

28

Lopez, Donna

From: Ovadia R Simha [simha@MIT.EDU]
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2013 11:21 AM
To: City Council; Lopez, Donna
Cc: Marc Levy; Michael Farrell; Robert Winters; Erin Baldassari; Michael Morisy; Paul McMorrow; Robert Weisman; Scott Kirsner; tjan@globe.com
Subject: MIT-IMCO Zoning Petition for PUD 5

Dear Members of the City Council

For the past two years I have provided you with a perspective on the MITIMCO petition, in its various forms. A perspective that I hoped would serve to help you evaluate the short and long term implications of this proposal. I did that both a result of my 40 years of experience guiding MIT's planning and development and as a devoted citizen of this city with children and grandchildren who call Cambridge home.

I began by reminding you of the obligations that MIT took on in 1965 and 1967 to use certain land and buildings acquired by MIT for exclusively academic uses in exchange for the transfer of \$6.2 million dollars in Federal funds to Cambridge. Funds that permitted Cambridge to undertake the Kendall Square Urban Renewal project. Without those funds and the commitment that MIT made to the Cambridge City Council and the Federal Government, Cambridge would never have been able to undertake this project. The project that now provides a major portion of the tax revenue the city now enjoys. You were provided with a complete set of documents that chronicled those agreements along with materials that described MIT and neighborhood efforts to build a Kendall Square with a balance of housing, commercial buildings and retail services.

While there is still contention about MIT's legal obligations, a matter which is under further review by officials at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington, there is no question that the moral and ethical obligations that MIT undertook to both support the city in a time of great economic need and to insure the rational expansion of the academic campus into the future was well understood and supported by six generations of MIT presidents. Trust is a vital component of town and gown relationships. When one partner breaks its word there is little basis for a healthy long term relationship. That trust is now in jeopardy as a result of this petition.

As you know well, the success of the revival of the economic base of Cambridge in the eastern end of the city has been driven in many ways by MIT through its investments in Technology Square and University Park and more importantly by its production of a continuing stream of innovations by its faculty and students. It is the expectation that this flow of ideas and people, that have drawn major corporations to Cambridge, will continue into the future. If that flow is curtailed by a lack of academic space and the resulting reduction of laboratory based innovations, then there will be little reason for these corporations to continue to remain here. In other words, by encouraging this petition, which would convert academic expansion opportunities to commercial development, you will be killing the golden goose that has provided the city with the wealth it now enjoys.

You have been offered, as a result of a succession of criticisms by councillors and the public, a number of so called community benefits to pass this petition. Most of the offerings have been drawn from the K2 C2 study. Some, as the result of long festering issues such as parcels of land in existing neighborhoods that have sat fenced in and lifeless for decades when they could have been used for much needed parks and open space. The site offered at Cherry street is a case in point. There, the contribution is made without a commitment to prepare a design, develop the site and endow its public purpose to insure that it will be

maintained into the future. This in contrast to the creative solution that MIT and the city came up with at the Pacific Street park in Cambridgeport in the 1990's.

You have heard much about the need for housing from Graduate students but you have heard nothing about the need for housing MIT's employees. The MITIMCO petition, once again, ignores these two important groups of people who are critical to MIT and Cambridge's future. The study that has been initiated to determine the need for graduate housing may recommend a housing program for graduate students but you have no guarantee that it will result in MIT's fulfilling its long standing commitment to house at least 50% of its graduate students. You need to have the results of that study and the commitment to act on it before you vote on any proposal .

A painful example of MIT's lack of interest in housing its staff , except when forced to, was the effort that a group of MIT faculty and staff embarked on in 2007 when we tried to get MIT's support to help us build a residential co-op within walking distance of the campus. Without that support we were never able to fully realize this goal. You must seek to get MIT to understand the importance to Cambridge of having more of its employees be part of the Cambridge community.

You have been told that MIT's leadership has been promised a new revenue stream of \$25 to 30 million dollars a year and that the city will receive a \$10 million dollar tax revenue. This is likely to be a shell game in which within ten years commercial space built under MITIMCO's proposal will likely be used for academic purposes and be removed from the tax roles. In turn, MIT will cease to receive the revenue it now dreams about. In other words a lose - lose proposition.

It is wonderful that MITIMCO believes in economic opportunities in Cambridge. There are many opportunities for it to invest its funds in projects in Cambridge that do not conflict with the MIT's principal purpose, education and research. MIT demonstrated that in Technology Square, University Park and at 1 Kendall Square. With its partnerships with Alexandria REIT, BIOMED and Boston Properties. MITIMCO has been holding properties in Cambridge in limbo for many years, property that could have been employed for use as innovation spaces (see the empty former Polaroid buildings on Main Street) and for housing (see California Paint and Fort Washington). The council should use its powers to encourage more of that kind of investment. Investment that will be lasting.

Finally, beware of buying a "pig in a poke". The proposal before you promises much but guarantees little. The planning of this area is still in motion. The MIT Faculty task force believes that it will have the opportunity to make substantial changes in the planning of the east campus south of Main Street and has said so publicly. You may find that you will experience "buyers remorse " because you did not wait until you had a firm development proposal agreed to by all parties before you provided the zoning and development incentives that you are being asked to vote on. This is not a new idea. Before University Park went forward the City Council had a real plan and real agreements on everything from land uses, building sites, design standards, traffic plans, affordable and market housing programs and mitigation actions signed and sealed before the final zoning .

Be wise let this petition expire so that you can develop a real and balanced partnership with MIT

O. Robert Simha