

February 24, 2014

Dear members of the Planning Board:

I am writing to object to the redevelopment of the Edward J. Sullivan Courthouse building as currently proposed by Leggat McCall Properties. This building, which has been the bane of the East Cambridge community since its completion in 1974, will in no way be improved by what Leggat McCall is promising, as the building will continue to stand in stark opposition to its office and residential surroundings, and continue to contribute to a gross volumetric displacement of air. In essence, accepting their proposal means that the building will remain unchanged as to its general form, scale, and height, which has been the constant problem since its creation. Add to this the light-pollution caused by the conversion of the tower exterior to glass panelling as proposed, in that direct sunlight will be reflected onto underlying streets, and into buildings and houses, and that the office spaces within the tower risk to be lit up like a torch at night, the future building promises to be even more of a nuisance to the community than it was before. As for the exterior aesthetics of the building that Leggat McCall has in mind, apart from the so-called pedestal area, the high-rise tower has the potential to be visually louder, if not uglier, than the present façade is generally held to be.

My understanding is that the land upon which the Sullivan Courthouse stands was private property that was deeded to public use in the early 19th century. From there, it was used as a small prison complex until the present high-rise building was erected. The last owner of this building having been the Commonwealth, public use would seem to have been maintained until the Commonwealth's recent dealings with Leggat McCall, from which it can be inferred that the Commonwealth is placing the interests of money and private development over the needs of the public good. As an example of this, let me call your attention to a public meeting that was held in August 2012 between the East Cambridge Planning Team, who were representing the interests of the neighboring community, and three development teams, who were vying for redesigning the Sullivan Courthouse at the time, one of which was Leggat McCall. At the end of the meeting, which was mandated by the Commonwealth prior to its own negotiations with the developers, the public who attended was asked to rank the three prospective projects in order of preference. First place easily went to a development team that promised to reduce the height of the building. Second place went to a development team that pretty much left the building as it was, yet promised to take the interests of the neighborhood into serious consideration. And third and last place went to Leggat McCall, whose sole representative had nothing substantive to say and no plans to show. The neighborhood's responses were ostensibly handed over to the Commonwealth for consideration, and yet the Commonwealth chose Leggat McCall without this

development team having shown the public a thing. The whole affair could be deemed farcical if the end result hadn't remained problematic as to how the Commonwealth completely ignored the interests of the neighboring population.

In moving to a conclusion, let me again state my opposition to the Leggat McCall proposal as it presently stands. Yet from their proposal, I do wish to mention one aspect that would be beneficial to the East Cambridge community. That has to do with the pedestal area, as I believe it is called. Remove the tower section from the building and one is left with an architectural form that is more in keeping with its surroundings. And at present, Leggat McCall's exterior façade for the pedestal itself seems reasonable enough, in that it matches the red-brick buildings surrounding it. But Leggat McCall's insistence that only 24 apartments can be built there, with the rest being devoted to office space, seems a bit misleading. The pedestal being symmetrically designed, what is promised to be 24 apartments on one side of the building could easily be mirrored on the other side, with the leftover areas being designed as slightly larger apartments. Also, while at first I found Leggat McCall's ideas for retail at the ground level interesting, more and more I am concerned that what will actually be in place there will be more coffee shops, fast-food sandwich retailers, and bars catering only to the enormous office building that Leggat McCall essentially wants to build. Rather, what would be more beneficial to the needs of residents living in the scaled-down apartment building I have in mind, as well as to the needs of the abutting residential community as a whole, is a small grocery store. As for the remaining FAR of the tower, it would better serve the public good of the neighboring community for Leggat McCall to remove it entirely than to keep it as is, or as they envision it for the future. Ultimately, by way of compromise, it would seem more realistic for Leggat McCall to enter into negotiations with members of the East Cambridge community who would like to see the tower section transferred to where the neighboring public parking lot now stands so as to create more of a stepped architectural setting.

Yours sincerely,

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