

Lopez, Donna

From: Lee Farris [lee.farris@verizon.net]
Sent: Monday, October 20, 2014 2:49 PM
To: City Council
Cc: Albano, Sandra; Lopez, Donna
Subject: Comments on Affordable Housing Orders for 10-20-14

Dear Councillors,

As you know, we face a regional affordable housing crisis. I greatly appreciate the intentions of the Council Orders aimed at increasing affordable housing in Cambridge. I attended the Affordable Housing Trust's Roundtable with the City Council. While I appreciate all the work of our city staff, I did not see a comprehensive affordable housing plan. It is not sufficient to say the city wants to build as much affordable housing as possible, because that does not provide a clear yardstick for success. I think we need clear goals and a definition of success before the Council approves changes in use to city land.

I would like Councilors to ask our city planners to create a comprehensive housing plan. I'd like our housing plan to project what incomes people would need to live here. Do we want a future where 20% of households live in affordable housing, and 50% of households live in housing that requires a \$200,000 income? Or, as I would prefer, do we want to have residents with a more even distribution of incomes? In order to go from the current distribution to the distribution we would like, how many units need to be added at what price points? What density and heights would be needed? What funding would it take?

A plan would propose a number of people who can reside in our city, considering factors like a projection of family composition, an estimate of how much space each person would occupy, and how much land is residential vs. commercial or open space. The number of people would vary depending on assumptions about density and height.

These are the kinds of points that would be considered by a Master Plan, which seems to be strangely delayed. Why is Cambridge behind Somerville, which has already created its comprehensive plan? (See <http://www.somervillema.gov/news/city-launch-affordable-housing-program>) I agree with Somerville that "building more housing alone is not enough to control this systemic challenge."

On the specific orders:

Order #20 -- Use of city-owned parking lots #5 (Norfolk Ave. & Bishop Allen Drive) and #6 (Columbia & Bishop Allen) in Area 4

I would like any city-owned land to be used for 100% affordable housing (not "up to 100%"), because that land is such a precious and scarce resource. In fact, I'd like all city-owned parking lots to be inventoried for possible conversion to 100% affordable housing. I think any land owned by the city should not be sold to for-profit developers, but should remain in city hands. There could be a 99 year lease, or a land trust, or other method of managing the land. I'd like middle-income units to be created by strengthening the inclusionary housing program.

Order #5 -- draft zoning for an affordable housing overlay district

This Order is interesting, but not specific enough, so it should be sent to the Housing Committee before going to city staff. We need to know if this would be a citywide overlay, or an overlay for a specific area. Councillors should specify how they want the overlay to interact with base zoning, the inclusionary bonuses, and other zoning overlays.

Lastly, I strongly support the Silver Maple Forest **Order #11**, and anything else the city can do to try to preserve the land.

Sincerely,

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