

In yesterday's Globe magazine are some quotes by speakers to college graduates. What Bill Gates said at Harvard in 2007 is appropriate to what is on my mind. "Don't let complexity stop you. Be activists. Take on the big inequities. It will be one of the great experiences of your lives."

There are great inequities in the permitting process as it has been working in Cambridge. Developers almost always get what they want; residents' concerns are given a nod and a smile, and perhaps an email response to a letter.

The complexity here is the affordable housing piece. The Cambridge Residents Alliance wants more affordable housing as much as any other citizen group, as much as city councilors do. We have written a platform on affordable housing and many articles and letters pushing for increasing the inclusionary zoning formula, building 100% affordable housing on city parking lots, increasing the nexus linkage fees to add to the pool of money for housing. My colleagues, Jonathan King, Nancy Ryan, Lee Farris, Kathy Watkins and many others have spent countless volunteer hours researching, writing, asking questions, meeting with other citizens, meeting with leaders and authorities in various gov't and professional groups, learning technicalities and rules. Activists all! I am proud and honored to be the secretary of the CRA and I embrace our mission to keep Cambridge liveable, affordable and diverse. I'd like to also mention and praise the letters and public comments made by brilliant and thoughtful people, expressing their opposition to N/T, opposition to spot zoning without a master plan, the danger of setting a precedent for more of the same. One of my friends, who is a deeply involved in climate change and not so much in local issues, called me after the last city council meeting when the Twining/Normandy proposal was discussed. She said she was impressed by the thoughtfulness, thoroughness and passion of the speakers against the tower; and that those in support had relatively bland, pro forma comments.

I think you could have bargained for much more than Twining/ Normandy is offering in their plans. For one thing, you could have adopted the very reasonable order to prohibit more labs and office buildings in Central Square and eliminated the either/or inevitable choice---that if you don't grant this absurdly over zoned luxury housing tower, then another lab or office building will be built on the Quest site. You could have pushed for 20 or 25% affordable units. The developers and their stockholders would still make a bundle of money.

Austin TX just had a city council election and the council is now majority female. I can't help but wonder how Cambridge's city council would operate if the gender composition was more balanced. My women's intuition tells me there will be more women councilors come November.

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