

February 10, 2015

To the Cambridge Planning Board and the City Council:

Re: Special Permits for the Sullivan Courthouse re-development at 40 Thorndike Street in East Cambridge

We are residents of East Cambridge and make our home at 59 Otis Street at the corner of Third and Otis Streets. Our brownstone closely abuts and sits in the shadow of the Sullivan Courthouse at 40 Thorndike Street.

As concerned neighbors we have carefully reviewed the proposal for the redevelopment of the Sullivan Courthouse in East Cambridge and have several significant concerns. As this project comes before you for consideration and approval, please act to both preserve and enhance the quality of life for the residents of East Cambridge. We ask that you deny the special permit applications from Leggat McCall that are required for their proposed renovation of the Sullivan Courthouse.

Some of our concerns are as follows:

1. Height:

A onetime exemption was granted to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, against the best interest of the residents of East Cambridge, to construct a public courthouse and high security jail building that far exceeded the local zoning height limit of 80 feet. At 22 stories and over 500,000 square feet the Sullivan Courthouse was and is grossly out of scale and character of the surrounding 2-3 story residences and is considered by most to be a blight on the neighborhood. As this non-conforming building is no longer to be used for its intended public purpose it should be razed and replaced with a conforming building. It would be a travesty to take this one time exemption and special variance for a public use building and pass it on to a private developer to profit from at the expense of an entire neighborhood of tax paying residents.

What is the need for such a height exemption for redevelopment into private office, retail, and/or residential use? The proposed use will bring considerably more employees, visitors, and/or residents than the courthouse did and exert major pressures on the already taxed neighborhood infrastructure, including our streets, parking, utilities and open space.

We cannot support granting a height exception for a new building in this neighborhood. This is no longer a public building being used for public purposes and thus it should be considered what it is — a new commercial building and be held to existing zoning requirements.

2. Parking:

A \$200 million dollar private construction project that will add an estimated 2,000 people a day to an already crowded single city block must provide adequate parking. Adding just 92 spaces to a building of this size will not even come close to meeting the demand and will create an unacceptable parking situation for a neighborhood already struggling with parking issues.

3. Traffic:

Third Street today is already buckling under severe traffic jams during the daily rush hours and this will continue to worsen as construction and residency grows in Kendall Square and the surrounding areas. This overflow of traffic has created a backup at the lights on Cambridge Street and a resulting noise problem in our homes during rush hours every weekday. Crossing the street or walking in the neighborhood has become dangerous for pedestrians especially the elderly and those of us with children and dogs. Adding an additional thousand or more cars at this section of Third Street will certainly worsen the situation. We have not seen a proposal to adequately address this.

The proposed design by Leggat McCall has many other flaws, too many to address in a single letter. As you consider the special permit applications requested for this private non-conforming development, we ask that you consider the residents of East Cambridge. This quiet residential area is already surrounded and overwhelmed by many buildings exactly like the one proposed for the Sullivan Courthouse. Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past by ignoring the concerns and welfare of the residents of East Cambridge. Please, stand by your citizens and do not grant an exception to a developer looking to profit from a non-conforming structure in our neighborhood.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns, and for your public service.

Respectfully,

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