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Lopez, Donna

From: lawrence bluestone [lbluestone@verizon.net]
Sent: Sunday, April 06, 2014 5:16 PM
To: City Council
Cc: Lopez, Donna
Subject: Support for Maher, Benzan McGovern Policy Order for Planning - April 7 Council Meeting

To the Cambridge City Council -

As a long-time Cambridge resident, I want to express my strong support for Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan, and Councilor McGovern's Policy Order to continue Cambridge's excellent planning efforts of recent years, including the recently completed K2C2 process which engaged the participation of many Cambridge residents, including myself.

- Cambridge's thoughtful and balanced growth over the last decade and more has significantly contributed to a better quality of life for all of Cambridge's citizens, and has provided all of us with expanded housing choices, expanded shopping choices within walkable districts and neighborhoods, more parks, better recreational facilities, a wonderful new library, and a stable fiscal base - the envy of every other City in Massachusetts. This has all been brought about by the thoughtful growth policies arrived at after deliberate district planning efforts throughout Cambridge. This thoughtful growth has served as the foundation for making our city the vibrant and healthy community it is today.
- This is not to say that we don't have issues which we must address. The rising cost of housing and its affordability is the key one. However, what is clear is that it has not been overbuilding that is the problem. Quite the opposite - it's the currently constrained and inadequate supply of housing that is insufficient to meet the demand of all who wish to live in our thriving community. Without fostering a significant growth in our housing supply and density, prices will continue to rise. This can only be attained by supporting greater mixed use densities in and around our commercial squares where there is sufficient transit, while scaling down heights at the edges to meet the lower scales of our traditional neighborhoods.
- Cambridge has also been successfully planning to be a green city and has been at the leading edge, nationally, of shifting our travel patterns from the car to walking, transit, and cycling. In fact, in Kendall Square, our most prominent growth area, traffic has actually declined in recent years although several million square feet of new development has occurred there! This reflects amazingly successful transportation policies enacted in recent years by the City. Keep it up!
- In some other communities, there is merit in undertaking a comprehensive city wide plan - usually in those that do little planning otherwise. Of course, this is not the circumstance in Cambridge. Our vigorous PB and CDD do almost continuous planning - in neighborhoods and districts throughout our city, which diminishes the need for a periodic city-wide plan that can soon become outdated.
- Lastly, and importantly, it is necessary to understand the legal role, or lack of one, of a Chapter 91 Comprehensive Master Plan in our Commonwealth if the City Council were to choose to support one. In Massachusetts, a Comprehensive Master Plan carries little to no legal weight - other than as an advisory policy document. Zoning regulation in Massachusetts remains the primary land use and design control mechanism. Unlike in most other states, in Massachusetts, there is no legal requirement that a city's zoning ordinance adhere to or comply with the recommendations of a Master Plan. Therefore, any future Planning Board and City Council can craft new zoning regulations that either may or may not reflect the Master Plan's conclusions. This puts into question the entire validity of such future Plan and the significant effort it will take to produce one.

In summary, Cambridge, despite its vitality and high quality of life, continues to face growth challenges - housing costs, traffic, and sustainability. Over the years, the City, through careful community-based planning, has successfully transformed obsolescent industrial wasteland areas (Kendall Sq., Lechmere, Simplex, and now North Point and Alewife) into thriving mixed use communities, and is seeking to restore Central Square to its former vitality. The City has been aggressively addressing these growth issues over recent years through it's current processes and is continuing to make significant headway. Yes, growth must be balanced, its impacts mitigated, and neighborhood edges protected. But, growth has been the foundation of our city's vitality and increasing quality of life. If the city's processes basically work, refine them, but don't discard them.

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