great difficulty selling this house and moving, because very few buyers are interested in living among undergraduates, and our house is zoned in such a way that it can't become a rental.

Maybe there's a compromise; maybe you could loosen some of the most difficult historic district rules so that landlords could modernize and update in ways that would benefit them and their tenants without destroying old houses and replacing them.

But in weighing interests I ask that along with landlords and potential developers you remember that we are here, with a lot of skin in the game. Our plans, our hard work in the neighborhood, and, honestly, our love for living in a place that on a snowy night with street light on...could be 1912.

Sincerely,

Ann Nichols