

November 1, 2024

Steve Fridsma  
2036 Joan Avenue NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

City of Grand Rapids Planning Committee and City Commissioners, c/o Elizabeth Zeller  
1120 Monroe NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I am a licensed architect and studied new urbanism at the University of Michigan as part of my Master's Degree. I have visited Seaside, Florida and Stapleton, Colorado merely as an urban planning "geek". I would point to Celadon New Town in Grand Rapids Township as a positive local example of similar principles. I also participated in some Community Master Planning workshops.

I am concerned about the **lack of clarity around the language regarding the CMP Compact Neighborhood Designation** as they relate to housing density in particular to the Huff Park and Cattail Crossings Nature Preserve.

Huff/Cattail is different from Riverside, Briggs, and Aberdeen parks, which are mown and developed with playgrounds, shelters, bathroom facilities, etc. At Huff Park, only the Northeast corner of the property, approximately 20% of the total land, is developed in this way. The majority of the park is a designated Nature Preserve.



In the map in the adjacent photo, north is down. The nature preserve is accessible from the parking lot on Aberdeen NE (bottom). The area in yellow is the wetlands. Knapp Street forms the south (top) border. There is a paved trail through the wooded portions of the preserve, and a boardwalk system through the wetland that the City improved in 2018 for over \$2 Million from the 2013 Park Millage and the Michigan DNR.

I live adjacent to this park in the southwest corner and daily see deer, wild turkeys, and many bird species. It is considered a "Birding HotSpot" by Audubon.com. Occasionally, we see opossums, skunks, foxes, wild turkey, barred owls, sandhill cranes, and mink. It is a much beloved oasis in the heart of the NE quadrant of Grand Rapids, one where users can feel far from the city when on the trail and boardwalk.

The proposed **Compact Neighborhood** zone is shown to surround this nature preserve, and appears to permit Multi-Family Housing. As the Master Plan cites, I too, would normally support changes that allow for more diversified housing types. However, the main reason for my letter is that I oppose permitting multi-family housing right up against the Nature Preserve, which I believe would wreck the experience of users of the park and discourage wildlife due to the increase of cars, noise, artificial light, and human activity.

Currently, the homes that border Huff Park/Cattail Crossings are on approximately 1/3 to 1/2 acre lots and are +/-2,000 sf ranches and split-level homes with quiet, deep backyards harmoniously facing the park, blurring the edges of backyard and park. Some homes are visible from the trail, especially in winter; however, most are far from the trail. My own home is approximately 900 feet from the Huff Park trail.

Neighbors and I are aware that a developer stated at a Creston Neighborhood Association Land Use Committee meeting that they wish to develop 35-45 townhouse condominiums on the property behind the farmhouse at 1435 Knapp Street NE which is only 2.5 acres, bordering Huff Park/Cattail Crossings. Because of the geometry of the Huff Park trail in this area and the location of 1435 Knapp Street NE, it would be possible to build townhomes within only 300 feet from the Huff Park trail using current set backs. While a specific proposal has not yet been submitted, I would like to believe that our City's leaders would agree that this degree of density and height would not be harmonious or compatible with the other properties adjacent to Huff Park and I believe would ruin people's experiences of Huff Park and its wildlife.

This same developer has also purchased 1491, 1449, 1443, and 1335 Knapp NE, as well as 2027 Joan Ave NE, in some cases under pseudonyms. Neighbors have reason to believe there is a deal in place for 1431 Knapp NE. This is about half of the properties between Ontario NE and Ball NE on the north side of Knapp NE that have been turned into rental properties. While these homes have been improved, they are being rented, not sold, and our community has become more transitional. There have been 3 different renters in 2027 Joan Ave NE alone with the past year, which makes it hard to build community.

We and neighbors have received requests to buy our homes from a number of different realtors. We and our neighbors are nervous that eventually these properties will be ganged together and torn down. The site is currently zoned low-density and I believe for good reason, and that is to keep the scale of buildings and density of human activity down for the wildlife and users of Huff Park, for it to remain a respite in the city. I am not opposed to single family homes behind 1435 Knapp Street, which would remain compatible with the scale and density of adjacent homes and not encroach upon Huff Park/Cattail Crossings with buildings, noise, glass, and artificial light at night.

I would like to suggest that there should be additional language specifically protecting our set-apart Nature Preserves, as opposed to more generic descriptions of "Open Space" or "Neighborhood Park", from adjacent dense development, which could defeat the purpose of our Nature Preserves, especially one as well-used, special, and recently invested in as Huff Park/Cattail Crossings, which is already bound on all four sides. There is general language about development being "Compatible" and "relating to the local development patterns" which can be VERY open to interpretation whether you are a bird watcher, neighbor, or a housing developer seeking to maximize profit for their investors.

Please consider using the Bridge to Our Future Community Master Plan to protect Huff Park, a jewel in our community, and other nature preserves from the encroachment of too much density and human activity, preserving them for the community's and wildlife enjoyment.

Thank you for considering this matter.

Respectfully submitted,



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