

Tuesday February 11, 2014

Dear Mayor, Council Members, Planning Board Members, City Manager, State Rep. Decker, and Mr. Murphy

We are writing today to ask that the special permit application (PB288) from Leggat McCall be denied.

We live at #80 Thorndike Street, about a block from the courthouse building. We have been living in East Cambridge for 10 years. We have been active in the building of a family-friendly community here in East Cambridge, and have seen property values climb and neighborhood community grow as more and more young families, children, and professional settle in this neighborhood. We consider ourselves fortunate to have chosen to settle in a neighborhood where old values and new change have melded together to create what is now one of the most desirable neighborhoods to live in in the City.

Those who know East Cambridge are familiar with the juxtaposition of the new and the old; the beautiful and the not so beautiful, the up and coming and the tried-and-true. We see this balance in the local businesses along Cambridge Street, in the trendy new restaurants along 3rd Street, and in the bustle of the many new workers who stream into Kendall Square each day.

However, there exists in our neighborhood one entity that belongs to no part of this balance. This is the Sullivan Courthouse: monstrous, brutishly ugly, and dramatically out of place. It is universally acknowledged to have been nothing but a mistake.

Decades later, the city has a singular opportunity to correct this error: to bring the building visually in line with similar development in the area, and to better complement the beauty of the historic court house complex that surrounds it.

We are in favor of developing the building to bring more office space, retail establishments, and residential units - all much needed. However, to miss an opportunity to seriously redress the size of the building would be a major mistake, and a tragic missed opportunity.

The neighborhood and consequently the City has been immensely fortunate in the boom BioTechnology and related industries in this area. Property values have soared over the past 15 years in East Cambridge. Abandoned lots, vacant landscapes and sketchy corners have all but vanished from McGrath Highway to Main Street - all due to the development and opportunity in East Cambridge.

With such growth, and the associated financial benefits, we believe that this is the right moment to acknowledge and appreciate all the boons of this area by focusing now on a development decision that seeks to redress this glaring error even at some financial cost.

In addition to the issue of size, we are also concerned about real issues of wind, light pollution, and traffic and parking. We are pro-growth, and pro-business, and we embrace the changes and increased activity in East Cambridge with joy. However we do witness the regular clogging in 3rd Street, and know that the only “give” in this area is to spill over into the East Cambridge residential streets. As a neighborhood which has seen a major growth in families with young children, we are concerned as always about our narrow grid of streets with impatient and rushed drivers missing stop signs or blowing through intersections.

**Now is the time to take a brave stance against the continuation of the project until the state can come up with a financial option for the developer to reduce the height of the building. Given all that we have gained in this neighborhood, it behooves the state and the city to hold off for an opportunity to rectify this colossal mistake.**

Sincerely,

Abigail & Alister Lewis-Bowen  
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