

Cambridge City Council

June 1, 2015

The City Manager's latest Citizen Satisfaction Survey, conducted last year, indicated that affordable housing displaced education as the "single most important issue" in Cambridge, by nearly a 2-1 margin over the next most important issue. The percentage of citizens citing taxes as the most important issue continued to drop and is now just 1% of those surveyed as compared to the 18% that listed affordable housing.

With that in mind, I studied the budget, which is now before you for passage, looking for the affordable housing initiatives funded by tax dollars that would surely be there. However, outside of the CPA, which has been a fantastic help to the development and preservation of affordable housing, meaningful affordable housing initiatives were once again absent from the budget.

Apparently the Manager and the City Council feels that enough is being done to meet the affordable housing crisis. With thousands on the waiting list for low and moderate affordable housing, developers are being rewarded with lucrative upzoning packages in return for building minimal affordable housing.

The Twining deal passed recently by the Council resulted in a \$25M affordable housing package paid for out of the profits that will be generated by the upzoning.

I call on the Council to at least match this private developer's contribution with \$25M from general revenues or free cash for the development of low and moderate-income housing. I am not a tax expert, but as I understand it, the 10 largest property owners would contribute about 1/3 of the \$25M. This expenditure would have only marginal impacts on the tax rates of the vast majority of homeowners and property owners. The Council should send the current budget back to the Manager with a mandate to include a substantial affordable housing initiative.

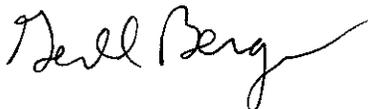
I don't expect the Council to act this courageously, however. I suggest that the Council put a referendum on the next regular ballot that would clearly explain what the tax impacts of a \$25M expenditure for affordable housing would be, giving voters an opportunity to express their priorities. This empowerment of the residents would be an example of meaningful participatory budgeting.

While looking at the budget I found many areas where money could be shifted from the current budget to affordable housing. Most striking were programs in the Police tactical division. It seems as though when the Federal Government dangles a carrot of money for tactical programs, Cambridge likes to jump. The Feds dangled money for a bomb squad with bomb sniffing dogs, and now we are on the hook for more than \$500,000 annually. Other tactical programs coming from the Federal government raise real concerns about their impact on minorities and individual freedoms.

Finally a word about some current Volpe zoning proposals. While Cambridge does not fully control the fate of this land, to suggest zoning that lowers the requirement for low and moderate income housing in the Volpe development to less than the current minimum now in effect across the city (a minimum that should be substantially raised in a new inclusionary zoning formula), and to shift affordable housing resources away from low and moderate income families to those households earning in excess of \$100,000, is just wrong. The K2C2 study, which included very limited participation from affordable housing advocates, is not the law of the land, and is no substitute for a rational and just development policy.

Gerald Bergman

82 Elm Street

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerald Bergman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name and address.