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Communication: Cambridge City Council - July 22, 2014

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The City Council, on behalf of residents of the city, should adopt certain principles that would maximize the affordability of housing in Cambridge.

1) Cambridge should continue to use **80%** of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) for affordable housing.

2) Cambridge should commit itself to **maintaining all expiring use buildings** for affordable housing as well as other types of buildings that are now providing affordable housing for Cambridge residents. Briston Arms in West Cambridge, the Close Building in the Port and Fresh Pond Apartments on Rindge Avenue are just the latest examples of threatened buildings that must be maintained as affordable housing.

3) **A**) Cambridge should move **ASAP** to adopt a new base rate under the Incentive Zoning Ordinance. The new nexus study should move ahead as quickly as possible now that bids for the study have been submitted. It is shocking that the 2002 nexus study which recommended that the affordable housing contribution be set at $7.83 in 2002 dollars (approximately $10.00 in 2014 dollars) for every square foot of applicable gross floor area was never adopted.
B) The fee could be collected on commercial development above 20,000 square feet instead of the current 30,000 square feet.
C) Cambridge must study the impact of a growing number of commercial projects whose special permits do not trigger the Incentive Zoning Ordinance. The Incentive Zoning Ordinance is written too narrowly and excludes more than 50% of the commercial projects that require a special permit. Cambridge should look carefully at negotiated benefits that impact the development of affordable housing, negotiated benefits that have universally favored developers at the expense of the Cambridge community.
The failure to adopt an updated and improved Nexus base rate, the failure to include smaller commercial projects, the failure to draft an incentive zoning ordinance that includes most if not all commercial projects and poorly negotiated benefits have cost Cambridge residents tens of millions of dollars over the past decade!

4) Cambridge should explore initiating a **jobs linkage fee** such as exists in Boston and is now being considered in Somerville. A jobs linkage fee would address employment barriers and occupational skill gaps in the city's labor force and ensure that Cambridge residents fully benefit from job opportunities in the future development projects. This jobs linkage fee would be in addition to affordable housing fees. Housing affordability is dependent on residents having decent jobs at decent pay.

5) Cambridge can incentivize housing for the middle class, but it **cannot** come at the expense of any inclusionary zoning units for low and moderate-income persons and

families. Thousands of people below 80% median income are on the waiting list for housing. Rents are so high in Cambridge that families holding subsidies cannot use them in Cambridge and are being forced out of the city. Current programs, which are under attack at the Federal level and are woefully inadequate to meet the need, are now aimed primarily at the working poor, especially those without the assets and choices of the middle class.

6) Cambridge must be more creative and aggressive in its inclusionary zoning proposals. We **must dramatically raise the current requirement of 15% affordability** (in reality this results in about 11% affordability for the final development) citywide. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), in their recent study of the impact of the Green Line Extension in Somerville, determined that **35%** of new units would be needed for low-income housing. Some persons and organizations in Cambridge have called for inclusionary zoning of **25%**. Somerville calls for inclusionary zoning for developments **8** units and above, while in Cambridge we begin at 10 units. Developers could be **required** to build more **family-size units** (three bedroom). Inclusionary zoning requirements could be related to geographic areas of the city, with greater requirements in Transportation Oriented Districts, such as Central Square.

7) City owned lots, while remaining city owned or leased to non-profit affordable housing developers, should **maximize** the potential for affordable low and moderate income housing while achieving a balance with other free and accessible urban amenities such as open space, community squares, farmers markets, art installations etc. while **eliminating** their use as surface parking lots.

8) Universities and colleges must house their students on campus. The failure of the City Council to tie mandatory development of student housing to upzoning proposals brought to the City by universities and colleges has resulted in vastly increased rents and the displacement of hundreds of low, moderate and middle-income families.

9) Housing is considered unaffordable because families cannot afford high rents and the high cost of purchasing homes given wages that are too low to meet those high costs. Cambridge must do more to enact a minimum wage citywide that is equivalent to that set by the Living Wage Commission for city-contracted jobs. The living wage must be extended to **all workers without exception.**

NEXUS

The new nexus study will establish the basis for requiring contribution from commercial developments as set forth in the Incentive Zoning Provisions. The new study will ask that housing affordability for middle-income households be considered. This study should only increase available funds for affordable housing and should not diminish opportunities for low and moderate-income persons and families as we seek to define the middle class and respond to their needs in relation to the needs of low and moderate-income families.

The fact that the nexus base contribution has not been raised since 2002 is inexcusable. The failure of the City Council to not raise the base contribution rate since 2002, which has cost affordable housing programs hundreds of thousands of dollars, is inexcusable. Councilors should speak to this inaction.

Rapid office and commercial development, without requiring sufficient affordable housing, has generated increased rental housing prices caused by the extra demand from new employees. This new development, when added to the effects of the loss of rent control, has devastated low and moderate income neighborhoods, has severely impacted the economic diversity of its residents and has increased the gap between the rich and poor in Cambridge.

Jobs linkage awards should consider the job-training provider's past performance, as well as employer relationships and partnerships to recruit targeted Cambridge residents. A Cambridge jobs linkage fee is an appropriate policy response to fund services that expand resident access to employment at new development projects and mitigate the potential for these projects to disproportionately benefit workers from outside Cambridge.

The new nexus study should include job linkage. We can learn from Boston's twenty-five year history with the Neighborhood Jobs Trust, as well as from Somerville's inclusion of a jobs linkage in their recent nexus study.

INCLUSIONARY ZONING

Inclusionary zoning, set at a percentage of at least 25%, would help Cambridge create and maintain economically diverse neighborhoods at little or no direct financial cost. Affordable units can be integrated into the development of the overall community. Inclusionary zoning should make possible the integration of populations that traditional zoning and special development programs segregate –young families, retired and elder households, single adults, female/male heads of households, minority persons, families with young children, and households of all types. We could maintain and build income-integrated communities at a time when the gap between rich and poor is widening.

It will also have to be recognized that Cambridge is a city, and that density limitations need to be rationally increased in order to provide more housing for low and moderate-income families.

Decisions about affordability and equity are often decisions about priorities. We cannot prioritize the profits of developers and universities over the affordable housing needs of Cambridge residents. We must do more to meet the need for decent jobs at decent pay for Cambridge residents. We have an affordable housing crisis that does not need to be further documented. It is time for action, not words.

"What to the Slave is the Fourth July?" by Frederick Douglass is not only a brilliant work of oratory. It speaks to our every frustration spurred by the gap between the ideals of the United States and the reality we witness every day. Even though his were words that spoke directly to his moment in history, they still ring with an unsettling power. As Douglass says, "Had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would today pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake." —Dave Zirin