

4/7/14

I thank Councilors Simmons, Mazen, and Carlone for proposing Order #14, which calls for a city councilor-led process to develop a Master Plan. Their order recognizes the intensifying concerns that residents have long expressed about the quantity and type of development that is happening in Cambridge, and the fact that development is taking place without comprehensive city-wide planning.

I also appreciate that Mayor Maher, Vice-Mayor Benzan, and Councilor McGovern want to respond to residents' concerns.

As I see it, how you define the problem is important. Residents are concerned about both the current process of planning and the resulting future development going forward. I think most of us want to build a diverse, livable, and affordable city- the question is how to get there.

I feel a city-wide Master Plan would really benefit my Area 4 neighborhood. With an inclusive and participatory process, I think we will develop a better plan for Central and Kendall Squares than has resulted so far under the city's current approach to planning. With a city-wide comprehensive Master Plan, residents would be confident that there will not be consequences from development in other parts of the city negatively impacting our neighborhood. While we improve the K2C2 plans, I'd like to see a pause until July 2014 in considering the Kendall and Central up-zoning proposals. There is considerable public support for this position, as shown in April 2013, when I presented to the Council over 500 signatures on paper and another 300 signatures online on a petition that called for a Master Plan and a pause in up-zoning large projects.

Some Councilors say that working on a Master Plan now will take attention away from solving the urgent situation of families being displaced. I am fully confident that the Councilors, City Manager, and city staff can work on two tracks at the same time both on passing urgent short-term measures to reduce displacement, and on creating a comprehensive plan that considers development throughout our city and in the region.

Some Councilors say says working on a Master Plan will take too long, and meanwhile families will be displaced, so we need to talk now about how to build more housing. I agree there is an urgent need to prevent displacement by creating more housing that is affordable to working and middle income families. Affordable housing is an important issue to me, because I think it is the cornerstone to keeping some degree of racial and economic diversity in Cambridge. What we do not need to do is build lots more market-rate housing, without considering the impact on diversity, livability, and sustainability.

I think there are a number of things the Council could do relatively quickly to create affordable housing. The Housing Committee meeting chaired by Councilor Simmons really highlighted the need for more affordable housing funds, so that the non-profit developers will not continue to miss opportunities to build more affordable units. I hope the Council will soon increase the incentive zoning rate from \$4.58 to \$7.80 per SF, as recommended in the 2002 Nexus study. Such funds would allow developers of affordable housing to be competitive in this market.

The City Council is charged in the Zoning Ordinance with reviewing and recalculating the rate every 3 years. However, the City Council has not discussed a recalculation since 1997 when they backed off increasing the amount. I'm frustrated that one of the best two funding mechanisms that we have to increase affordable housing has been left to languish by the Council while a huge amount of commercial development has occurred. Imagine how much money the Novartis building, 300 Mass. Ave., and other large buildings could have generated for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund if the rate had been set at the Nexus level.

For people who prefer Order #15 because they want housing built now, I encourage them to ask the Council to halt special permits and upzoning proposals for commercial buildings, which would encourage building housing under the current zoning.

In closing, I encourage you to vote for Order #14 for councilor-led and inclusive process to develop a Master Plan.

Thank you all for working to plan an affordable, diverse, and livable Cambridge.

Sincerely,

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