

SKYLINE FROM A1

Task force pushing city to increase density downtown

in place within a year. At this time, Hieftje said, he is against a new millage.

Others on the council were more receptive.

"This is the first I've heard about it," said Bob Johnson, D-1st Ward. "It's certainly something worth exploring."

Council Member Kim Groome, D-1st Ward, said the Affordable Housing Task Force recommended a similar millage to pay for affordable housing in 2000, but the idea never gained support.

"I do think when we use them to meet community goals, they are a good thing," Groome said of the proposed tax.

With a millage, developers in theory would face fewer obstacles to building. That would translate to lower housing prices. These are considered key to attracting young professionals. The city would like to see more housing in a price range of \$250,000 to \$380,000 downtown.

Newcombe Clark is the type of resident Ann Arbor is trying to draw to its downtown.

He's 23 years old. He is a successful commercial real-estate broker. And he rents a two-floor apartment downtown because it's too expensive to own a similar residence.

Clark, who didn't attend Monday's meeting, said he's for more development downtown.

"If it is done right, you can add greenspace and keep the feel of Ann Arbor," Clark said. "If you want your downtown to be healthy, you have to put bodies there. Not just bodies that are working. But people that are living there, too."

The Downtown Residential Task Force released its report last summer, but Monday night was the first time the task force,

the council and the Planning Commission have gotten together to discuss it. The report was based on a six-month study that looked at the barriers to development in the downtown.

Among the findings were that the community has a "not in my backyard" sentiment that city representatives support. The city's development approval process moves very slowly with a historical lack of political support and departmental coordination.

Other recommendations included:

- The city has put up "economic barriers" to reducing the cost of building with high utility connection fees, footing drain disconnects and developer contributions to affordable housing and parks.

- The city should change zoning to allow for greater height and density throughout downtown. The city should encourage residential towers of up to 12 stories.

- The city should consider building additional publicly owned parking facilities.

The height of downtown buildings is probably the most controversial part of the community discussions. For instance, a recent proposal by a developer to build 14-story and 9-story residential towers on North Main Street near Kerrytown was widely rejected.

Some environmentalists have called for new building heights not to exceed four stories, while the mayor has said he would support buildings as high as 15 stories "on rare occasions" in certain parts of downtown.

Council Member Leigh Greden, D-3rd Ward, said building heights as high as 14 stories would work only if it made housing more affordable downtown.

"What I don't want to see is a



ROBERT CHASE, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

An historical marker anchors the southeast corner of Main and Liberty streets where buildings owned by Amvest Property Management Inc. are located. New "luxury lofts" are advertised for rent in the third building from the left, creating more living space downtown.

14-story building with units selling for \$400,000 to \$500,000," Greden said.

Resident Rita Mitchell showed up Monday to give her views and was disappointed there was no public commentary.

Mitchell said the task force's recommendations heavily favored developers.

"It was very developer-focused," Mitchell said. "It feels like a lot of concrete and it's very dense. ... Instead of a lively downtown, they could get a

dense and dead downtown."

Resident Margaret Wong attended the Downtown Residential Task Force meeting last summer. She said she still needs to see the details before making any decisions.

"It's too early," Wong said. "We want to see Ann Arbor remain vibrant. But the devil is in the details."

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