

Oppose Normandy-Twining Up-Zoning Petition

Carole Perrault <cperrault@att.net>

Fri 5/15/2015 9:23 AM

City Clerk Agenda

To:City Council <CityCouncil@CambridgeMA.GOV>;

Cc:Lopez, Donna <dlopez@cambridgema.gov>;

 1 attachment (177 KB)

Testimony 5.14.15 Normandy-Twining Petition.pdf;

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan, and the City Councillors:

Please find ATTACHED written testimony in regard to the Normandy-Twining petition, which will be before the council for a Second Reading at Monday's (May 18) City Council hearing.

Ms. Lopez can you kindly include this testimony in the official record.

In addition, I have included a link below to an article on "The Guardian's" website that is an analysis of the rampant development that London has experienced in recent years. Councillors, I would like to call your attention to this article because in some ways it is relevant to what is beginning to happen in Boston and here.

<http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/sep/17/truth-property-developers-builders-exploit-planning-cities>

Thank you for your kind attention to my point of view.

Sincerely,

Carole Perrault

May 14, 2015

Cambridge City Council
City of Cambridge
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

RE: LETTER EXPRESSING OPPOSITION TO THE NORMANDY-TWINING ZONING PETITION

Dear Honorable City Councillors:

The “Mass and Main” Zoning Petition proposed by Normandy/Twining Partnership comes clothed with a public interest, as its outcome affects the community at large. Because the public has an interest, the petition must submit to being controlled by the *public* for the *common good* and not for that of a singular developer seeking profit above all else. This zoning petition especially has significance, because what happens here will likely be a catalyst for other similar zoning petitions throughout C2 and beyond its borders. The fundamental questions before you Councillors, as “we the people’s” representatives and stewards of our city’s future, are:

- Who is the *public* that I am representing and am I representing that *public* with a clear conscience and with reasonable knowledge, understanding and appreciation of how this vote will impact the short-term and long-term demographics, urban fabric, heritage, and quality of life of Cambridge’s diverse citizenry?
- What is the *common good* and am I representing that *common good* with a clear conscience and with reasonable knowledge, understanding and appreciation of how this vote will impact the short-term and long-term demographics, urban fabric, heritage, and quality of life of Cambridge’s diverse citizenry?

These fundamental questions, require an uncorrupted public forum, sincere probing, deep questioning, and complex debate, along with research and data gathering

- From experts (sociologists, sustainability architects, urban planners, preservationists, economists, climate scientists, etc.)—those that understand and appreciate that a community’s distinctiveness rather than its sameness is what makes it economically and culturally viable and that unless the development is tied to human values, it may be short lived and not achieve the benefits anticipated, especially in the climate-vulnerable times we live in,
- From other municipalities who are facing similar pressures and who have successfully negotiated development and change or are learning lessons from failures of policies that did not protect human values, human dignity, public assets including heritage, etc., and
- From a broad cross-section of the population that constitutes the *public*.

It requires you as our Councillors to challenge your own and others stereotypes, your own built-in biases and external biases driven by campaign donations, and your own and others politics and former ways of doing business in Cambridge. Above all, it requires adequate comprehensive

planning in the larger context of the entire city, not by a lot-by-lot basis or by a PUD-by-PUD basis.

I have followed this zoning petition closely and have been disheartened, dismayed, and, at times, downright disgusted by the lack of such debate and deliberation, by you, our representatives and by the Planning Board. Politics and a biased knowledge and data base of a few have gotten in the way of any serious broader *public* discussion on the impact such a zoning allowance and such a petition would have on the diversity and spirit of C2's historic, cultural, social, and human character. If this zoning petition is allowed to move forward without a serious discussion of issues of diversity in all its manifestations, gentrification, impact on the historic, architectural, cultural, social context, and without any comprehensive planning effort, it will be a tragedy of high order for the future of our city's core and beyond. The developer has so skillfully and deceptively presented images that limit how the structure's proposed height will impact the streetscape from both ends of Mass. Ave. and from the neighborhoods on either side of Mass. Ave. The up-zoning petition of 2-1/2 times the currently-zoned height is massive for this location and is program-based, not design-based, and will, no doubt, contribute wildly to the ongoing gentrification of Cambridge, with its proposed 232 luxury versus 40 affordable and 7 middle income units. Do the math here as to the profit margin the developer and his investors will garner!

It strikes me that Cambridge's officials, both elected and not, are playing right into the scare tactics being set in play by the institutions' corporations and developers; i.e., if you don't give us what we want we'll take our marbles and play elsewhere, etc. I say whoa! You have leverage here to negotiate much more for the *public* and the *common good* and I ask why aren't you devoting your efforts to these goals? Isn't your job to protect *public* assets over *private* assets?

Just look at what MITIMCo has recently unveiled for the lower end of Main Street—a handful of towers

- That have reduced historic preservation to tokenism;
- That stand to further diminish class diversity;
- That will have a huge impact on the aesthetic, physical, and human character of the street;
- That do not adequately address the social responsibility of MIT in providing housing for its graduate students; and
- That reduces truly public assets of human scale, integrity of materials/architecture, sky, light, heritage, democratic open space, etc. (The Kendall Rooftop Garden, which has already been diminished, will be diminished even further by towers on both sides of its currently open vistas, especially if a tower is built at the Volpe site.)

This is a modern urban Greek tragedy being played out on Main Street. The proposed streetscape with its handful of towers looks like something out of the horrors of urban planning in the 1960s-70s, albeit with some token history thrown in. This era of urban planning will surely make the urban planning of the sixties and seventies look benign. I mention this because without careful planning, C2 could be reduced to this drama. You, as our Councillors, have an opportunity here to slow down the unbridled ruin of our democratic city by the monies of the powerful and the few.

Ada Louise Huxtable, who pioneered modern architectural criticism in the pages of *The New York Times* and who, during her long career, celebrated buildings and places that respected human dignity and civic history,¹ wrote in a 1963 *Times* editorial titled *Farewell to Penn Station*:

Any city gets what it admires, will pay for, and, ultimately deserves. Even when we had Penn Station, we couldn't afford to keep it clean. We want and deserve tin-can architecture in a tinhorn culture. And we will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed.

Bringing her words closer to home, I say to you Honorable City Councillors of Cambridge that time and history will probably not judge your tenures by the cookie-cutter *placemaking* districts that you have permitted, but by the historic and civic districts and democratic spaces that you have destroyed by fast-track actions and by what increasingly appears to be a degraded public process and truncated planning process.

I believe that if you vote to approve the Normandy/Twining Partnership Zoning Petition before you on May 18 and other petitions like it that are sure to come, the C2 National Register Historic District and the C2 Cultural District will be on the path to loss, with all that those designations are meant to embody. This zoning petition for a 195-foot tower, as presented, without thorough deliberation and analysis within a larger planning context, will not prove to enhance or preserve the soul, identity, historic and architectural integrity, and the diverse and civic vitality of the district and, most importantly, its abutting neighborhoods. It will, no doubt, contribute to the gentrification of C2, the developers' and a select group of favored architectural firms' coffers, the Chamber of Commerce and all that it has become, and the institutions and industries that are shirking their social responsibilities in a city that offers them so much. You have an opportunity, by saying NO to this zoning petition, to slow-down piecemeal development with all its flaws, in favor of a more democratic and comprehensive planning model.

The choice is yours on May 18 ...

And ours in November ...

Respectfully submitted,

Carole L. Perrault

Carole L. Perrault
39-year Cambridge Resident
41-year Civil Servant in the field of Architectural Conservation

¹ David W. Dunlap, "Ada Louise Huxtable, Champion of Livable Architecture, Dies at 91," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2013.

The excerpt below is from Article III of the Cambridge City Code, which enables the establishment of neighborhood conservation districts. I feel its language is appropriate to single out here:

To preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City of Cambridge and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation, and maintenance of neighborhoods ... which constitute or reflect distinctive features of architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wide public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods ...; and by furthering these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live and work.