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To: Cambridge City Councilors
From: Jacqueline King, Member of the Cambridge Residents Alliance
Re: Vote "Yes" for a Cambridge Master Plan
Date: April 7, 2014

Dear Cambridge City Councilors,

Please vote "yes" tonight on Policy Order #14, calling for the launching of a process to develop an updated citywide Master Plan for Cambridge, under the guidance and direction of the City Council.

Many thanks to Councilors Carlone, Mazen and Simmons for bringing this important motion forward, and to all of you in advance for giving a Master Plan process your thoughtful consideration. The Cambridge Residents Alliance and other neighborhood groups have been calling for a Master Plan for some time. We have collected some 800 signatures on petitions calling for a Master Plan over the past two years, which we presented to the previous City Council. We are grateful that our voices are being heard.

We would also strongly urge you to take a "pause" in making decisions about major up-zoning proposals until certain basic elements of a Master Plan process have been completed. The potential scope and accelerating pace of development in this city -- a likely 22 million square feet of new commercial and residential space over the next 20 years, if all proposals coming before the city are taken into account (more than half already approved) -- require that we have a serious public discussion about where we are headed as a city.

I want to mention two major policy issues that a Master Plan would need to address:
Affordable Housing and Sustainability.

Affordable Housing: Some say we don't have time to develop a Master Plan, we need to just "Build Housing Now!" Let's examine the situation. Many thousands of longtime Cambridge families have been priced out of the city since rent control ended in 1994. A Master Plan needs to squarely address the displacement and gentrification that have already taken place and will increase under the current wave of development. Plans for many thousands of new residential units are underway in different parts of the city, ranging from Northpoint to Kendall Square to Central Square to Fresh Pond / Alewife. But 88% of these are for market-rate and luxury apartments. Only a small number of affordable units would result from these proposals, under the current inclusionary zoning ordinance. *This massive construction of market-rate units will continue to have a ripple effect on the surrounding neighborhoods, pushing up rents and housing prices and resulting in a net loss of affordable units, thus driving even more low- and middle-income residents out of the city. By following this path, we will become a less affordable, less diverse, less inclusive city.*

A Master Plan should call for the required inclusion of affordable units to be raised from 11.5% to at least 25%. (A recent MAPC report for Somerville recommended 35% to

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prevent displacement.) But it should also encourage the development of affordable housing for itself, not just as a portion of luxury towers. The city should target city-owned land and use creative funding mechanisms to build 100% affordable housing on some lots--built on a human scale, in keeping with the neighborhood. It should also call on MIT to build dedicated housing, on land it already owns, for the majority of its 5000 graduate students and post-doctoral fellows who do not currently live on campus.

Sustainability: Our city should be a leader in the fight against climate change. We need to develop a robust sustainability plan, as part of an overall Master Plan, that encourages: energy efficiency, renewable energy, green building, recycling, waste reduction, fewer cars, more public transit, walking, and biking, all as part of an integrated whole. All development in the city should be evaluated--and either approved or discouraged--in light of these broad criteria. We have been firm supporters of the Net Zero emissions requirement for major new developments.

Planning to Date: One final word about planning. No one is saying that any previous planning efforts should be "scrapped." A Master Plan process should respect the previous efforts and incorporate any of their best elements. However, some planning efforts have been deeply flawed. The K2C2 process for example, included mostly those with a direct economic stake in a "big development" outcome, and then added a small number of residents hand-picked by the city manager who did not represent the neighborhood organizations. We are calling for a more bottom-up, community-based planning process. We are confident that the Carlone-Mazen-Simmons Master Plan policy order would have the best chance of bringing about this democratic and inclusive process, partly because it would be led by our elected officials who are accountable to the people.

Thank you very much for your attention. Good luck in your deliberations tonight.

Sincerely,

Jackie King
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