

## Comments to the Council, April 27, 2015

I'm here to speak on several items, so please excuse my reading from notes – I want to make sure I cover everything in my allotted 3 minutes.

First, I want to support the expansion of the Hubway bike share program into West Cambridge (order #8). As you know, West Cambridge is the city's most auto-dependent neighborhood, and one reason is the relative paucity of public transit. Hubway can help fill in the gaps in a transit system that doesn't cover crosstown routes (you can't go directly from Huron Village to Porter Square by transit). Hubway also helps cover that crucial last mile from a T stop – I could pedal to Harvard Square faster than waiting 20 minutes (at least) for the next bus to come on Huron Ave.

Second, I applaud the City's willingness to explore switching our municipal electricity source to 100% renewables when it negotiates a new service contract for next year (item #3 on the Manager's agenda). I made the switch myself last fall and am willing to pay a few dollars more each month to reduce my personal carbon footprint (last month is was \$12.70 extra – if I turned off a few household appliances I could probably reduce that to below \$10 a month). Mothers Out Front made the process of switching easy. More than 200 other households have made the switch and I'm noticing more and more solar installations. This is an opportunity for the City to show leadership on an issue people clearly care about.

Third, I urge you to reject the petition from Citizens Bank for a variance for 10 protruding banner signs on a prominent building in historic Harvard Sq. (that's petition #3). It's visual clutter and if you grant a variance to Citizens, then every other store will want to put up banners to compete. In the era of smartphones, navigation has never been easier – why do we need banner signs sticking out from buildings?

Fourth, as the leader of the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance and a near neighbor of the former Tokyo restaurant, I am of course very interested in seeing this long-neglected parcel put to better use (policy order #13). Certainly housing would be preferable to an extension of the auto repair garage, which is what we have heard the new owner is considering. We

also believe this location directly opposite the crosswalk to Fresh Pond and next to the Tobin School would be ideal for some ground floor retail – a café where pond visitors and Tobin families could stop for a snack or a light meal. Though neither of the sponsors of this policy order have reached out to the FPRA for our thoughts, we look forward to working closely with the City to think creatively about how the Tokyo parcel might help meet our city's affordable housing needs and enhance the neighborhood, too.

Last but not least, I remain opposed to the Normandy Twining up-zoning petition. Central Square is not in my backyard, but I can see the slippery slope that comes from rushing through a spot zoning petition to benefit one very well-connected developer. I recently read former Mayor Barbara Ackerman's memoir "You the Mayor" -- she refused to accept campaign donations from parties with business before the council, including real estate developers and attorneys, because of the appearance of impropriety. In light of the rush to approve this piecemeal petition in lieu of broader district-wide planning, six of you here might ask yourselves what the woman with the room down the hall named after her would think of the long trail of donations that you have received from the Normandy Twining principals and associates, their family members, and their attorney, former Mayor Gallucio. I don't think Mayor Ackerman would be smiling.

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