

March 23, 1998

*Stephen H. Kaiser
191 Hamilton Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02139*

Donald Drisdell
Deputy City Solicitor
City Hall
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

SUBJECT: Curbcut Safety at T-intersections

Dear Mr. Drisdell,

I was quite surprised by your testimony before the City Council on March 16, and have prepared a transcript of those sections dealing with curbcuts relative to the Polaroid site (see attached). I remain quite puzzled by the sources for your testimony and its apparent contradictions.

You are aware that traffic engineers have looked at the existing Pleasant Street driveway and have found it less than satisfactory. All of the engineers involved to my knowledge support the concept of relocating the driveway about 70 to 80 feet away from its existing location and all feel that this relocation will produce a safer driveway, both in terms of safety and lesser impacts on residential streets. In the latter part of your commentary you support this conclusion by recognizing the existing arrangement as "*not in an optimal position*" and that if relocated the driveway would "*operate better*." You see such a relocation as representing "*desirable goals*."

However, your preceding argument states that if the driveway were to be relocated at least 25 feet away from the intersection, "*You would be forcing that curbcut into what would probably be considered from a traffic engineering perspective the least safe position for it to be.*" In this instance, every traffic engineer looking at the Pleasant Street driveway has concluded that safety would be enhanced by such a relocation and you recognize this concept in your concluding remarks. You are completely in error in your interpretation of traffic engineering assessment of the safety of driveways at intersections and the Pleasant Street driveway in particular.

You did offer a clear, logical and unassailable argument subject to a very careful and explicit condition : "*if you were going to have a curbcut at a T-intersection, the safest place to have it would be directly across from the entering street.*" This is like saying that if you are going to live in Cambridge, the safest place to live is in Cambridge. The difficulty for the traffic engineer is that a driveway at the intersection is not a wise solution and particularly so at the intersection of Pleasant and Florence Streets.

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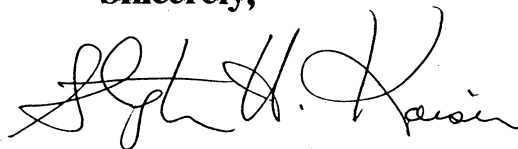
The existing intersection is more an awkward Y than a T intersection. The driveway to the garage is shown in the original development plans as intersecting Pleasant Street at a 45-degree acute angle, which makes any right turns out very difficult, with traffic swinging into the opposing lane. Nowhere in your remarks did I see any reference to the peculiar angles and geometrics of the Pleasant Street intersection, but this omission was probably for the good since you were having some difficulties with other fundamentals of traffic engineering.

Your inventive compounding of traffic engineering and legalisms is made more baffling by your initial references to a T-intersection as not being an intersection. I was quite surprised when I first hear you make this assertion and for a moment thought that I had heard you improperly. The transcript does indeed confirm that you claim a T-intersection is not an intersection. Your apparent justification for this conclusion is not a legal one but is attributed to "*traffic engineering safety analysis*." What you appear to be saying is that if the safest location for a driveway is at a T-intersection (certainly false for the Pleasant Street intersection), then a T-intersection is not an intersection. This phenomenal leap of logic utterly defies common sense. You begin with a false premise on safety and produce a conclusion which is neither related nor sensible. To me it is like claiming that if water flows uphill, then the moon is made of green cheese.

I doubt that you could produce a single engineer that would support your claim that a T-intersection is not an intersection. No engineer I know would dare make such a claim and expose himself to the well-deserved ridicule which would be sure to follow.

In light of the quite untenable nature of your remarks before the City Council on the technical matters of curbcuts at T-intersections, I would urge that you withdraw the entirety of your comments from the record, and on matters of driveway and traffic safety you would be advised to permit traffic engineers and traffic administrators to offer such testimony in the future, with regard to any matters of highway safety.

Sincerely,

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Stephen H. Kaiser
Traffic and Transportation Engineer
Cambridgeport Neighborhood Initiative

Transcript of City Council Testimony, March 16, 1998

Associate City Solicitor, Donald Drisdell
on Putnam Avenue & Pleasant street Driveways

"These two curbcuts comply with our Zoning Ordinance... The Pleasant Street curbcut is not in an intersection based upon the interpretation that has consistently been made - The Pleasant Street curbcut is not in an intersection for the purposes of a zoning analysis and that is consistent with the way in which the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance has been interpreted for some years.

"The Pleasant Street curbcut is at what is known as a T-Intersection where one street comes into another street but does not cross it. The curbcut on Pleasant Street is nearly directly across from the incoming street. And the rationale as I understand it for not concluding that such a curbcut is in an intersection is that the traffic engineering safety analysis would suggest that if you were going to have a curbcut at a T-intersection, the safest place to have it would be directly across from the entering street.

"And in fact if you apply the zoning ordinance in the manner which has been suggested, it needed to be at least 25 feet away. You would be forcing that curbcut into what would probably be considered from a traffic engineering perspective the least safe position for it to be. On that basis and looking at the history of how such an application for a curbcut or review of a curbcut has been analyzed in the Inspectional Services Department in the past, curbcuts that enter a T-Intersection have not been deemed to be within an intersection.

"And so the Pleasant Street curbcut was deemed to be in compliance with current zoning. The Putnam Avenue curbcut as analyzed by the traffic director was deemed - even though compliant with our Zoning Ordinance - not in an optimal safety position. It should be further away from the intersection in accordance with traffic engineering safety analysis.

But the Pleasant Street curbcut was viewed in that analysis to in fact be safe where it is currently located. Even if it not in an optimal position, it operates safely. The analysis for the building commissioner was based upon the existing Pleasant Street curbcut.

"It is clear that many people, traffic engineers included, believe that the Pleasant Street curbcut would operate better if it were located differently on Pleasant Street Those are desirable goals, but as a strict legal analysis this is a landowner who has a curbcut, at a location which in accordance with our practice in the past, has deemed to be legal and in compliance with our Zoning Ordinance.... (we) could not deny a building permit. "

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"The Pleasant Street curbcut was not deemed to be unsafe by any of the traffic engineers who reviewed it - the City Traffic director or their consultant. "

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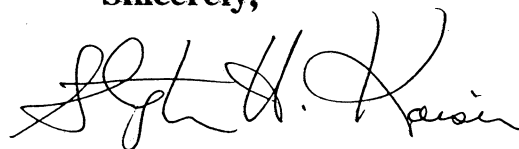
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Stephen H. Kaiser
Traffic and Transportation Engineer
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Consent Communication #17

W-20

Communication was received from
Stephen H. Kaiser, transmitting
a memorandum regarding curbcut
safety at T-intersections.

In City Council March 23, 1998

PLACED ON FILE