

Dear Members of the Urbana City Council,

I am writing in regards to the Hope Village project.

While I find this project intriguing and I hope it is successful, as I tried to learn more about it I could not help becoming focused on the residents who live in the immediate vicinity of the project site.

I do not live close enough to the project site to be personally affected, but I did visit the site and I listened to the public meetings where the project was discussed.

What I saw at these meetings were a number of residents, many of whom live in the Carver Drive neighborhood area immediately south of the project site, express valid concerns about how this project will affect their quality of life and the character of their neighborhood. I saw a great deal of confusion and frustration, and dare I say intimidation, caused by the Plan Commission and staff, regarding when and how residents could give public input during those meetings. I saw a number of residents express anguish - feeling that they had not been informed, consulted, and included in decision making regarding the project.

At the December 7th Plan Commission meeting, in front of the residents who already felt disenfranchised, I saw the entire Commission stand up and walk out of the Council Chambers so that they could discuss the Hope Village project in a place where those residents would not be able to listen and stay informed. This flagrant disregard for the Open Meetings Act took place with Mayor Marlin and Council Member Maryalice Wu present, and with the blessing of City Attorney David Wesner. Of the many public officials present, all of whom are required to go through Open Meetings Act training, not a single one spoke up for the rights of the residents in the audience that night.

At the December 18th Council meeting, I saw Urbana residents from more affluent neighborhoods (including at least one past City Council member), in an apparent attempt to hijack the moral high ground and remove focus from the actual concerns raised, accuse residents of the Carver Park neighborhood of "bigotry".

The Hope Village project may very well turn out to be an excellent idea, and I hope in the future I will be hearing about how amazingly successful it is.

However, if the City of Urbana desires that its operations make some residents feel disenfranchised and trampled upon, then you have succeeded once again. I believe the City owes the public a clearer accounting of their decision making process on this project, including an explanation and apology for unlawfully excluding the public from Plan Commission discussion on December 7th.

-Christopher Hansen