

Lopez, Donna

From: Saul Tannenbaum [saul@tannenbaum.org]
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2013 11:50 AM
To: City Council; Lopez, Donna
Subject: Awaiting Report Item Number 13-42: The Cleanliness of Central Square

To the Honorable, The City Council:

On September 30th, the Cambridge City Council approved a policy order requesting that the City devote more resources to the cleanliness of Central Square. On the agenda for Monday's Council meeting is the City Manager's response, a response the Council should reject. The Council order is straightforward. Besides requesting that the City engage in a partnership with businesses it says:

That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to direct the Department of Public Works to devote a greater number of resources towards the challenge of improving the cleanliness of Central Square; with the specific goal of reducing litter, odors, graffiti, improving sidewalk conditions and plantings

The response of Acting Commissioner of Public Works Owen O'Riordan, delivered through City Manager Rich Rossi says:

The Department of Public Works has devoted substantial resources aimed at reducing litter, graffiti, and odors, and improving sidewalk conditions and plantings in Central Square. We expect to continue and increase these efforts where possible,

We should be grateful that O'Riordan rules out reducing resources. But, to a direct request from the Council, the City responds with a resounding "maybe".

This shouldn't be good enough for the Council. The City should either commit new resources or explain why that's not possible.

When it comes to the cleanliness of Central Square, or any part of the City, what matters is outcome, not effort. O'Riordan's long list of efforts includes not a single word about the actual cleanliness of the Square.

As for the list efforts to keep the Square clean, the lack of context renders the list meaningless. Are the efforts proportionate to other areas of the City? Is more work being done now than a year ago? How can anyone without a background in public works evaluate this response without needed context?

But what should trouble Councilors the most is the tone of the response. The Council's request for more resources is one result of effort from numerous citizens concerned about the state of Central Square. In Riordan's response there isn't even the briefest acknowledgment of that effort. Wouldn't it be a refreshing change for the City to respond - and mean - as follows:

We would like to thank the residents of Cambridge for taking the time and effort to help improve Central Square. We know you take pride in your City and hold its services to the highest of standards. We regret that we haven't met your expectations and will work to rectify that as quickly as we can.

That's the City I want to live in, and the sort of City government in which one could take pride.

- Saul Tannenbaum
16 Cottage St.

cc: City Clerk Donna Lopez, for inclusion in the record

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