

6 Newtowne Court Apt. 166
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Monday, June 25, 2012

2012 JUN 26 AM 9 40

To the honorable, the City Council of Cambridge
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

I am a board member of the Alliance of Cambridge Tenants (ACT) and resident of Newtowne Court. In May the ACT Board voted to endorse a moratorium on upzoning initiated by neighborhood groups in Area Four. We are an organization mostly of low-income renters. Why have we become so concerned about development issues?

One reason is that we are worried about the impact of rapid redevelopment on rents. After a short pause, rents are rising again this year. The Federal government (HUD) will only pay so much: if landlords can get a rent much higher than HUD's "fair market" standard, residents will no longer be able to use Section 8s for those apartments. ACT is hearing from voucher households that they are in danger of losing their homes.¹

Furthermore if commercial landlords ask for and get higher rents, our favorite stores and restaurants are forced out. They are replaced by businesses that cater to higher-income people.

At the same time, The Housing Authority (CHA) is facing a fiscal crisis potentially so severe that it will be greatly tempted to sell off some of its property rights. This became starkly clear when the Community Development Dept. (CDD) showed slides suggesting that more than half of Newtowne Court might be replaced by a mixed-use, mixed-income midrise development.²

Why are people especially alarmed by Forest City's current proposal to expand University Park?

Because the kind of high-tech university-centered development that was once largely confined to non-residential, non-retail areas like Kendall Square is now moving up Mass Ave toward Central Square itself, the heart of Cambridge (if it still has one).

The CDD favors a more densely built city, maybe in part for anticipated tax revenues. Commercial landlords favor it because they anticipate a ripple effect leading to higher rents. Some opponents of development are willing to compromise in exchange for developer-paid "benefits packages" and the affordable 15 percent required by inclusionary zoning.

As residents we ask: how much will average market rents increase in Cambridge as a result of the level of development anticipated by the CDD? How many apartments will be removed from potential Section 8 occupancy by those higher rents? Who will actually benefit from deals worked out between the City and particular developers?

As residents we ask: how many more people will live in and travel around Cambridge as a result of this anticipated level of development? How will this new population impact the streets, transit, and cultural makeup of our communities?

We need answers. Meantime I hope that you will withhold your support from upzoning proposals.

Sincerely,

Bill Cunningham
etwee@earthlink.net

¹ "Home values in the Boston area declined 1.4 percent last month.... Meanwhile, rents in the Hub continued to climb, posting a 3.6 percent rise to \$1,884 in May. The national rent index also rose 4.6 percent to \$1,252. Rents rose on a monthly basis in 77 percent of the 344 markets covered by Zillow." "Zillow: Boston Area Home Values Drop As Rents Soar" *Banker & Tradesman* June 20, 2012

² "If insufficient operating and capital funding were to persist, CHA would not be able to fund the operating and capital needs of its entire portfolio. The CHA would need to consider selling some developments to reduce operating costs and to raise the needed capital dollars to maintain other CHA properties." Margaret Donnelly Moran, *memorandum* to the CHA Board of Commissioners Nov. 16, 2011
<http://www.actcambridge.org/sites/default/files/admin/Informational%20Memo%20to%20BOC%2011%3A21%3A11.pdf>