

May 18, 2015

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan, and City Councilors,

I am here to express my strong support for the Normandy Twining petition and to urge you to vote in favor of this proposal.

As a former member of the C2 Advisory Committee, I have been very disappointed that there has been no forward movement on our work to formulate a vision that sought to preserve the unique character and diversity of Central Square; foster community and vitality in the Square; and create a sustainable neighborhood where people can shop, work, play and live in close proximity and utilize public transportation to reduce auto traffic. Finally, there is a project in the Normandy Twining proposal that provides a development that furthers our vision.

First of all, the approximate 230 units of housing, with 47 affordable units and 10% family units will help to promote diversity, community and vitality in the Square. Adding this additional housing will begin to address the repercussions of a very insufficient housing supply to meet the extensive demand. We sorely need additional housing in Cambridge to even begin to curb the very alarming increases in housing prices in our city. I am particularly pleased about the addition of 47 affordable units, interspersed throughout the building, which will help to safeguard some modicum of the diversity that we are losing all too rapidly, and the family units that will bring more engaged parents and children into our community and our schools.

This development will enliven an area that all too often sees little activity both on the Mass Ave. side and on Columbia Street. The activity will not just be a result of the residents coming and going, but the public market and the local retail will also generate activity where today there is little or none. The additional housing will also help to provide the market that can attract and keep the kind of retail that the neighborhood is currently lacking.

The development is particularly well situated to promote sustainable smart growth as it is close to the growing businesses of Kendall Square and to public transportation. With this proximity to public transportation and local employers, the creation of local retail, and the proximity to the entertainment and other shops and services that the Square has to offer, it will make a substantial contribution to realizing our vision of creating a sustainable community where people can live, shop, work and play in the same neighborhood to reduce auto traffic.

As to the fact that the building height is greater than that proposed by the C2 Committee, I would say that, shortly after our work was completed, I was a participant in conversations with my fellow members about concerns that our proposed density was insufficient. We feared that, given housing and construction costs, it was not enough to adequately incent developers to build the affordable housing we felt was so important. That was over two years ago, and housing and construction costs have only continued to rise since then.

For me, this is not only about what kind of city I want to live in and but even more, about what kind of city I want to leave for generations to come. That is what motivated me to participate in C2 and what drove the vision that we formulated. It is the reason that I come to testify for developments such as the Normandy Twining.

As this development will help to contribute to creating a sustainable, diverse and vibrant community for today and tomorrow, I am here to register my strong support for the Normandy/Twining petition.

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