

**Lopez, Donna**

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**From:** Nancy Ryan <nancyryan4@comcast.net>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2015 5:01 PM  
**To:** City Council; Lopez, Donna  
**Subject:** Please reject the Normandy petition and move forward on planning

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan and Members of the Cambridge City Council:

Nearly three years after the Cambridge Residents Alliance called for a moratorium on upzoning until a responsible citywide planning process was implemented, the city administration has finally drafted a call for consultants to apply to develop a Master Plan for the City. During that time, thousands of new, expensive rental units have been built, permitted or are proposed in favor of "conversations."

Into that void stepped Normandy Real Estate Partners and Twining Properties who filed a zoning petition last November that creates two "special zones" in Central Square for the advantage of this one development enterprise. One zone encompasses the entire city block on Massachusetts Avenue from Douglass to Columbia Streets and increases zoning to allow a 195-foot tower that is 2.5 times taller and more than double the density under current law. The second re-zones part of the residential side of Bishop Allen Drive for permanent surface parking. We don't believe the city is getting enough for this giant give-away – 40 affordable and 7 middle income housing units out of 232 luxury apartments. We see this as an invitation for other developers to look for the same kind of deal.

The Normandy/Twining zoning amendment is the poster child for the city's current development plan or lack thereof, as real estate investors propose large buildings with "market rate" units. Rents often start at \$2,000 per month and go up from there; our law requiring affordable units in these buildings has remained woefully inadequate at 11.5%. The lack of planning with a futuristic urban design orientation is likely to result in further gentrification of Cambridge into a city with many relatively wealthy people and continue to displace low and moderate income individuals and families. Our concerns for adequate infrastructure, transit, traffic management, air quality and more become invisible if there is no overall plan.

The Cambridge Residents Alliance calls for a Master Plan process with an immediate priority assessment of our housing needs to *increase* equity and socio-economic diversity in Cambridge. There should be no approval of new large developments, including the Normandy/Twining tower, without this analysis. We also call for the City to use its own resources to sharply increase affordable housing now.

We have presented these and other priorities ("early deliverables") for the citywide plan to the administration in response to the draft Master Plan initiative. These include: 1) a preliminary housing plan that will serve during the time of the planning process and be revised at the end; 2) an initial identification of the population size appropriate to Cambridge and the socio-economic mix that will keep us the diverse city of which we brag; 3) a preliminary plan to use city-owned land, including parking lots, and general city revenues, to maximize affordable housing including public/private partnerships; 4) a look at the impact on civic life of international investments in land and construction in Cambridge; 6) an early priority given to the Fresh Pond/Alewife area due to the poor planning which has resulted in over-building, and to the potential for rapid development of the remaining land, especially within the quadrangle; 7) an assessment of the impact of climate change on all areas of the City but particularly in eastern Cambridge and the Fresh Pond/Alewife area.

We need in these next months to wrestle with how development proceeds during the planning process. And we want to participate in a comprehensive planning process that is conducted in a democratic, community-based manner and completes in 18-24 months, not 3 years from the hiring of a consultant. Boston is embarking now on a two-year citywide future planning process – at one-fifth the population and a tiny fraction of the land mass, surely we can move more effectively than we have in the past two years.

For the Executive Committee of the Cambridge Residents Alliance,  
Nancy Ryan

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