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East Cambridge Stabilization Committee
c/o Hugo Saffenne, Chairperson
89 Third Street
East Cambridge, Massachusetts 02141

CAMBRIDGE MA.

Members of the Cambridge Planning Board
57 Inman Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

May 5, 1987

Re: Galleria at Riverside Place

Hon. Members of the Planning Board:

We are writing regarding the plans which have been presented to us to develop a new shopping mall, office and condominium complex at the site of Lechmere Sales in East Cambridge. Before you endorse these plans, we ask that you consider the following neighborhood concerns:

1. Overall Size: We feel that the planned complex is too large for the site. Nine years ago, the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan contemplated a substantially smaller complex for this parcel. Much has changed in Boston and in East Cambridge since that plan was put forth. A great deal of development has occurred which was not thought possible nine years ago. We are already living in an area which is much more congested than it was supposed to be - and it will only get worse. A project of this scale will greatly worsen all the problems which come along with over congestion. Given today's conditions, we see no reason why a project which is so much larger than what was planned should be permitted.

2. Traffic: We feel that in a number of ways the traffic studies which were presented by the development team do not adequately address the problems which will be caused by the mall. For example, the studies only look at the PM peak hour impact of the project, and then only in limited situations. We would like to see the traffic studies broadened to consider what the traffic impacts of the mall will be at the weekday peak hours for the mall itself (not just during rush hour) and on weekend and holiday peak hours. The quality of life for all East Cambridge residents could suffer greatly from having mall traffic all evening and every weekend. The residential tone of our neighborhood will be threatened by non-stop traffic jams.

The studies which were presented to us also failed to study the queue length or waiting times at the various neighborhood intersections which will be affected by mall traffic. For example, how long will people have to wait at the intersection of First and Cambridge Streets to get leave the mall? How long will the expected queue be on Saturday afternoon

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on Commercial Street to turn left into the mall? What will that do to traffic flows? We do not know.

We further feel that the traffic studies failed to address adequately the impact of changing background traffic patterns. For example, in the PUD Application, the developers show a large parcel owned by Com Gas on Third Street as a "Future Development Site." Despite that clearly proper name for the site, no attempt was made to factor in what the traffic impact would be if that site is developed within permissible zoning. The studies also failed, for example, to consider the increase in traffic arising from the tremendously popular Mugar Omni Theater. Weekend traffic patterns at the Commercial and McGrath Highway intersection have already been disturbed by that new development at the Museum of Science. How will the mall traffic affect that traffic flow? For these, as for many other background developments, we have no answers as to how this project will fit into the planning scheme.

We believe that a one way street system should be in place for the roads going between First and Third Streets to keep as much traffic as possible on First and Commercial Streets. This system is not yet in place and there is as yet no commitment from the City to institute such a system. Before a project as huge as this receives your final approval, we feel strongly that the Traffic Department should approve a one way street system for these streets. Good planning demands at least this much.

4. Parking: We are very concerned that the parking which is planned for the project will be inadequate to meet the need generated. We know that the City planners have been working with the development team to have the number of parking places reduced. Unless the overall size of the mall is substantially decreased, as we feel it must be, we believe that reducing mall parking will do us no good. People will still drive there; they will park in neighborhood spots. We thus cannot endorse any effort to reduce the number of parking places unless the overall size of the project is decreased as well.

5. Design: Insofar as the current plans for the design of the mall do not conform with the design criteria of the Community Development Department, we urge the Planning Board to require the developers to comply with those criteria.

6. Other Impacts: We are worried about the impact of the mall on the overall quality of life in East Cambridge. Many questions arise in this context. For example, what will happen to our neighborhood when it is flooded with 21,000 visitors a day? What effect will the mall's long hours have on us? Will there be liquor licenses granted? How many? How many fast food places (and how much litter) will we have to contend with? How will neighborhood merchants be affected? Will there be any guarantees of neighborhood employment either in the building of the mall or afterwards? What will be the adverse environmental impacts during the construction of the mall? How will they be

mitigated? How will water table problems be resolved? Few of these concerns have yet been adequately addressed in the planning process. Before any final decision is reached by the Planning Board, we feel they should be.

In summary, we ask that no approval be given to the mall plans at this time. Because many of the issues of concern to us - and the Planning Board - fall within the review of the State Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, we feel that it would be prudent for the Planning Board to withhold any final endorsement of the plans until after the state environmental review is finished. This is a massive project; once it is in place, we will have to live with it for generations to come. We feel that it is only fair that we have the chance to know in advance what we are facing.

Thank you very much for your concern.

Very truly yours,

The East Cambridge Stabilization Committee

By:

Hugo Salenme
Hugo Salenme, Chairperson

cc:

Cambridge City Council
Cambridge Community Development Department
Cambridge Traffic Department
Cambridge Department of Public Works
Cambridge Building Department
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs
Department of Housing and Urban Development
Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Senator John Kerry
Rep. Joseph Kennedy
Senator Michael Lo Presti
Rep. Peter Vellucci
Mr. Stephen Karp
Cambridge Chronicle
Cambridge Tab
Boston Globe
Boston Herald
Boston Phoenix
WGBH - FM
WBUR - FM
WEEI - AM

Comm. from Hugo Salemmé, Chairperson, East
Cambridge Stabilization Committee Re: neigh-
borhood concerns on plans presented for the
development of the new shopping mall, office
& condominium complex at the site of Lechmere
Sales in East Cambridge.

In City Council,

May 18, 1987

*Referred to the City Manager
and
Community Development
Department*

*5/20/87 - copy sent to the City Manager
& Community Development Dept. in*