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Comments by Terrence F. Smith
Director of Government Affairs
Cambridge Chamber of Commerce
June 20, 2011 Cambridge City Council Meeting
Unfinished business Item # 7, Committee Report 5

Good evening Mr. Mayor and members of the Cambridge City Council.

My name is Terrence Smith and I am the Director of Government Affairs at the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce at 859 Massachusetts Ave. and a Cambridge resident at 21 Manassas Avenue. I am speaking on Unfinished Business Item #7 and Committee Report 5.

I am happy to be here this evening to express my strong support as a Cambridge resident and the support of the Cambridge Chamber and our 1,500 members for the zoning proposal before you tonight filed by Novartis.

Novartis is an important community partner and the development proposal to build a campus on Massachusetts Avenue across from its existing headquarters demonstrates this company's commitment to our city.

The petition requests a modest increase in allowable development in a largely institutional and commercial part of the City and will provide numerous benefits to Cambridge while allowing an important member of our business community to continue to grow here. The proposed zoning changes support the Council's goals around maintaining a strong fiscal position, good environmental stewardship, promoting Cambridge business and building community.

Commercial property taxes provide the primary source of revenue to fund City services. Expanding the commercial revenue base, through projects like this, not only insures long-term funding for services but also reduces the tax burden on residents.

The property affected by this zoning change is currently under-used and the proposed redevelopment will improve the use of this space while increasing, through the improvements to open space, the green space in this part of the City. Building in urban areas has a number of other environmental benefits including using existing transportation and utility infrastructure and protecting green space in exurban and suburban areas.

The development that will result from approval of this petition will bring needed construction jobs to Cambridge and, once the project is completed, new employment to Cambridge. These employees will then increase the customer base for local businesses further improving the Cambridge economy.

The campus proposed by Novartis will provide important physical connections that will energize Central Square, University Park, Kendall Square and MIT. The Novartis campus development on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue will improve the east-west connection along Massachusetts Avenue between Central Square and the MIT campus and the north-south connection between Central Square and University Park and Kendall Square.

The modest increase in allowable development provides numerous benefits to Cambridge while allowing an important member of our business community to continue to grow here. Other communities are increasingly competing for the type of development that finds Cambridge attractive and the limited support requested here, a modest increase in the amount of development permitted, is at the lowest end of support often requested by developers in communities around Cambridge, in other states and globally.

Approval of this petition is the right thing to do for our City. It demonstrates that Cambridge supports reasonable growth, supports our business community and is ready and willing to compete to remain the global center for life sciences and technology.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening and again I encourage all the members of the council to vote in favor of the Novartis petition.