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Cambridge City Council Testimony – July 30, 2102

Hello,

My name is Esther Hanig, and I live at 136 Pine St. I have lived in Cambridge for thirty-two years and for the vast majority of that time, I have lived in Area Four. I am here today primarily to state my opposition to the Area Four downzoning petition before the City Council.

My opposition is based on the kind of city and neighborhood that I want to live in. I love living in Cambridge which is closer to my ideal of what an American city should be than any other place I know of. Cambridge is a city of great diversity, committed social values and strong community. I want to support measures that preserve those characteristics as much as possible.

Unfortunately, our city and neighborhood's diversity is declining. With the defeat of rent control which all of us who supported it know was intended to address the strong demand and limited supply of housing in Cambridge, we are all too rapidly becoming a city of only the rich and the poor. The middle class, particularly middle class families are declining steeply. With the demand continuing to increase, this not only impacts the diversity of our neighborhoods and our public schools, but I feel that it also threatens the strength of an active and engaged community. The more families who live here and send their children to our schools, the greater will be their investment and engagement in preserving a strong diverse community.

With increasing housing prices and decreasing federal assistance, current resources to expand middle income family housing are scarce to nonexistent and those to expand low income housing are very limited. Given that reality, I feel that we need to be open to the availability of increased density in exchange for ironclad guarantees of including middle income family housing. Increased density also increases the availability of low income housing as well due to linkage.

I am also very concerned about the impact of climate change, and as a socially responsible city, I feel we need plans to mitigate car traffic in our neighborhood and city. Working towards smart growth where people can shop, live and work in the same area so they don't need to get in cars is another reason we need to be open to the possibility of increasing density. We need to be able to have developments that provide a mix of housing for people who work nearby and the retail mix to meet the needs of both current and prospective residents.

I have heard legitimate concerns about the potential impact of new developments with increased density. The concerns that I hear the most frequently are about the traffic and public transportation impacts. In addition to looking at smart growth as a mitigation strategy to reducing auto usage, we need to find ways to make bicycle and pedestrian usage more accessible and safer and to promote programs such as auto sharing and Zipcar. Increased usage of public transportation will produce more revenue and demand for expanding subway availability. The city should be working with the state to ensure that funding and planning for the T provides the adequate public transportation needed to meet the rising need and to combat climate change.

COM 2012 #341

Communications #78

A communication was received from Esther Hanig, 136 Pine Street in opposition to the Area 4 downzoning petition.

In City Council July 30, 2012

REFERRED TO THE PETITION

I by no means feel that any and all increased density is good for our neighborhood. I only ask that we look at the potential carefully, along with the impacts, and that we respond in ways that allow for density where it benefits our community and look together at ways to address the problems or issues that might arise.

I feel that we are at an important crossroads for the future of our city, and my position on what lies ahead is grounded in supporting what will produce the greatest diversity, the most engaged and strong community and the greatest sustainability. I believe that the Area Four downzoning eliminates possibilities for addressing these issues.

I also would like to add a word about the Forest City request. While the initial housing proposal did not meet the needs of the neighborhood that by no means precluded alternative housing or increased retail proposals. I feel that in keeping with the goals I have mentioned that it is important to have greater community benefits in exchange for the increased density.

Thank you for your consideration.

Esther Hang