

LETTER- COUNCIL TWININGS/ NORMANDY FINAL SIGN-OFF 5-18-15

Tonight marks the final decision- changing Central Square and Cambridge forever.

From an urban preservationist stand, the cultural fabric and human scale is being eroded-- all because the City Council

- 1) Couldn't get it together to push a master plan; and
- 2) because they latched onto a private developer willing to take the responsibility for affordable housing out of their hands in exchange for unprecedented height, FAR and zoning concessions—special zoning provisions which the planning board STILL doesn't have, yet they too approved.

In discussing K2 and C2 over the past years, I didn't realize you were inviting K2 INTO historic C2.

The planning board's criteria states in part: "Consider the variety of vantage points from which tall buildings will be seen, especially from significant public spaces and nearby low scale residential neighborhoods as well as city skyline views". This has been TOTALLY ignored by both bodies.

One Board member said: "if you are close enough, you don't know how tall it is". AND then, "195 ft is close enough to the 160 ft (actually 140 ft) so it really won't make that much difference". Why have zoning protection at all if this is the lax attitude? Not even C2 members agreed on heights in their committee deliberations.

A frenetic letter from three Council members emphasized the need for inclusionary housing, but they have yet to take inventory, or even study other configurations of HOW to get more housing while honoring scale, history and context as Councilor Carlone tried. They were afraid that if the developer doesn't get what he wants, he will take his ball and go home.

Another councilor, in an e-mail, compared this 19-story up-zoning to 5-story zoning change in Porter Sq. He also quipped that some opponents don't even live in Central Sq. We are all here now because CENTRAL SQ IS THE GOVERNING CENTER FOR OUR CITY. Cambridge Citizens have a right to weigh in on its fate.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A MUST. But do we approve of a casino if they offer 100 units? Would the Holmes Block have been a tower? Can we add floors to the existing public housing on Main St?

In any case, Councilors, you are shirking your basic responsibilities in zoning, good governance as a whole. The whole legislative system has been corrupted as a whole and has no place for either the defensive or the smug. Elections are coming.

Marilee Meyer

10 Dana St #404

02138

Mbm0044@aol.com

May 15th, 2015

TO: Cambridge City Council

Richard Rossi, Manager

SUBJECT: OPPOSED TO OVER-SIZED NORMANDY/ TWINING TOWER

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan and City Councilors,

After exploring Kendall Square and the site of MIT's proposed six glass towers on Main Street, I am even more opposed to the Normandy/ Twining Tower in Central Square. The Council has allowed the private developer to "wag the Council" with the carrot of affordable housing, something Cambridge has woefully ignored in favor of developers doing the work for them. Three Councilors waxed frantically about the need for inclusionary housing but in doing so, are allowing restrictions to be re-written for the benefit of one private builder. A once-inconceivable project in the middle of smaller and human scale



main streets has been fast-tracked without zoning protection in place. Now, all developers have to do is offer a housing minimum to get the profit-driven additional height at the Public's greater expense. Would this apply to Casinos offering 100 units? Would the Holmes Block be a tower today? Do we want the unfortunate Rindge Towers in Central Square?

The transfer of development rights allows for 160 ft in height, which is the exception to the 140 ft height, which is the exception by special permit from the 80 ft height allowed. Yet, we are further accepting another 3 stories "because it is close enough" according to the Planning Board. The building is incongruous, inappropriate and generic. It is jarring and slices the sky like Boston. It dominates from every conceivable vantage point up and down Mass. Ave. and from neighborhoods. It is the exception to any vague urban planning.

But instead of considering CONTEXT in the National Historic Register district, the discussion has been expertly framed as "if you are against this project, you are against affordable housing", an argument I resent! This skyscraper opens Pandora's box to loop holes. Does the Council even know what they are voting on? It is nebulous, causing one planning board member (who follows Council's lead) to say "we can study the statistics from this project and apply them to the next", or "if you are close to the building you don't see how tall it is" (!). How will other land parcels owned by this developer be handled, or are allowances going to be done piecemeal?

Kendall Square sprawl is taking over making Main St. the potential bedroom for the bio/ tech firms with a non-descript disproportionate Manhattan identity. Kendall Square was a tabula rasa unlike Central, which so far, has staved off the cold sterility and dark canyonization of Cambridgeport. East Cambridge neighborhoods have been protesting the oversized eyesore that is the Courthouse, yet we are determined to make the same development mistakes voluntarily. The reviled building at Prospect and Mass. Ave. is not justification for height. Green Street housing is tucked on a different street and designed so the first floor is set back. It is a different animal. Mass & Main doesn't relate to anything. The argument that Mass & Main will mark the entrance to Central Square like a sentry is arrogant.



The tower is not saying “this is Central Square”, it is saying “this is the end of Kendall Square”, which it is clearly not. Central Square begins with, ironically, public housing and blocks of historic buildings. The tower is actually plunked down in the middle of one of the most diverse communities in Cambridge. With undistinguished modern design, it doesn’t belong in this funky, intellectual, progressive, a bit urban and grungy, multi-cultural, innovative, intimate and inclusive square. With the larger CVS and Walgreen retail spaces, it is conceivable that the

Gap will re-merge, catering to its market-rate residents. Gentrification is on its way.

The smaller buildings on Mass Ave can take extra height as suggested by the C2 Advisory Committee which consists of business owners looking to maximize their own properties. But no other housing possibilities have been studied-- the whole point of Councilor Carlone’s presentation which was ignored. Instead of deliberating alternative plans, any efforts by both Carlone and Mazen to do so were crucified not because of the merits, but because of protocol, opportunism, perhaps legacy and ego.

Let’s be clear. Affordable housing is a must, density can work, access to transportation (which hasn’t been studied for volume), some parking, “vibrant” first floor retail, some more token units, are all good. But we are losing the fabric of cultural heritage and history with the explosion of investment towers spilling over from Boston- death by 1000 cuts. Changing the massing and volume of Normandy/Twining is important to maintain as much sky, scale, context as possible, or we will live with these massive misplaced towers for the rest of our lives, opening the door to more towers- making urban renewal of the 60s and 70s look tame by comparison. There should not be any new large developments before we get a Master Plan and the priority should be affordable housing on city-owned land, strengthened by the planning process which should not reward a private developer from which six of nine councilors benefit. We can have both housing and heritage, working together for a diverse and human scale community.

