



# CITY OF EAST LANSING

The Home of Michigan State University

September 6, 2018

Ann Nichols  
ELi Managing Editor  
P.O. Box 115  
East Lansing, MI 48823

Dear Ms. Nichols,

We are writing this letter in response to the recent ELi article, “Fire Marshal Review Missing on Center City Project,” dated August 30, 2018:

<https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/fire-marshall-review-missing-center-city-project>.

The entire premise of the article is misleading as no such physical “fire marshal review” exists, or is required, for this project or any other project. The fire marshal is nonetheless involved every step of the way, from evaluating all plans – including the building code and plan reviews – to attending the ongoing regularly scheduled site plan and progress meetings, which take place weekly.

City Manager’s Office  
410 Abbot Road  
East Lansing, MI 48823

(517) 319-6920  
Fax (517) 337-1607  
[www.cityofeastlansing.com](http://www.cityofeastlansing.com)

East Lansing Fire Marshal Don Carter’s role is to evaluate and provide feedback on the professionally prepared plans and reviews that are put together by the code officials and consultants for the project and he has done just that. He has provided his expertise and feedback on all fire safety-related aspects of this project, including accessibility in the event of an emergency, proper separation between the two buildings, where hoses can be hooked up, where alarm panels will be located, installation of new fire hydrants, installation of fire suppression (i.e. sprinklers) and all other items related to the fire safety code. To say that the project “apparently skipped the normal Fire Marshal review stage” is inaccurate. The fire marshal has more than 80 hours invested in this project. According to Carter, “This is a dynamic ongoing process. Everything is continuously reviewed for critical errors and mistakes. If we find deficiencies, the developer makes them right and we move forward.”

As to ELi’s statement that it “seemed” that, in a fire, the design of the buildings might create an accidental “chimney” and that it would be difficult for firefighters to access, the City’s fire marshal reviewed all designs for the buildings and has no more concern for the Center City District structures than for any other building in the community. The buildings meet code, including all requirements for fire suppression. ELi has no evidence provided by a qualified professional to the contrary.

It’s also inaccurate to state that “City staff never checked to make sure final design plans for the project match what Council approved.” The project does meet all of the conditions approved by Council (setbacks, zoning, etc.). As is common in building projects, there will be minor changes once construction is underway and the code allows for administrative approval of those changes. When changes are made, all appropriate parties – including the fire marshal – evaluate every change for fire safety-related implications.



# CITY OF EAST LANSING

The Home of Michigan State University

Staff members with the East Lansing Fire Department and East Lansing Department of Planning, Building & Development have worked in collaboration with one another to ensure the Center City District project (along with all other construction projects) are built to meet all code requirements and staff members meet weekly with project architects, designers and builders to discuss construction progress and any issues that arise. Additionally, all plans for the project have been reviewed by all appropriate parties and all required inspections have and will continue to take place. Everyone involved with the construction of this project are experts in their field and they have the full support of City leadership, including the East Lansing City Council, as they work to ensure that this project is successfully completed with the safety of the community in mind.

While we support Eli's right as a nonprofit news source to inform residents about City news, we do ask that your reporters be transparent in their reporting and provide fair, accurate, balanced and unbiased information to readers. We also ask that your reporters respect the fact that City staff members have full-time jobs providing public services to the community and cannot accommodate endless lines of questioning as your reporters research their stories. If you do decide to comment publicly on this letter, we do ask that, with transparency in mind, you share this entire letter with the public in a prominent position in your article.

City Manager's Office  
410 Abbot Road  
East Lansing, MI 48823

(517) 319-6920  
Fax (517) 337-1607  
[www.cityofeastlansing.com](http://www.cityofeastlansing.com)

City staff works hard every day to build community, reinvest in infrastructure and provide exceptional City services to the community. If we make mistakes, we work to fix them and prevent them from happening again.

In an attempt to set the record straight about the ELi story addressed in this letter, we sent a previous City communication to the author on August 31, 2018 and, yet, damaging and false information still remains in the original and subsequent follow-up articles. Given that there is no foundation to the ELi story addressed in this letter, we ask that it be retracted. We also extend an invitation to come take a tour of the Center City District construction site with our Planning staff to learn more about the process and the project.

Sincerely,

George Lahanas  
East Lansing City Manager

CC: ELi Board of Directors – Alice Dreger, Stephen Thomas, Travis Stoliker, Sam Hosey Jr. and Michael A. Lawrence