



Neighborhood Association of East Cambridge

NAEC Positions and Supporting Information

We are pro-development.

We seek development that is reasonable for the neighborhood AND financially viable for the developer. We believe that these two goals are mutually compatible.

Our goal is not to stop the development process indefinitely and perpetuate a vacant building. Our goal is to slow the process down in the interest of better planning and the thorough consideration of impact on the neighborhood.

Contrary to fears being circulated in the community, we do not believe it is likely that the State will abandon the site; it is high-profile asset in a hot real estate market. It is not in the State's financial or political best interests to abandon the sale and development of the building and prolong the liability of maintaining it.

It takes time to arrive at the best redevelopment solution for this complex site; better that we take the time to think hard about our choices now than live with the consequences of a rushed decision forever.

The City must enforce its own zoning laws.

The State, in its request for proposals, explicitly notified all developers of the City zoning restrictions in effect at the site, including an 80' height limit. Moreover, whenever a substantial change of use is proposed - as in this case, when the developers envision changing a public courthouse to a private business tower - City zoning ordinances dictate that the new use cannot be more detrimental to the neighborhood than the previous use.

When a change of use and other permits are requested of the City, consideration of the zoning and the infrastructure capacity of the neighborhood must, by law, be taken into consideration and influence the final outcome.

We ask that the City take a proactive role in defining the applicable zoning, and explore potential re-zoning strategies to protect the quality of life of the neighborhood. The City has the leverage, the authority, and indeed the responsibility to do so. It is the City's responsibility to create and enforce zoning for the protection of our neighborhoods. That is the point of zoning and urban planning in the first place!

The Community's concerns have been repeatedly dismissed.

The State wrote its Request for Proposals with no regard for the welfare of the neighborhood. It then chose the developer that initially refused to reduce the height and density of the building, and was consequently voted "worst choice" by the neighborhood. On this critical point the State and the developer, Legatt McCall Properties, have ignored the voice of the community. The concerns of the neighborhood must be incorporated into the approval process. We insist that we have a seat at the design review table.

The State has said that it was solely trying to maximize its revenue when selecting the developer. In doing so, the State has failed its duty to the citizens of East Cambridge, who should not be asked to bear the hardships of a grossly out-of-scale building just so the State and a private developer can maximize their profits. The large size of the building was originally allowed via State exemption from local zoning because it was a public use; now that it is changing to private use and ownership, the benefits of the exemption should not be simply given to the private developer at the expense of the neighborhood's quality of life.

At more than 500,000 square feet, this building is one of the largest in Cambridge. Traffic to the building is anticipated to surpass the threshold of 3,000 vehicle trips/day which should trigger a full Environmental Impact Report (EIR) from the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA). The Developer has requested a waiver of the reporting requirement. The MEPA review process is designed to protect our air and water quality from unhealthy impacts. East Cambridge is near the intersection of two major Interstate highways (I-93 and I-90) which already degrade our air quality and exacerbate asthmatic and bronchial conditions. We believe a full EIR must be conducted.

The process so far has been based on unreliable information.

The developer has offered studies and claims that do not stand-up to scrutiny - or meet the common-sense test. For example, they have submitted to the City a traffic study that claims no additional adverse conditions, and a light pollution study that grossly understates the brightness of the building at night, and an overall impact study that does not even mention the loss of privacy that neighbors will experience as office workers peer into their backyards and bedrooms.

As a neighborhood, we will have to live with the results of this development. We deserve accurate and independent studies, fully vetted by the approving authorities.

Unanswered questions about the proposed development:

- We ask the City to declare: what is the applicable zoning for this site, given that the proposal calls for converting it from public to private (for-profit) use?
- What will be the actual cost of asbestos abatement and of demolition? We call for unbiased, third-party estimates of these costs.
- Similarly, we call for accurate, objective studies of traffic, parking, light and wind impacts.
- What will be the actual impact on the privacy of neighborhood residents if 20 stories of the 22 story tower (which for years was open only during business hours on weekdays) is converted into a glass office building occupied by office and lab workers late into the night and on weekends?