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Lopez, Donna

From: randa ghattas [randaghattas@yahoo.com]
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2013 1:58 PM
To: City Council
Cc: Lopez, Donna
Subject: MIT Petition

Dear City Council members,

I am writing in support of the MIT petition. Specifically, I am writing to support the increased height request to 350 feet for additional housing. I consider the housing one of the most important components of the petition. I hope that we can understand that in order to meet the housing needs of current and future residents of Cambridge, it is important to take on smart growth strategies that embrace height for housing on major street arteries, such as Main Street and Massachusetts Ave. I also consider the middle income housing component an important addition that needs to be included in future proposals of housing across the city, especially as Cambridge is increasingly becoming a city of have's and have nots. As a city, we are losing our middle income tier rapidly to the detriment of our neighborhoods and schools. I am also in favor of many of the community benefits that are included:

* conveyance of the parking lot at 35 Cherry Street to the City (an excellent opportunity for the city to develop middle income housing on a street full of parking lots)
* commitments to create apprenticeship opportunities for Cambridge youth during construction
* work on a pedestrian/bicycle path adjacent to the Grand Junction railway (on the condition that it does not jeopardize the potential of the Urban Ring at a future date)
* commitment to a deed covenant to keep micro-unit tenants from applying for residential parking permits
* significant "community benefit" payments

On that note, I am going to write that I am less than pleased with the process. It resulted in many last minute changes that are difficult for anyone, except those deeply involved, to track. The Council, if it wants citizens to trust them, needs to do a better job of negotiation and must develop mechanisms to make ensure transparency and to hold MIT accountable for the commitments it is making.

Finally, while I support this petition, I am truly concerned about two key things: future housing needs and sustainability. Ideally, I would like to see much more housing in this proposal. As MIT (and for that matter, any other developer) continues to develop land in Cambridge, I want to see mixed use development with housing as a primary component of the plans. In addition, I am disappointed at the proposal from the perspective of sustainability. I hope that as the proposal develops and projects get proposed, the city council is very attentive to questions of sustainability. Currently, run of the mill strategies toward sustainability (such as LEED Gold) are common. MIT has the potential of taking advantage of its landholdings to truly create a sustainable framework for development by investing in public transportation, alternative modes of transportation, and resilient strategies toward landscape and buildings, from energy efficiency/net zero buildings to landscape mitigation and management.

Thank you
Randa Ghattas
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Cambridge MA