

To: Cambridge Mayor,
Cambridge City Council Members,
Cambridge Planning Board Members, and
Cambridge City Manager

From: Karen and Frank Field, 91 3rd Street, Cambridge

Subject: Special Permit Application PB288 from Leggat McCall

Date: 23 Feb 2014

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

The City of Cambridge has an opportunity to rectify a serious planning error that was compelled by the Commonwealth when it installed the Sullivan Courthouse in East Cambridge. As someone who was an MIT student during the mid-1970s, the Courthouse was a clear anomaly in East Cambridge, even from as far away as MIT's West Campus dormitories. Today, it is not only out-of-place, but also essentially abandoned, housing an increasingly restive and vocal jailhouse population.

My wife and I moved to this neighborhood from Cambridgeport over a decade ago, and we have noted how substantially this building influences this part of town. The wind that swirls around the building is reminiscent of the winds in Kendall Square and those surrounding MIT's Green Building – all consequences of outside building height and faulty management of the environs. And, as anyone who has walked the neighborhood, the Courthouse looms over the skyline from almost every sidewalk in East Cambridge.

With the traffic congestion that is already experienced every working day, it is hard to believe that an increase in commuter traffic is being proposed, particularly in light of the efforts that have already been taken by the City of Cambridge to try to mitigate Third Street congestion by commuters into Cambridge.

Our specific concerns are:

Building Size: It is clear that, given the circumstances, it is impossible to convert the building to something entirely in keeping with those in the vicinity -- but the City should not pass up an opportunity to mitigate the building's size imbalance with the neighborhood. Some effort to reduce the building scale in keeping with the neighborhood should be a part of any redevelopment.

Traffic/Parking: Third Street is a congested "speedway" during the morning and the evening commute. As the City is well aware, Third Street is a major artery into Kendall Square, which is already undergoing its own development boom. Moving that development eastward will not only exacerbate this traffic congestion, but it will also introduce a whole new

set of commuters into the area, all searching for increasingly scarce parking spaces.

Neighborhood Equity: East Cambridge is already the site of considerable development, helping to support the growth of the City's tax base. It seems entirely inequitable that this neighborhood should bear the burden of past development mistakes, particularly when considerably better examples are being offered throughout the City. East Cambridge deserves as much attention to esthetics, amenities, and local character as other Cambridge neighborhoods receive, and the current plan offers little evidence that such considerations were given any weight.

We understand that sustainable development represents tradeoffs that must be made between economic and community objectives. However, the current plan for Sullivan Courthouse seems to reflect an imbalance in favor of the Commonwealth's desire to get rid of a mistake without incurring any of the consequences that the residents of East Cambridge will instead be obliged to bear for decades to come.

If the process has failed us, is it not perhaps time to reconsider the idea that we may be asking too much of a building that has already been deemed a failure according to every reasonable criterion?

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