

From: Thomas Feraco
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2014 1:19 PM
To: Liza Paden <lpaden@cambridgema.gov>
Subject: 40 Thorndike Street - Sullivan Courthouse

Dear Liza,

I'm writing to urge that you deny the special permit requested by Leggat McCall for 40 Thorndike Street.

There simply should not be a 280-foot glass tower filled with private corporate commuters in the midst of this quiet residential area in East Cambridge zoned for just 80-feet. This was never in the master plans commissioned by the City. A thing like that just does not belong in the neighborhood.

The old Sullivan Courthouse has been a costly fiasco. Why did we ever permit the construction of a 280-foot high-security prison in the first place? The issuance of that crucial special permit has proven to be a tragic mistake.

And now, the Commonwealth is leveraging that mistake to milk it for cash in shameless disregard of any sort of master plan for the community.

If the old building were torn down, I can't imagine anyone in their right mind would permit ANOTHER 280-foot tower of exactly the same bulk to go up. So why would we permit a developer to pick the concrete and asbestos off the old building and wrap a new skin on the old bones? To do that costs a lot more, carries more risks, limits the design, restricts the possibility of creating parking — and all those costs get passed onto renters in the form of jacked-up rental fees. For the \$200m+ this developer will spend, you could have had Moshe Safdie design and build a Symphony Hall.

It is obvious that the height exception for the old Courthouse was an enormous mistake. But “grandfathering in” that mistake to permit a new tower now would be criminal. What's more, the land itself was donated to the City two centuries ago for a public use — which the proposed private office tower most certainly is not. What's being proposed is a new building with an entirely new and private commercial purpose. As such, it needs a new permit and the design must be made to conform properly with the existing zoning requirements — not a one-time exception granted for a high-security government jail.

It would be wrong and offensive for many reasons to permit the proposed plan to go forward. If anything, the Commonwealth should be helping this community by compensating us for suffering with the atrocity of the old Courthouse for forty years — not sticking it to us again. Fortunately, the City's zoning laws can defend us against this sort of stupidity.

Sincerely,

Tom Feraco

Thomas J. Feraco | SeasmokePartners llc