

March 17, 2024

Dear Mayor and members of City Council,

Ten years ago a previous City Council approved the creation of the UV-D, UV-T, and CMU commercial district ordinances. This Council has an opportunity to change them. The UV-D site of the old Randalls is one of Bellaire's prime commercial locations. Requirements of the UV-D include zero setback of at least 75% of the front of a building, located on the property line, and a minimum height of 2-stories. Site coverage can be as much as 90%, and that can mean wall-to-wall buildings, with little or no green space. Does that represent the City of Bellaire, our city of homes?

Those changes in 2014 enabled the construction of the new H-E-B plus the loss of numerous small businesses. The mess of parking spaces and plantings in that area were then promoted as a move to a new look, similar to Highland Village or the Sugar Land town center. That hasn't happened, all we've gotten out of it is narrow streets and unsightly landscaping, which the City must maintain.

Regarding more retail, some of us can recall a time when Bellaire's busy downtown had a variety of small businesses: dress shops, a children's clothing store, menswear shops, hardware stores, appliance stores and a record shop. There were a couple of grocery stores, a furniture store, even a drugstore with a soda fountain. Gone now, or moved online, and at this point in Bellaire's history, other than food establishments most retail has been in decline, and our close proximity to Meyerland Center and the Galleria provide plenty of shopping opportunities.

My concern is that with the Randalls site once again available we could end up with mixed-use multi-family. Tall buildings filled with apartments or condos, with businesses along the ground floor. Considering the complaints about the METRO transit station, does Bellaire really need residential rental properties in the middle of town? In most small affluent cities multi-family is either not allowed or is located on the fringe, such as the current location for the apartments at 4301 Bissonnet.

I doubt that most Bellaire residents want to see their most visible downtown site lost to tall buildings jammed against Bellaire Blvd and Bissonnet. There's nothing attractive about a view of a parking garage, and 90% site coverage wouldn't leave much room for trees or green space, either.

Please, listen to the residents and revise the UV-D. Move to one or two-story commercial structures for shops or offices, pull-in parking, and plenty of trees. We need green space with benches, not concrete with some sort of underground tanks. Limit building heights to 40 or 45 feet or 2-1/2 stories. Site coverage to 60% or less.

Make that area a park-like destination that folks can enjoy, as visitors to the businesses or just driving past. Then please move on to the UV-T and CMU and revise the onerous requirements in those districts as well. Thank you.

Jane McNeel