

2

Lopez, Donna

From: Albano, Sandra
Sent: Friday, October 17, 2014 11:33 AM
To: Lopez, Donna; Crane, Paula
Subject: FW: Comments on the City Council Agenda for Monday

In case he didn't send to you

From: Doug Brown [mailto:douglas_p_brown@yahoo.com]
Sent: Friday, October 17, 2014 11:23 AM
To: City Council
Cc: 'Doug Brown'
Subject: Comments on the City Council Agenda for Monday

Dear Councilors,

Please allow me to submit the following comments in regards to the Policy Orders submitted for next week's regular City Council meeting. I hope that you will find these comments useful as you consider each of these important issues.

Sincerely,

Doug Brown
35 Standish Street

Policy Order #5 Affordable Housing Overlay District Toomey, McGovern, Cheung, Benzan

Though the goal of this Policy Order is both noble and needed, I don't believe that creating a City-wide overlay district is necessarily the best strategy to ensure the creation of enough new affordable housing on parcels appropriate for such use. To start, it doesn't make much sense to do this until we see the results of the Nexus studies currently underway. And technically, a city-wide overlay makes a bit of a mockery of the idea of an overlay district at all. Instead, it would do better to add an Affordable Housing category to the Table of Uses, then apply it to all zones deemed to be appropriate. That would allow a fuller discussion of the issue. For example, is Affordable Housing allowed in an Open Space zone? We probably don't want the City turning Danehy Park into a giant housing project, right? Similarly, should affordable housing be allowed in Industrial zones? Would anyone want to live next door to the Transfer Station on Mooney Street? Again, probably not. (Note that currently, you can't build housing in an Open Space district, but you CAN build housing in an Industrial district). Regardless, while I support the idea of incenting affordable housing throughout the entire City, there are probably specific parcels and areas where the City might not want to encourage such development.

Policy Order #13 Tokyo Site McGovern, Simmons, Benzan, Maher

I support this Policy Order, as it offers some hope that an otherwise abandoned and blighted property might be transformed into a community asset. Should the owners be unwilling to either restore or dispose of the property in a timely manner, I hope that the City would explore further steps to incent them. Along those lines, perhaps we should consider doing what Washington, DC now does- taxing vacant and abandoned properties at a much higher tax rate to in part compensate for the added police and fire services they demand, but also as a strong incentive for property owners to in effect "use it or lose it." (Vacant properties are taxed at 6x the usual residential rate; blighted properties at 12x). If we really are in the middle of an affordable housing crisis, and if every piece of land is needed, then such a novel approach might help unlock more parcels for future use. For

more on what Washington, DC is doing, see these links: <http://otr.cfo.dc.gov/page/otr-vacant-real-property> and <http://dcra.dc.gov/service/vacant-building-enforcement>. Takyo would be a great candidate for such an approach.

Policy Order #14 Masse's Rezoning Cheung

I strongly support this Order, as it represents an appropriate response to the threat of overdevelopment in an already crowded neighborhood. Going further, I would offer the following reasons why such a rezoning is appropriate in this specific case:

- 1) The existing Business-A zone is surrounded on all four sides by Residential C-1 zones.*
- 2) Abutting commercial properties (Walden Spa, Paddy's Lunch, and the Cambridge Mantessari School) are already zoned as Residential C-1, not as BA.*
- 3) Once the former hardware store is converted into two new rental units and the parking lot is converted into a new residential building with 26 units, there won't be any businesses left in the BA zone.*
- 4) Allowing construction under the more permissive BA zoning, when all buildings in the zone will ultimately be 100% residential, is a zoning loophole that must be closed. The currently proposed project should have to operate under residential zoning rules now, BEFORE building everything. Put another way, if they want to use it as residential, they should have to follow the residential standards. Otherwise, we will end up with high-density residential in the middle of a low-density residential neighborhood. In effect, what I am saying is that the public good supports the idea that a grandfathering should only apply if the same use is continuing, not if the use is changing.*

Policy Order #16 Transportation Competition & Prize Benzan, Carlone, McGovern, Mazen

Great concept- I support this Order strongly. And here's a free idea to get you started. Update the Table of Uses to permit co-working spaces in all zones. Next, add a requirement that all residential projects over 20,000 square feet devote at least 2% of their total floor area to co-working spaces. The end result, achieved at zero cost to the City, would be that more people would be able to work at home, and that they would no longer need to get in their cars at all, thus significantly reducing local commuter traffic.

Policy Order #20 Disposition of Parcels 5 & 6 Benzan, McGovern, Carlone

*Given the affordable housing crisis that we currently face, I believe that an evaluation of parcels 5 & 6 is a great idea, and I strongly support the proposed order. In fact, I would go a step further and strongly support a review of **ALL** unused, City-owned parcels to assess their ability to provide new housing to residents. The City should inventory its own property and see if any of the land already owned by the City would be a good fit for development. That said, the disposition process for any designated parcels must of course be open, transparent, and produce the maximum public good for our City and its residents. Therefore, it is assumed that any property that is found to be appropriate for development would be the subject of an open bidding process, such that the City can be assured to receive the maximum public benefit. Along those lines, I would consider it inappropriate for the City to engage in direct discussions with specific developers prior to such a process taking place.*