

Lopez, Donna

From: Michael Brandon [mjbrandon@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, November 03, 2014 8:51 PM
To: City Council; Lopez, Donna
Subject: Re: Planning Board appointments (Manager's Agenda Item #1 for 11/3/14):

And that "'hot' Mr. Healy" was simply a typo--definitely nothing Freudian about it. MB

On Mon, Nov 3, 2014 at 8:42 PM, Michael Brandon <mjbrandon@gmail.com> wrote:
Councilors:

Please excuse my seemingly Freudian slip in the fifth paragraph of my communication below. I of course meant to say that Mr. Rossi, not Mr. Robert Healy, the former City Manager, made these crucial decisions about Planning Board appointments. (Old habits die hard.)

I'm sorry that you do not agree with me that the new board will be even more unbalanced than the current one. Even Mr. Healy realized that appointing one or two "regular" folks to his boards for appearance's sake wouldn't undermine his control of city policy or hurt their decidedly heavy pro-development tilt.

What a breath of fresh air Mr. Rossi could have introduced by appointing rejected applicants such as Phil Dowds and Tom Stohman, who are both well qualified and experienced and would have at least given neighborhood advocates a sense that their viewpoint isn't overwhelmingly overshadowed by the bureaucratic and commercial interests that drive the city's development department.

Despite the dedication, expertise, civic-mindedness, and good intentions of the board members, this same-as-it-ever-was, opaquely picked panel of powerless project tweekers is obviously designed and inherently destined to obey the administrative staff's instructions and support the rampant, unplanned, uncoordinated, uncontrolled overdevelopment of the city's neighborhoods and natural resources that continues to degrade the quality of residents' lives.

But thank you once again for considering my opinion.

Sincerely,

Michael Brandon
27 Seven Pines Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02140

On Mon, Nov 3, 2014 at 5:21 PM, Michael Brandon <mjbrandon@gmail.com> wrote:

Councilors:

I'm pleased to see that City Manager Richard Rossi has filled the long-vacant slot on the Cambridge Planning Board and made other appointments so that, in his words, "the composition of the new board provides greater balance and representation."

Mr. Rossi notes: "As City Manager, one of my most important responsibilities is appointing members to the Planning Board. These choices directly impact the future of our community." He proceeds to praise "the civically engaged citizens across the City for their dedication, hard work, and contributions throughout this [selection] process."

Given these comments and others we've been hearing lately from the City Manager and the City Council about increased transparency, responsiveness, level playing fields, and citizen participation at City Hall, I was puzzled to see that the chairman, vice-chairman, and four other incumbent members will continue to sit on the Planning Board, and that the newly constituted nine-person panel will consist entirely of former city employees and professionals directly connected to the real estate, development, and construction industries.

Perhaps qualified applicants representing neighborhood associations, environmental groups, homeowner and tenant interests, artists, academics, and other non-industry perspectives were not sufficiently recruited or for some reason failed to apply. But based on currently available information, it's hard to understand that in such a diverse city as Cambridge a more broad-based board could not have been selected.

Given the intense public interest in these appointments and the importance of allowing the electorate to understand and evaluate how Mr. Healy made these crucial decisions, I respectfully suggest that you ask him to release the applications of all 24 Planning Board candidates and provide biographical info detailing their qualifications, education, background, and experience.

In the absence of such openness, the increasingly widespread public frustration and cynicism about the city's planning and development policies and their implementation and enforcement will only grow.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Brandon
27 Seven Pines Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02140