

January 21, 21014

Dear Mr. Russell and Members of the Board:

As an abutter and community representative, I have spent a great deal of time studying the documents of Leggat McCall's proposed redevelopment for 40 Thorndike Street, the former Sullivan Courthouse in East Cambridge. This project is immense (510,000 square feet and 22 stories tall) in an area dominated by low-scale buildings of mixed use and mostly residential character, organized in a manner typical of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. With it's proximity to both Kendall Square and North Point, there is no doubt that East Cambridge will continue to play a vital in the future of the City of Cambridge. Although 40 Thorndike Street may represent primarily a business deal for Leggat McCall Properties and will have a lasting and huge impact on the City, it most directly impacts the quality of life in our East Cambridge neighborhood. If the project fails to correct and improve the wrongs of the existing courthouse, it will be a huge and highly visible failure not only to Cambridge, but also to Boston, Charlestown and, surrounding communities. However, it also offers the opportunity for tremendous improvement to the surrounding residential neighborhood, as a stimulus for redevelopment of Cambridge Street, North Point, Kendall Square, and areas in between, including First Street.

I have concerns about the impact of the proposed re-design, particularly its compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. Therefore I wish to express my concerns, but also, when possible, to offer solutions that I feel will better integrate the new project into the existing neighborhood. To make it easier for myself, I have treated the streetscape (sidewalk to the top of four-story podium) and the tower separately.

Spring Street Issues

- A. The current proposal is hugely out of scale and out of character with the two-to-four story houses opposite. Spring Street appears to be the true corporate 'front entry' to the office tower with a monumentally scaled, multistory glass lobby at its center. The real address is 40 Thorndike Street as stated in the Special Permit Application.
- B. This corporate entry is flanked by retail space, far from the street and sidewalk foot traffic, and which will no doubt be difficult to rent.
- C. The proposed open space offers no amenity of any value to the community and is the least expensive solution to leftover space. It's true function is a raised, landscaped corporate plaza. It separates the project from the community, and it emphasizes how much the neighborhood is dwarfed by the tower.
- D. This area in particular is subject to high winds already and a windswept corporate plaza will do nothing to improve this problem. I experience these winds every day walking my dogs. Turning the corner from Second Street is where the wind becomes most noticeable.

Spring Street Solutions

- A. I am in favor of low- scale meaningful housing along Spring Street and see this as a solution to some of the previously listed problems. It helps to mitigate the scale of the tower to its surroundings. It also offers a highly desirable response to smart growth. It should be noted that both HYM and DivcoWest proposed low-scale housing on Spring Street and that this scheme was by far the most favored by the community.
- B. Leggat McCall's own architects, Elkus Manfredi, have successfully designed and built an example of low-scaled urban housing wrapping an office tower, the Saltonstall Building at 100 Cambridge Street, a very challenging site in Boston.
- C. The park may not be necessary. Far more pleasant and usable green space currently exists nearby: at Lopez Street, at the Bullfinch Courthouse complex, the Lechmere Canal Park, and along the Charles River; a new two-acre park is to be built between Second and Third Streets.
- D. Wind. Low-scale housing is likely to mitigate the problems, however wind studies are needed as an active design tool for the tower and all areas of the project to reduce this problem.
- E. We need to strongly consider encouraging the city to redirect traffic through the area to improve safety by changing 1) Spring Street to one way from Third to First; 2) changing Thorndike to one

way from First to Third; and, 3) changing Second to one way from Binney to Cambridge. Removing the existing wall will have no effect. Cars approaching Third from Second Street need to pull up to the edge of the sidewalk for clear visibility.

Third Street

- A. One of the better street frontages overall, we still see serious problems with the proposed strategy of including HVAC air intake at sidewalk level. Mechanical equipment noise, along with a proposed design incorporating a wood slated sidewalk could present challenges for handicapped access as well as snow, leaf and trash removal.
- B. The proposed housing along Third Street is 75% loft space. Shadow studies show that little direct light enters the small living spaces. More meaningful housing is most desirable.

Second Street

- A. The street level of this elevation is largely given over to loading dock and garage entry functions. While this is discretely represented behind closed rollup garage doors, fact tends to show that as wishful thinking. Enforcement of closed garage doors as 'default' need to be insisted on and enforced as has been done elsewhere, for example in the City of Boston.
- B. The proposed loading dock cannot accommodate large moving trucks. This could result in blocking street traffic and noise pollution to the nearby residents. A plan needs to be put in place to mitigate traffic, prevent truck idling, and limit hours during which both residential and office tenants can be moved in and out of the building.

The Tower Problems

- A. Wind at street level.
- B. Nighttime light pollution will affect surrounding residential neighborhoods, not just abutters.
- C. Potential solar reflection on surrounding residential neighborhoods from reflective glass tower curtain wall. At present, approximately 30% of the building is glass. When the outer concrete cladding is removed, 100% will be glass. Glare analysis was not included in the presentation.
- D. Mechanical noise from rooftop HVAC units.
- E. The curtain wall design is undifferentiated and over-scaled, and emphasizes the monumental bulk of the tower.

Solutions

- A. Desk Top Wind Tunnel Studies need to be made and design solutions incorporated to reduce this problem.
- B. Strategies to reduce light pollution and solar glare need to be made, studied and incorporated into the design
- C. Sound attenuation needs to be incorporated onto HVAC units, sound insulating screens need to be incorporated, and the City's regulations on noise pollution need to be enforced.
- D. Design strategies need to incorporate means to reduce the tower's bulk to make it at least appear more graceful and slender. A design of undifferentiated mirror glass will not make the tower go away nor offer any improvement from the massive precast concrete structure currently looming over the City of Cambridge. The neighborhood of East Cambridge and the City of Cambridge deserve better, and I strongly believe that something far better can be achieved.

Leggat McCall should also be required to hire a naturalist firm to complete a survey of the current avian population BEFORE they do any work and commit to returning at least the existing population of falcons and eagles to the tower after construction is complete with annual censuses of the population taking for 5 years after occupancy reaches 80%. Many neighbors have expressed their concern to me about the birds inhabiting the upper stories.

The proposed market in the garage space is the largest benefit to the neighborhood from this project that I can see. We would like it to be completed before the building is given a Certificate of Occupancy.

In summary, I believe there are many details that should be worked out and clearly defined before approval is given to this Special Permit request. Leggat McCall has indicated that they are willing to

work with the neighborhood, but I rely on the Planning Board to see that all these matters – noise, traffic, wind, deliveries, appropriate housing, open space are clearly specified in the permit itself. Leggat McCall will be attending a Q&A session for the full membership of ECPT on January 22. A formal letter will be sent thereafter.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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