

Lopez, Donna

Alan Greene, 82 Fifth St, Read Seth Teller letter

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From: Seth Teller [teller@csail.mit.edu]
Sent: Monday, May 19, 2014 9:00 AM
To: Lopez, Donna; City Council
Cc: Bethany Stevens; Ilan Levy; Peter Crawley; Rhoda Fantasia; Mike Hawley; Heather Hoffman; Stephen Kaiser; Gary Dmytryk; Nancy Ryan; Jan Devereux; Charles Teague
Subject: Comments on Item 14-22 and Order 13 re: Sullivan Courthouse

Dear Madame Clerk,

Please include these comments in the packet provided to the Council for tonight's meeting, and in the public record.

Thank you.

Dear Councillors,

The residents of Cambridge, and the Council itself, have been terribly served by the various City departments and agencies on the Sullivan Courthouse matter.

The Community Development Department has been mostly absent throughout the process. Apart from some minor comments around the edges of the proposal, we haven't seen any informed pushback to the misinformation the developer has been spreading over the City: the questionable traffic studies, the garage parking study, the wind study, and the lighting impact study. The developer didn't even mention, in their application to the City, the anticipated impact on surface parking in East Cambridge. They didn't even mention the anticipated impact on residents' privacy.

Did the City or any of its agencies call them on any of this? No.

The Traffic and Parking Department certified, quickly and in writing, the Developer's proposal to long-term lease 420 parking spaces in the municipal garage. Yet after months of wrangling, we citizens were able to analyze the City's actual parking data. It shows without any doubt that the garage is headed for full occupancy, even with any development at the Courthouse. How could your T&P department have gotten this basic fact so wrong?

Meanwhile, the City Solicitor's opinion on the critical legal question underpinning the proposal is nothing more than a parroting of the developer's attorney's assertions. She did not even acknowledge the existence of a contrary opinion by a nationally-known land-use attorney hired by us citizens. There is no more polite way to say it: this is dereliction of duty.

Councillors, there are myriad technical objections to the current proposal. And there are serious legal objections as well; we hold that the Planning Board simply doesn't have the right to grant this permit. But beyond the technical and legal objections, there's the overarching moral question: should the State of Massachusetts be allowed to discharge the debt it incurred in the 1970's on the backs of today's Cambridge residents alone?

Here's how this story could continue, if only the Planning Board, and the City Council, could find the courage to stand up and say to the State, "This process is simply unacceptable. You cannot take a planning disaster from the 1960's and 1970's, which all agree was allowed to be built *only because of state supremacy," and perpetuate that disaster forever by transferring the site to private ownership."

Folks, as representatives and residents of our City, it is time to take a stand here. Let's use every means at our disposal to send this completely inappropriate proposal back to the State, and back to the drawing board. Yes, that will likely mean waiting for the next Governor and her or his administration. But they can't do any worse than the current administration, who have stonewalled us at every turn. And there's a reasonable chance that they will do better.

We've lived with this monstrosity for four decades. Let's take a few more years to get it right.

Let's block this proposal with every tool we have, and put the State on notice that their current RFP and sale process is a dead duck. They simply must issue a new RFP that states explicitly that whatever is to be built in the City of Cambridge, by a private developer, shall respect the City's zoning ordinances. Meanwhile, on our end, let's convene a grand conversation among all citizens of the City about what ought to be done with the site, as part of the Master Planning process that has been so much discussed of late. (A useful precursor to that conversation would be to hold the next Planning Board hearing in East Cambridge, so that the residents most directly affected, including many seniors who were here before the Courthouse was built, can weigh in.)

That's the process that should have been followed from the start.

We've lost a few years and dissipated a lot of energy getting to this point. We can't get the time back, but we can avoid wasting all that good work. It's not too late to fix this situation, but correcting it will require the Council to step up and take a stand against this outrageous proposal and the process that produced it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Seth Teller
281 Hurley Street
Cambridge