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June 4, 2012 - City Council Presentation

I am speaking in support of item #10 under policy orders, and am requesting that the City Council amend that order to include 35 Cherry Street (the vacant lot at the corner of School and Cherry Streets which is owned by MIT) in that order. It is time that the lot at Cherry and School Street and the lot at Watson and Brookline Street be made available for community uses to be decided by neighborhood residents rather than being land banked by MIT for some future development.

The Cherry Street lot was formerly parking for the long vacant MIT commercial building at 750 Main Street. This vacant lot has been the focus of advocacy by residents of Area 4 for several years and was a major Land Use topic in the 2010 Area Four Neighborhood Study. On many occasions Area Four residents have been vocal about this vacant lot and the continued practice of MIT to land bank lots in residential neighborhoods of the Central Square area.

What has been missing from this advocacy has been a strong and consistent effort on the part of the City Council to gain control over these important parcels. It is one thing to vote on resolutions; it is another to make these lots part of the conversation whenever and wherever MIT hopes to expand their developments.

This is another critical time when MIT land holdings, in their entirety, need to be on the table for discussion. There should be no moving forward on any zoning relief for MIT related parcels or plans until all property owned by MIT comes onto the table for negotiation.

Forest City has forwarded to you a set of drawings that indicate the shadows that would be cast over Area 4 if their new development next to the Central Square firehouse were to proceed - even more important than their study of shadows is the shadowy character of their purchase and control of property in Central Square and residential neighborhoods.

If you pass this Council Order, you must follow up and take action. It was one year ago that the Council passed several orders regarding the Harvard Street property that Neighbors For a Better Community (NBC) removed from neighborhood control. This Council Order should not suffer the fate of the Council Orders regarding Harvard Street. For example:

Where is the follow-up to your letter to the Attorney General regarding the conduct of Neighbors for a Better Community and the transfer of land out of community control? Which of you have met with the Attorney General's Office? Have decisions been rendered in regard to the land? Has the Harvard Street lot undergone an independent appraisal, which is necessary if there is any meaning to the eminent domain council order? Another year has gone by and the Area Four community is wondering if the council orders regarding this lot were meaningless political gestures. Will this Council Order be meaningless as well?


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