

23

Lopez, Donna

From: Seth Zeren [seth.zeren@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, April 06, 2014 1:09 PM
To: City Council; Lopez, Donna
Subject: With regard to the City Council Meeting on Monday 4/7

To the Cambridge City Council,

I am writing to express my support for the K2C2 planning process and concern with the proposed policy orders to conduct a "master plan" for Cambridge.

Over the last few months I have been shocked with the vitriolic, offensive, hyperbolic, even apocalyptic language around development in Cambridge. Cambridge is not a traffic clogged hell hole where light and even hope is being crushed under the iron talon of vulture developers. Cambridge is one of the nicest places to live in the United States, the best place this side of Amsterdam. It is walkable, with a diversity of uses in close proximity, and connected to the region by transit. That is why I chose to live here five years ago when I moved to Boston.

So I find myself fundamentally at odds with those screaming from the roof-tops that the city is a disaster. Indeed, I can see many opportunities to infill single-story retail with mid-rise, mixed-use buildings that would continue to make Cambridge the envy of any other City in the United States committed to sustainability and smart growth. Cambridge's solid financial health, built on dense, highly productive neighborhoods and business areas is also a point of pride. It's wonderful to live in a City that can provide public services and investments on a stable long-term footing!

I also love that Cambridge is a leader in the fight against climate change. Sustainable growth means turning away from a car-centered paradigm for development and ensuring growth that relies on cleaner forms of transportation without an increase in vehicle traffic. Increasing the housing and commercial opportunities in Cambridge neighborhoods best served by public and alternative transportation promotes sustainable growth that allows residents the opportunity to live, work, shop, and play in the same community. Any new planning process in Cambridge should emphasize walking, biking, and public transportation to reduce car dependency and build a more sustainable city.

But there is a problem. Cambridge, and indeed the whole Boston area, has become very expensive. It's people like me who are part of the problem. Just like thousands of others, my wife and I moved here because we think it's the best place to live in Boston. There are so many of us who would like to live here that it's very difficult to find an apartment, let alone an affordable condo. If you go to a showing, you had better be prepared to sign a lease right there; if you wait till 5:00pm it will be snapped up by someone else. Rents continue to go up because every bedroom can be filled with a young professional able to pay \$1,000+ a month to live in Cambridge.

Median condo sales in Cambridge are now north of \$450,000 for a small two-bedroom unit. My wife and I would love to be able to stay in Cambridge, buy a home here, and raise a family in Cambridge schools. We are that middle class that so many say that they want; we are well employed, but we will likely be unable to afford to stay here and put down roots.

To us, the fundamental problem is the limited supply of housing. For decades, throughout the Boston area strict regulations have pinched new housing creation, particularly multifamily housing. Tightening supply has raised prices much faster than other regions and commuting from New Hampshire, Providence, and Worcester (and through Cambridge) has become commonplace. Demographic, environmental, and economic changes are driving people of all ages back to living in the city. Cambridge's population has been growing since the 1990's after shrinking for decades. Both the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Governor have recognized this problem and called for the creation of tens of thousands of new housing units around the region. MAPC recently projected that Metro Boston must produce up to 435,000 new housing units by 2040 to meet the needs of working families and our aging population -- in Cambridge alone, overwhelming demand for housing requires at least 6,000 new housing units.

I'm a planner by training and profession; I like plans and planning. But any planning effort—look to Somerville's Somervision for a particularly good example—should not prevent the immediate and ongoing creation of more housing. We need more housing now.

I'm also concerned by the language of the proponents of the Carlone et. al. proposal: "Scrap K2C2 and start some real planning" is one example. As a citizen and resident of Cambridgeport who participated in a couple of the C2 workshops I find this deeply offensive. I attended those meetings, I made my voice heard, I participated in some "real planning," and I was impressed by the professionalism exhibited by City staff and consultants and the careful balancing of interests required of the Committee. Overall, I think the product is pretty good. I am frustrated that the City has demurred in taking up the recommendations from the group. Is it perfect? No. I didn't get everything I might have wanted out of it. Neither did any anyone else. Where the document falls short, let's built upon it.

Scrapping the work of K2C2 would bring into question whether I or anyone else who participates in a community-based planning initiative would have confidence that our work would matter. There is a fundamental issue of trust at stake here that the fervent petitioners, in their desire to "win," will poison trust in our public processes and the durability of any plan for development.

Master planning isn't all bad. There are a lot of opportunities to build a constructive dialogue and to find opportunities for smart infill development that strengthens our city over the long-term. I don't think a hundred or five hundred angry petitions are representative of the 100,000 plus people in Cambridge. There are thousands just like me who embrace a positive, pro-change, smart growth, walking, biking, transit vision for Cambridge. I urge you to stand with us.

23

Seth

183 Chestnut Street, Cambridge, MA