

11-23-15

To City Manager Richard Rossi, and to the honorable City Council.

While I **support Policy #1**, asking the city to explore the possibility of a comprehensive housing plan, I am asking that #3, the **Barrett Petition** - allowing basement units to be built as part of re-zoning- **NOT move forward** without due diligence or comprehensive understanding, something repeatedly lacking in its presentations to date. The public has had two shoddy viewings of this proposal with the Planning board and Ordinance committee, with later fine-tuned information from the petitioner. We now know that there are several major amendments, but the public has yet to see the changes. This does not make for a transparent procedure and can only lead to unintended consequences.

Striking issues:

- (1) **How to build a unit in a single-family house, (2) removal of the Owner/ Occupant requirement changed from including 2-family properties—(3) without a mechanism for maintaining affordable housing.**

In order to create light in those basement apartments, foundations would have to be reconfigured to accommodate half-windows or window wells which are excavated. To get the height, houses have to be either dug out or lifted. If they are lifted, then the original foundations can be replaced with concrete and more accommodating materials. The problem is that most of the homes identified on the Barrett map tend to be **historical in nature** which means original foundations and street-scapes, proportions of structures and architecture may be changed. There is a danger in tinkering with our historical fabric as we lose the very human scale and neighborhood contribution to density.

Developers are very smart when it comes to basements, parking on front lawns, and exterior doors for access-- changing the character of some of these sites. We know that not all addresses work because of flooding so they are automatically disqualified. Developers will be long gone before any leaks are identified after the fact.

Further-- basements are where furnaces, water heaters, electrical/ gas meters and storage are usually located. There is usually one egress. This unsafe scenario needs inspection and regulation.

The bigger problem with the Barrett Petition, as pointed out, is the **removal of the owner/ occupant stipulation** so there is potential for developers to buy a property, build a basement unit (which makes it a two unit property), and then sell it at a profit, effectively **negating any potential benefit** to an interesting concept. If that clause remained (owner occupancy), then HOW would an owner be able to sell the property if it had a basement unit which depends on owner occupancy and how would that be **protected as affordable housing**? I think we need to look at all this very carefully or ultimately miss the unintended consequences. This blanket petition looks like city-wide up-zoning, a Pandora's box which is ripe for abuse. PLEASE FOLLOW THE PLANNING BOARD MEASURED STEPS AT CONSIDERING THIS PETITION PART OF CAMBRIDGE'S MASTER PLAN. There are too many moving parts.

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