

Testimony in Support of Order #14
Monday, April 7, 2014
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I have such relief that we have all come together tonight to look at the question of how to do meaningful planning for the Cambridge of the future. I agree with anyone who says that there are elements of a plan scattered in many places, produced by dozens of community members and city staff focused on one piece of the elephant. Tonight, we decide how to embrace the whole elephant and involve many of the over 1,000 people who have signed a petition or come to a meeting over the last two years to plead for a citywide plan for development that looks at the whole picture. Indeed, we are all connected in this 6 square miles and what happens to one neighborhood impacts most of all of us.

In my own small attempt to be involved and informed, I've been looking into some of the structural ways we are required by our state and local laws and why I am deeply concerned that our Community Department has lost its focus on overall planning and should not be leading this next stage of our city planning. Rather, they should be supporting the process with professional expertise. I support Order #14 by Councilors Carlone, Mazen and Simmons. Here are a few things I've learned during the past two years:

The Planning Board:

- The Community Development Department staffs the Planning Board (at least 3 staffers usually present, including the Assistant City Manager;
- Three members' and one associate member's terms expired on March 13, 2014; one vacancy has not been filled for a while – the public has not been informed of any reappointments; we know qualified people who have applied and heard no response over the years;
- Mass. General Laws Ch. 41, Sec. 81A requiring planning boards states that the terms of board members should be staggered so the term of one member shall expire every year – neither the City Manager or his designated department seem to care whether our planning board meets state law;
- The chair has served as a member since 1988 and as chair for a large portion of that time;
- MGH Ch. 41 S70 -- The PB "shall make careful studies of the resources, possibilities and needs of the town, particularly with respect to conditions injurious to public health or otherwise in and about rented dwellings, and make plans for the development of the municipality, with special reference to propose housing of its inhabitants;
- The Community Development website states that the PB "engages in general planning efforts to improve the physical environment of the city;" – this is NOT the experience of residents who bring their concerns there – the PB approves plans one by one with little notice of the impact of a project on its environment or that of the city as a whole;
- The criteria the PB uses to grant Special Permits are not clear and often seem to be ignored;
- The Community Development Department clearly is not making certain a key component of the planning process is meeting even the letter of the law; most residents attending the PB come away with an experience that the developer need only appear to be granted all or almost all of his/her requests; it's as if the process is designed to create resident frustration and finally apathy.

The Incentive Zoning Ordinance adopted by the City Council in 1988 asks developers who request an increase in density or intensity of use to mitigate the impact of the demand for housing that

accompanies their office development by contributing funds to the Affordable Housing Trust. In 2002, the city's NEXUS study that recommends the amount set it at \$7.83 per square foot after a base amount of square footage. The City Council is required to review and recalculate that Incentive every 3 years – it has not done so in memory. Today, 12 years later, the amount is \$4.58.

- Wouldn't it be the CDD's role to monitor the need for an increase and to bring recommendations to the City Council?
- Look at the amount of commercial development built in Cambridge since 2002 – imagine what almost twice the square foot amount would have produced in funds for affordable housing.

Inclusionary Zoning – It is clear that the current 15% requirement of affordable units in developments of 10 or more is woefully inadequate – especially because it results in 11.5% and few developers agree to more than absolute the minimum. Yet CDD and others promote the current Inclusionary amount as adequate and have stonewalled questions about that.

Regarding Affordable Housing – the people we've lost due to rising rents that the NEXUS Study pegs directly to commercial development and higher-income workers moving into the city far outnumber the people we can house using inadequate Incentives and Inclusionary Zoning. We must address these issues immediately and as a priority. Waiting for the next NEXUS study in 6 months to a year is not adequate.

The Community Development Department has not been a resource to residents seeking professional, fact-based information; during the discussion of up-zoning for the Forest City Biolab at 300 Mass. Ave. and the MIT Real Estate Corporation's up-zoning proposals for commercial development on their academic campus, the CDD appeared to be a formal ally; the staff had not researched the original agreement with Forest City requiring affordable housing much of which had become unaffordable and was about to expire; and was supporting Forest City's statement that they had already built all that was required.

The C2 process:

- A handpicked group – interested residents treated like interlopers;
- Led by CDD with a push for up-zoning
- CDD final report encourages use of the Special Planning process as the "platform" for approving the C2 zoning guidelines that, in one case, could approve an increase from the 55 feet allowed by zoning to 140 feet with just a special permit that some say is presumed to be granted.