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Testimony at City Council meeting 12/8/2014 – Policy Order #6

I am curious about the timing of Policy Order #6 “the Ordinance Committee schedule a hearing to discuss the C2 plan and recommendations and that the Community Development Department be prepared to present any changes or recommendations to this plan and that members of the C2 Committee be invited to attend. “ While I have no objections to the Ordinance Committee discussing the committee’s recommendations, I wish to remind us all that the C2 documents do not constitute a master plan. I represent the Cambridge Residents Alliance which has stated for more than a year that there should be no up-zoning anywhere in Cambridge without a Master Plan. C2 can only be described as an up-zoning – it proposes raising the current height limit from 55 feet/80 feet with a special permit to 140 feet with a special permit. We are all aware of the citywide concern with the process of issuing special permits. Another 2 stories could be added with any transfer of development rights so we are talking about 16-story building heights in Central Square. The timing of this order coincides with the recent proposal by Twining/Normandy Real Estate for a 195-foot tower in Central Square..

Some say that inclusionary zoning will address our acute shortage of affordable housing. But when you put between 11.5% (current) or 17% (proposed by Twining et al) you get between 83% and 88.5% market rate or luxury housing. We need a thorough discussion of how much and what kind of housing we require throughout the city and where it will best serve the city. Market rate/luxury housing changes its immediate environment as the needs of its new residents tend to dominate.

On another related issue, others have noted that the Community Development Department scheduled a meeting tonight from 6 to 8 pm on the use of federal funds for affordable housing for the next five years. When a resident called to complain about the conflict with the City Council meeting she was told “it’s only for public comment.” This does not encourage faith that planning for affordable housing is a coordinated, resident-focused process.