

June 2, 2014

To the Cambridge City Council:

We write in conditional support of Policy Order #6 on the Council's agenda "to discuss ways in which the city can improve the design of New Street for pedestrians and vehicles" and thank Councillors Carlone and McGovern and Mayor Maher for putting it forth. While improvements for cyclists were not explicitly mentioned in the language of the order, we trust the city also will look for ways to improve the safety of bike travel along New Street.

**I. Discussion is a great start, but action is needed.**

The position of the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance is by now well known: **no further residential development should proceed until New Street has been redesigned and reconstructed to provide continuous sidewalks and bike ways for the entire length of the street on both sides.** (See links to our online petitions below.)

So, while we support the good intentions broadly expressed in the policy order under consideration, we are concerned that the wording of the order does not set any time frame for completing a redesign of the street. Further, since a decision is pending on a major residential project at 75 New Street -- where the developer is seeking special permits that would limit options for the street's redesign -- we ask that the order require the relevant city agencies to present preliminary findings for public review prior to the July 22 Planning Board hearing on that development. We ask that no decision on 75 New Street be made until a comprehensive street design has been approved and funds budgeted for its timely completion. Any eventual redevelopment on New Street should trigger contributions by the developers as part of the community benefits package, and the Council should allocate capital funds for the remainder.

**II. Let's get our priorities straight.**

While the proposal to redevelop the former J&C Adams site into 93 rental units is what focused the FPRA's attention on this urgent public safety issue, these basic improvements should have been made when Danehy Park first opened over two decades ago. Since then, use of New Street has increased exponentially, risking the safety of the hundreds of people, many of them children, who travel to and from Danehy Park daily by foot, bike, car and school bus. The more recent opening of Evolve Fitness has made New Street even more of a destination for recreation and physical activity. Evolve members who endeavor to incorporate a walk or bike ride to and from the gym into their workouts are faced with a patchwork of vehicle-obstructed (and, in the winter, ice- and snow-covered) sidewalks and a street too narrow to accommodate two-way traffic and bike lanes. Even without the proposal for a second large residential development on the street, redesigning New Street should have been a top priority years ago when its use changed from serving the town dump to serving the city's largest park.

We are pleased that members of the Council now recognize New Street's pressing need for a comprehensive redesign, but **we ask that any redesign be conceived within the context of a new master plan for the area, not merely to accommodate a developer requesting special permits for reduced setbacks**, without which developer Phil Terzis acknowledged the J&C Adams parcel would be "pretty much un-buildable for any kind of density." (See video of Mr. Terzis speaking at the planning board hearing on March 4, 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6q-K1PMCGw&feature=youtu.be>)

### **III. Design Specifications and Considerations**

The City's right of way for New Street is 37 feet including the two 5-foot sidewalks. That leaves room for two 10-foot roadways and a minimum of two 3.5-foot cycle tracks. Ideally the cycle tracks should be at the level of the sidewalk, as they are on Concord Avenue west of the Trader Joe's circle. This would also allow a smooth transition to the future Watertown branch cycle path. Street trees should be planted on the developer's site, so that they do not conflict with travel ways and do not complicate snow removal. The Department of Parks and Recreation should have a voice, if the proposed redesign involves taking parkland to widen the street.

Since New Street also serves as a shortcut (a de facto rear entrance) to the city's largest shopping center, any redesign must be flexible enough to complement the future redevelopment of that parcel into the high-density retail and residential complex envisioned in the Concord Alewife planning study. The possibility of creating a bike path along the former rail tracks behind New Street also must be considered when designing how (or whether) New Street crosses the tracks and continues through the shopping center parking lot.

We ask that the city seek an accommodation with the owners of the shopping center to use the parking areas closest to Danehy Park's entrance for public access to the park, thereby leaving New Street unencumbered by on-street parking. In addition we ask that the city work with the shopping center owners to create a safe, protected pedestrian and bike route between New Street and the mall's Fresh Pond Parkway entrance/exit to make the route to and from the Alewife T station more accessible for both residents and park users.

### **IV. The Need for Vision and Accountability**

Redesigning New Street to better meet current and future needs will require the city to show more creative vision and to make more demands of developers than it has demonstrated up to now. Since public pressure has prompted this action by the Councillors, we ask that the city hold a public hearing to review possible design alternatives, and solicit public comment at every step of the design process. We request that the new street design be approved and budgeted by the Council before any special permits are granted for further residential development on New Street.

There are no shortcuts to designing safe streets and livable neighborhoods. The public has waited more than two decades for the creation of a street worthy of the flagship park it serves rather than settling for an outmoded road to the town dump. We ask that the city take the time and care to finally get it right before any further development is permitted on New Street.

Jan Devereux  
Jay Yesselman  
Bob Simha  
Langley Keyes  
Ann Sweeney  
Doug Brown  
Peggy Barnes-Lenart

For the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance

*The FPRA has two online petitions related to the need to improve New Street's sidewalks and street design before more development is allowed:*

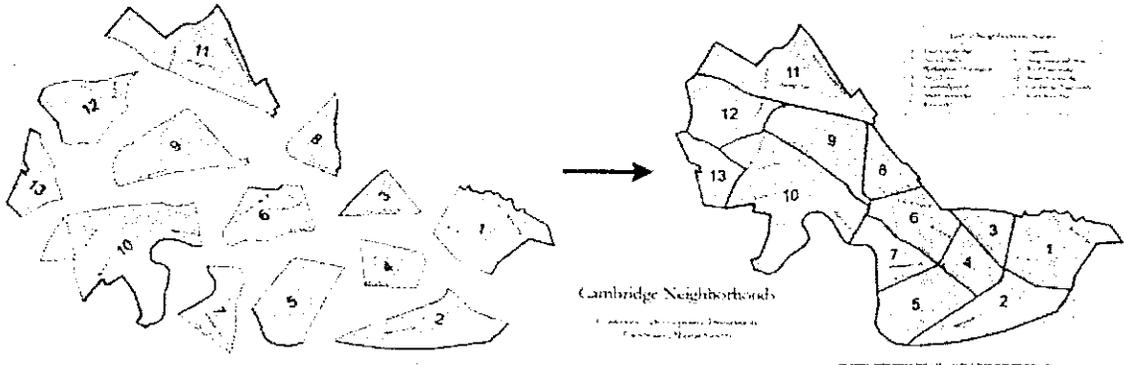
<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/352/899/065/deny-all-special-permits-for-concord-alewife-development-pending-a-master-plan/>

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/229/515/771/deny-special-permits-to-further-develop-new-street-fresh-pond-residents-alliance-letter/>

# *Where have we been? Where are we headed?*

Join your neighbors from around the city for  
a public forum on development & planning in Cambridge.

## **Cambridge Neighborhood Summit**



**Saturday, June 7**

**2:30–6:30 pm**

**Citywide Senior Center**

**806 Mass. Ave. (Central Sq.)**

*Come to Central Sq. to lunch at the Riverfest, then feed your mind and spirit at the Neighborhood Summit.*

### Presentation and discussion topics to include:

Developing a Master Plan: Building affordable housing to maintain a diverse population: Preserving and protecting open space and natural resources: Sullivan Courthouse: Foundry STEAM project: Future of the Alewife area; Improving City Planning.

*Participants from Area 4/Port Neighborhood Coalition; Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods; Cambridge Residents Alliance; Cambridge City Council; Essex Street Neighbors Assn; Fresh Pond Residents Alliance; Green Cambridge; Neighborhood Association of East Cambridge; North Cambridge Stabilization Committee; Porter Square Neighbors Assn; Winthrop Park Alliance; Young People's Project.*

**Light Food and Beverages – Spanish Language Assistance**

For More information:

[www.CambridgeResidentsAlliance.org/summit\\_program](http://www.CambridgeResidentsAlliance.org/summit_program)

or [KeepCambridgeLivable@gmail.com](mailto:KeepCambridgeLivable@gmail.com)

Register at [www.CambridgeResidentsAlliance.org/rsvp\\_for\\_summit](http://www.CambridgeResidentsAlliance.org/rsvp_for_summit).

v.5-29-2014