

Apr. 8, 2013  
Hon. Henrietta Davis, Mayor  
Cambridge City Council

MIT PUD-5 Petition

Dear Mayor Davis and Members of the Council:

I urge you to support the continued improvement of Kendall Square, to strengthen its evolution into a vibrant and vital mixed-use neighborhood, to ease the pressure on lab and office space that's squeezing out the next generation of start-ups, and most of all, to add a significant new supply of housing to our city by supporting the PUD-5 petition, as well as two proposed amendments that will make it even more worthwhile.

The questions that you and your colleagues have posed, the feedback of community groups and leaders, and the careful attention of planning groups have combined to produce a careful, thoughtful, and balanced proposal. It promises to deliver a well-rounded package of community benefits, a substantial amount of new housing, and a robust mix of uses that will push Kendall Square further along its transition from a sterile office district to a lively neighborhood. Good planning, and good-faith negotiation, deserves to be rewarded.

If it has a fault – and on this, its critics and supporters seem to agree – it lies in trying to accomplish too little, and not too much. The PUD-5 needs more housing. There may, in fact, be no site in Cambridge better-suited to the construction of very tall residential buildings. It sits atop the junction of jobs, services, transit, and retail. For years, the city has sought to increase the residential community in Kendall Square, extending its vitality beyond working hours. Moreover, there are no residential abutters at this site to object to a building of greater height than their own.

Councillor Cheung has proposed increasing the maximum height of the proposed residential building from 300 to 350 feet, in exchange for additional units designated for affordable and middle-income housing. I would much prefer to see a far taller structure on the site, adding as much as possible to our city's housing stock, even if that means mixing in some additional market-rate units. Opportunities like this one are quite rare, and should be maximized. Even so, I urge you to support Councillor Cheung's amendment as a compromise measure, and as a step in the right direction, although 350 feet is much too short for this site.

Amending the PUD-5 to include 18% affordable units and a 350 foot tower would make a solid proposal even better. I hope that you will support these proposals, and help reinforce Cambridge's strengths while addressing its pressing needs.

Sincerely,

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