

October 7, 2013

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To: The Honorable City Council – City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

RE: Proposed Long Term lease of Parking Spaces and portion of ground floor at City-owned First Street Garage

The letter to the City Manager from Leggat McCall dated September 26, 2013 requesting leasing arrangements for parking once the Sullivan Courthouse has been redeveloped is of great concern to neighbors and members of the East Cambridge Planning Team (ECPT).

The Team has worked internally with members to develop a proposal for a project which would include not only the courthouse block but also the municipal garage block. This proposal was presented to the ECPT membership and was provisionally approved. It was also presented to Leggat McCall and members of the Community Development Department of the City as well as to several City Councilors. While it was ambitious and would have required Leggat McCall to adjust some parts of its design of the courthouse, we felt a two-block development would greatly improve the area in and around this end of East Cambridge.

The request mentions the possibility of a ground floor retail space on the first floor of the garage which Leggat McCall would manage. This was also a factor in our proposal and so we are pleased to note the combination of a retail space and parking in the letter. There is a fairly lengthy process before the property can be released for disposition; one part of which includes a request for proposal. We respectfully request that a resident or residents of the East Cambridge community be included at all stages of the drafting process of the RFP and subsequent selection process. An open and transparent RFP process will assure the community that our concerns are being considered during this important phase.

The Council has demonstrated leadership over the last few terms with regard to requiring the phasing of certain elements of larger scale projects within the City to ensure those items that are beneficial to the community are completed in a timely fashion along with those that are potentially more lucrative for a developer. Recent examples include the "Central Park" at Northpoint and the phasing of park and residential components in the Alexandria rezoning. We strongly urge the Council to include similar requirements in the leasing proposal(s) for the garage spaces and the retail space along First Street. Possible phasing avenues include requiring the selected developer to have completed and opened the market before the leased garage spaces can be made available for their use. In addition, requiring the completion of construction of the residential and retail aspects of the Courthouse redevelopment in the timeline is also critical to enhancing the area around the Courthouse.

Sincerely,  
Rhoda Fantasia



Chair, Courthouse Subcommittee; East Cambridge Planning Team

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