

Comments to City Council on Policy Order 10 (Inclusionary Zoning)

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Dear Mayor Maher and City Councilors,

I would like to express my unequivocal support for Policy Order 10, regarding an increase in the Cambridge Inclusionary zoning ordinance.

As many of you know, I am an urban planner who has spent the last 10 years working to expand affordable housing opportunities in Cambridge, Somerville, and around our region. During that time I have learned an important lesson -- that inclusionary zoning laws are the single most important tools that municipalities have to increase the stock of safe and decent affordable low- and middle-income housing in their borders.

I thank Mayor Maher, Vice-Mayor Benzan, and Councillor McGovern for submitting a policy order that recognizes the important role that new development plays in addressing the affordability crisis in our city. This crisis arose because developers are not properly incentivized to create sufficient affordable housing alongside their market rate offerings. While 500 affordable units since 1998 is nothing to laugh at, but is not enough given the scale of development we've seen in the intervening 15 years.

Higher density, transit-adjacent residential development is vital in a progressive city like Cambridge that purports to favor cultural/economic diversity and environmental sustainability. Cambridge has already become unaffordable for most low-, middle-, and moderate income people so more incentives are required to ensure adequate affordable housing is included in all residential growth.

The solution to Cambridge's affordability crisis is not to downzone, pass moratoriums, or politicize development -- this would result in an environment where only the most well-capitalized, national developers are building the most profitable product they can place here with the minimal effort -- luxury housing and single use offices and labs. This will have a devastating impact on our ability to immediately create the type of affordable and middle income housing we desperately need in Cambridge.

The solution is to encourage and incentivize mixed-income residential development whereby the construction of required low or middle-income units is subsidized through higher-priced market rate units -- this is especially important given the quickly vanishing state and federal subsidized for affordable housing development, and can best be achieved through economies of scale, i.e., higher density residential growth with strong inclusionary zoning requirements.

Growth can be *good* for our city. A strong inclusionary zoning ordinance can make it even better. I ask you to support Policy Order 10.