

2/3/14

Dear Members of the Cambridge Planning Board:

As a resident of East Cambridge, living within a block from this building, I write you to consider carefully the request from Leggat McCall's to exempt the "40 Thorndike" development project from the current zoning requirements.

The Building was erected to provide a specific use for the community and it served that purpose fine, until it did not due to many reasons; the building was sold by the state; the exemptions under which the building was constructed were because of the specificity of its use which created a concerted chaos that somewhat worked in the fabric of the neighborhood, making bearable the presence of this beacon of shadow and wind tunneling emblematic of the swift justice done inside the cement fortress.

As an architecture aficionado, I do see the many functions it occupied with stern elegance, but alas the foundation of this elegance, its functions, have to come pass, and so should its presence.

The balance of night and day, weekday or weekend, with good fluxes of traffic at interlacing patterns, even the cement itself made the building active when needed and almost disappear when not operating, except of course for the always operating, at overcapacity one might add, jail on the top floors. So while the mass of the building was disproportionate to its use, was this ratio of actual use of the development that made it work. A balance that would be hard to replicate should the currently build edifice were to be activated at a possible capacity of 2000 to 3000 daily(24/7) users.

The ultimate success of the project will hinge on its ability to be profitable and approachable, and the proposed efforts do bring some softening of the austere facade but do nothing to address the real concerns of the development:

- will the traffic increase to beyond unbearable in the narrower streets around this building?
- will parking for the elderly population in the neighborhood be harder to come by, especially during a snow storm?
- will the winds this tower brings down eventually sweep all its guests of their feet, literally on the icy slopes?
- Will the cement be replaced by a glaring wall of glass filled with onlookers? our yards are not that interesting?

The minor softening proposed to ameliorate some aspect of the project do not address the main problems of density of development and shared infrastructure integrity.

The approval of development over the past couple of decades on this side of the river has been quite remarkable and quite well balanced; the sale of the Courthouse has blindsided many of us; the city should think carefully what could this development really mean for the greater picture and for the future of Cambridge. Kendall Sq, Central Sq, NorthPoint, all part of a scheme that should make the city thrive, but not collapse under its own success.

One thing the proposal gets right the development cannot stand on its own and needs the support of the neighboring block where the City Garage is, but hardly sufficiently according to the details of the studies So, why should it be just given to them? why aren't we developing both blocks to support each other successful future in this great, fast growing community in a more coherent way?

Sincerely

Fabrizio Gentili

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