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Subject: Fw: Re: North Mass Ave zoning amendment

Subject: Re: our question and demands...

Dear Councillors and Planning Board members:

Here are some ideas discussed throughout several meetings among neighbors and residents regarding the proposed Amendment prepared by the City in name of some neighbors. Some are key issues extracted from the amendment that we were concerned about and/or issues for you to consider.

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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

DIVISIONS/ HEIGHT AND FAR

> Results in...Split the Mass. Ave. Overlay District into three distinct areas, adding new use and dimensional restrictions, incentives, and requirements in some locations while removing uniform protections that have guided development along the Avenue for decades. Uniform development guidelines that were many years in the making with much community input and expert input from throughout the city. This amendment, unfortunately, doesn't seem to reflect or understand the purpose and intent of the original regulation.

> Rezones sections of the Avenue without clearly defining the metes and bounds of the newly created districts, nor explain the reasoning behind he split.

USE

> 20.110.31..1 Removes or relaxes limitations on new fast-food operations, hotels/motels, nightclubs, dance halls, commercial recreation venues, institutional facilities, and other possibly inappropriate activities along portions of Mass. Ave. and Linear Park by reclassifying them as "required" or "as of right" uses (allowable in some cases without a zoning variance, special permit, or public design review) . This is problematic for many reasons.

> Adds another multifamily housing district to North Cambridge and includes a slice of Linear Park as part of it (instead of rezoning the entire public park as open space and avoiding new incentives for dense apartment complexes with no ground-floor retail space or other public amenities).

> Discourages retention or restoration of desirable low-impact residential uses and yards along certain sections of the Avenue (unless an undefined process creates a "special exemption for historic structures")

LEGISLATION/INTERPRETATION

> Empower the city manager's appointed planning board to authorize any "active non-residential ground floor" uses in a new overlay subdistrict north of Porter Square. Certainly too vague, open-ended and too broad authority.

➤ Introduces vague, ambiguous, imprecise, contradictory language that will complicate interpretation of the ordinance and create new loopholes

LIMITATION OWNERS

> Limit property owners' right to replace existing nonconforming structures that are partially destroyed by fire or other disaster

PARKING RELIEF

> Reduces off-street commercial parking requirements, increases allowed overall building heights, and remove height setbacks on some sections of the Avenue? Not in the interest of a vibrant neighborhood which includes residents as well as restaurant and shoppers!

20.110.36 From what I understand, there seems to be some concessions that give businesses use of public land (not a problem if done well, without taking over a busy sidewalk), resulting in leniency in the # of parking spaces per table now required. Does the amendment really say that a restaurant is allowed up to 50% of the # of tables inside to be outside without requiring the per table parking minimum?

I may have this wrong, so I hope we can clarify this at the meeting. Already bogged down with parking and traffic, this is not a good idea in zones within 10 blocks of Porter Square

CONSISTENCY

20.103.1 Not sure precisely how this applies, perhaps an example would help? E.g. Is the old Long Funeral Home now the established scale that any further development in that "base district" can reach?

We surely would all love to see some harmony in terms of promoting tree scapes, gardens, bus shelters, seating, all those things that make it a pleasure to walk down the avenue. But consistency in potential height?

FAR RELIEF

20.103.1/and other clauses: 32 sq. Feet beyond the allowed footage is allowed for bays? Basement footage is not counted in the FAR? Increased footage allowed on historic lots? WHY is that beneficial to our neighborhoods, and how does that encourage a community-friendly business? Perhaps a Gap or other chain store would see this as beneficial, but is that what is needed on the Avenue?

DRIVEWAYS ALLOWED ON ABUTTING STREETS

I am confused about 20.105. Does this allow developers to put driveways on abutting streets instead of Mass ave? Residents near the square Beech St. , Porter Road, Creighton, etc. have worked on this issue quite a bit. We need to make sure we understand this clause, and that neighbors are aware. The opposition to this is clear throughout our neighborhoods, for very logical reasons. Please excuse me if, because of my ignorance or the language, I have misconstrued this item.

Lastly, before even considering any of this amendment, we urge you to consider:

Making transparent the logical and detailed rationale for major changes.

e.g. Why is FAR relief better for business...Where are the studies?

- Some of the amendment seems to discourage small business, e.g. 29.110.31.2

Conducting studies of proposed parking relief impacts in the neighborhoods, with abutters and neighbors criteria included, and following nationally approved procedures (e.g. not taking the reading at 2 pm on an August day)

Clear and *Plain English*, not confusing and misleading information and long clauses. We know, Stuart, that your team is working on this after our recommendations.

We need to discuss the differences between smart growth and density, and how one or the other of these principles are being applied here. pros and cons. Have there been studies in this region? What are the lessons learned from other regions? Some say we are already too dense in spotted areas, which is detrimental, such as in terms of traffic, overwhelmed city services, quality of life, and lack of open space. There have been some clear and strong urban development plans in Vancouver, Barcelona, and Paris, for instance, that councilors and planning board members may want to look at before ruling on any zoning amendment. I volunteer to go along!

And, did you know that John Nolen, the preeminent international urban designer (responsible for the plan for the Knight's garden at the St James site, was chair of the Cambridge City Planning Board back in the early 20th century? And did you know that he resigned due to the

council's inaction and lack of serious attention to urban design?

Too bad he isn't around to guide us all, and I hope, throughout this complicated , obfuscated process that you dedicate so much time to, that you know how much we appreciate every effort you make to better understand and design our city. And I certainly hope our city will continue to grow in ways that still reflect the spirit of Cambridge, a world class epicenter for education, literature, art, scientific discovery, and just plain neighborliness!

Thank you,

Costanza Eggers