

PATRICIA SMITH

The battle for Central Square



ON TUESDAY, THE Cambridge Planning Board will gleefully plunge the knife into the soul of a neighborhood.

On paper, away from the melee, the plan sounds copacetic. A glistening 72-unit, seven-story housing development is set to rise up right at one of the most visible, bustling junctions in Central Square. The

residents would be a decidedly lopsided, required-by-law mix of market-rate and lower-income. Cue the band. Thrill to the opening strains of "We Are the World."

But this seemingly innocuous move to beautify and improve is actually a blatant attempt to make a perfectly funky neighborhood more desirable to the badminton and brie set. They might as well rename the square Bellingshire or Snobville or Little Weston – because if the planning board gets its way and this twisted bit of manipulation is sanctioned, Central Square will no longer exist.

They have studiously ignored the will of the residents, and are more than willing to squash the community's personality for profit. It's a long shot, but Tuesday's the last chance to stop them.

Oh, what a tangled web they wove. Last May, it didn't take the buzz long to spread when Holmes Realty proposed tearing down the buildings on the corner of Central Square and Mass Avenue to make room for a mammoth, 11-story high-rise with all market-rate housing and all market-rate commercial retail.

James Williamson, head of the grass-roots group Save Central Square, remembers the disbelief, then anger, of community residents. "What Holmes proposed was so ugly, so enormous, so horrifying, it got everyone's attention right away. But it was just a ploy.

"They came in with a plan in excess of what they were really after. Later on, when they changed and modified to get what they really wanted, it looked like they'd compromised. When they came back with a lower building and a small affordable housing component, they tried to claim that they were responding to concerns expressed in an early part of the review process."

The "review process" has been a nothing short of a sham. The Cambridge Advisory Committee, ordained to conduct a preliminary review, gave a set of recommendations to Holmes that ignored two very relevant facts. Save Central Square had submitted over 1,500 signatures, on their way to an eventual 3,000, opposing the project. And community forums, supposedly designed to air "diverse public views" had been crammed with confounded residents, looking for a way – *any way* – to stop the company from proceeding.

They've been ignored ever since, along with a set of criteria formulated some time ago as part of a Central Square Action Plan. It says that proposed developments should encourage responsible and orderly development, preserve the square's cultural diversity, and encourage the development of mixed-income housing.

More bad news. Prominent on pro-Holmes committees is Central Square Business Association head Carl Barron, a tyrannical little operator Williamson calls "the godfather." Barron, who rules Central Square with an iron fist, has a square named for him. He owns Putnam Furniture. Politicians love him. Businessmen love him. He loves him.

And he would love to see an influx of deep-pocketed residents into the community he's done business in for 32 years. "I believe the building is old and dingy. And everything that's old isn't necessarily handsome. I'm 82 now, so I can make that statement with a great deal of feeling.

"The word 'gentrification' irritates me. It implies that simply putting in new construction puts the goods and services beyond the reach of low-income people. That is absolutely not true. People who can afford it actually provide funds for people who can't. I don't understand people who say they don't want the wealthy people. Diverse means everybody, and that includes people with money."

Williamson and Save Central Square plan to confront the Cambridge City Council on Monday, although the Zippity Doo Dah delegates haven't uttered a peep on the topic in eight months. Could it be because the aforementioned Barron is a hefty political contributor? The don doesn't deny, but demurs. "I am interested in Cambridge in its entirety," he barks. Point taken.

If you care about Central Square, show up at 5 or so on Tuesday at the City Hall Annex on Inman. Be prepared to wade through a virtual tidal wave of horse patooty as the Cambridge Planning Board signs Central Square's death warrant, ignoring the wails of protest from residents with everything to lose. It'll be a sight the "People's Republic" can be darned proud of: slimy and greedy bottom-line visionaries summarily raising their grubby middle fingers toward a community they've vowed to destroy.

THE BOSTON GLOBE • FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 1998

before it's too late!!

in the eleventh hour!!

Last chance(?) to speak out! Show how much you care! Show Patricia Smith how wrong she is!

Paul Dietrich
Chairman, Cambridge Planning Board
c/o Community Development Department

March 17, 1998

LAST MINUTE RESPONSES TO LAST MINUTE SUBMISSIONS

- 1) The "Community Development" Department have concocted a "draft decision" in order to "cook" the record so Holmes can be falsely characterized as having met all of the criteria for granting special permits. They claim they only do what the Planning Board instructs them to do. Is this what the Planning Board instructed? A favorable contrivance on every count -- regardless of the facts??
- 2) They have done this without providing any evidence or data to support these specious claims.
- 3) Some criteria are falsely characterized as essentially nonexistent! (Preserve Cultural Diversity.)
- 4) The "draft decision" was submitted on March 10, but the DESIGN was not submitted until the following Monday, March 16 at 4:30 PM. (It doesn't matter what Holmes submits: they are entitled to approval no matter what they submit??)
- 5) The "draft decision" includes references to a document **never discussed** at any hearing or by the Planning Board in reviewing the Holmes project. (Cambridge Growth Policy Document)
- 6) The references to this document are either false, misleading or incomplete. They warrant discussion and review if they are truly important as a genuine factor, and not just dishonest "embellishment" to make it "look good."
- 7) The material submitted by Jeanne Strain is recycled from earlier material submitted by her about which serious questions were raised. None of these issues have yet to be discussed.
- 8) Jeanne Strain has contrived a document that creates a false picture -- of Central Square, of the "efforts" of the CDD to "assist" existing tenants and of the extent of commitment by Holmes to address concerns about existing and future tenants. People get paid by us to do this kind of thing? There is "much ado about nothing" in the "document" regarding "measures taken" regarding Holmes (and Central Square). An "empty space" somewhere does not an affordable rent make. False histories and descriptions of the Starbucks building and tenancies are presented. Golden Donut? A batting average of less than .200 on tenant "assistance" of any kind -- no matter how miniscule -- is absurd.
- 10) An alleged "value oriented" retailer is unnamed.
- 11) Special favors for pet projects of the CDD are privileged over community needs and wants and existing businesses. "Incubators" -- at market-rate paid by the public -- will take precedence over proven businesses that have been in the community for 90 years. (A giveaway to Holmes!)
- 12) Rents are acknowledged to be the crucial problem -- yet **nothing** is done about this. The so-called "Community Development Department" claim they "can't do anything" for tenants by way of helping to negotiate -- together with community support -- more affordable rents for tenants who would continue to **"serve diverse economic and social groups in the surrounding neighborhoods."** But they can cut a deal with Holmes behind the backs of, and without any consultation with or participation by, the community they are meant to serve, to achieve retail space -- at "market-rate" -- for a proposal of special interest only to the bureaucracy and the little clique of insiders who "cook" these "deals" to benefit -- essentially privately -- only their narrow little group of "accepted" insiders. This represents an unseemly corruption of public responsibility and purpose.

James M. Williamson
1 + Perry St. 02139

Policy 7 leaves open the possibility that development of satellite institutional use clusters, in less sensitive locations, may be a preferred alternative to increased development at the main campuses or to expansion into adjacent areas, and may be, from a city perspective, a positive catalyst for changes in economic outlook that is encouraged by the City.

Nonresidential Districts and Evolving Industrial Areas

The effectiveness of many policies presented in this document will depend on the skill with which the issues centering on the amount and scale of development and the mix of uses which should be encouraged in the city's evolving industrial areas are addressed.

These areas were the principal setting for the new housing and commercial development occurring in the city in the boom years of the 1980s. Some of the tallest new buildings and densest development occurred here. These districts harbor the greatest potential for new development in the future. As a result, these areas will be the source of much of the city's new revenue in future years.

At the same time these industrial districts remain the setting for much older, low-density industrial buildings suitable for the start-up enterprises which have fueled the Cambridge economy in the last half of this century.

Despite their relatively large size (the Alewife area alone is more than 300 acres) the opportunities for future redevelopment in these areas are continually diminishing as new development patterns are set, as is the case in Kendall Square and in East Cambridge. And while some of these areas are relatively remote from established neighborhoods, external impacts like increased traffic affect even the most distant neighborhood as physical development proceeds.

With diminishing flexibility comes increasing conflict as the desire for additional housing, new sources of revenue, protected environments for start-up companies and generally improved environmental quality must all be satisfied in an increasingly more limited area.

Policy 8 is not meant to define the appropriate maximum densities that should be permitted in the city (most of the city is now well above the threshold above which modes of travel other than the single occupancy vehicle can be effectively developed). Rather the policy suggests that the most dense development should reflect the availability of transit services. Conversely, the availability of transit services should not mandate that the maximum development density be allowed as other policy objectives may play a more significant role.

POLICY 8

The availability of transit services should be a major determinant of the scale of development and the mix of uses encouraged and permitted in the predominantly nonresidential districts of the city: the highest density commercial uses are best located where transit service is most extensive (rapid transit and trolley); much reduced commercial densities and an increased proportion of housing use are appropriate where dependence on the automobile is greatest; mixed uses, including retail activities in industrial and office districts, should be considered to reduce the need to use the automobile during working hours. Similarly, the scale, frequency, mode and character of goods delivery should play an important role in determining the appropriate density of nonresidential uses anywhere in the city.

Neighborhood preservation, however, has been a growing priority in Cambridge since the late 1970s. The Townhouse Ordinance of 1976 (and its subsequent refinements) was adopted precisely to encourage small-scale developments that are compatible with existing neighborhood patterns. The special authority sought by Cambridge, (and granted by the legislature in 1979), to control institutional uses was motivated by the same objective: prevention of wholesale expansion and encroachment of institutional uses into residential areas. Other measures advancing that same objective have included adoption of the Demolition Ordinance in 1979, the Institutional Use Regulations amendment to the Zoning Ordinance in 1981, and creation of the Half Crown and Mid-Cambridge Conservation Districts in 1984 and 1985 respectively.

POLICY 26

Maintain and preserve existing residential neighborhoods at their current density, scale, and character. Consider exceptions to this policy when residents have strong reservation about existing character, are supportive of change, and have evaluated potential changes in neighborhood character through a planning process.



Urban blight, dilapidated housing, or general deterioration naturally are not among those neighborhood attributes that the City seeks to preserve. Therefore, Policy 26 suggests that positive changes in neighborhood character can be brought about by a participatory planning process with neighborhood residents that will result in physical alterations that are desirable, necessary and consistent with the principal objective of the policy.

That trend is particularly acute for low-and moderate-income households with children. The income required to rent a market-rate two-or three-bedroom apartment is beyond the reach of more than 50% of Cambridge's households. A single family house is affordable to only 18% of those households. The near abandonment of housing support programs by the federal and state governments has made it extremely difficult for cities such as Cambridge to narrow that "affordability gap". That gap is an especially important issue in Cambridge where over 50% of households have low-or moderate-incomes.

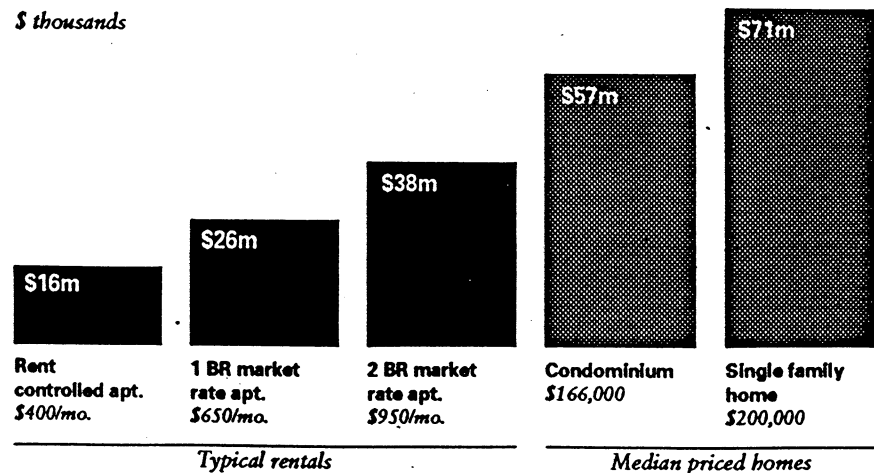
POLICY 28

Affordable housing in rehabilitated or newly constructed buildings should serve a wide range of households, particularly low-and moderate-income families, racial minorities, and single persons with special needs.

In an effort to prevent wholesale gentrification and displacement in Cambridge's existing neighborhoods, the City devoted much of the past decade to developing options for addressing the "affordability gap". Those range from linkage payment requirements in the zoning ordinance and the establishment of the Affordable Housing Trust, to inclusionary housing requirements in certain zoning districts and strong City support for a number of local non profit housing agencies. The policies are meant to affirm the City's commitment to stabilize the current diverse, mixed-income nature of Cambridge's neighborhoods.

Minimum household income required to rent or buy housing in Cambridge

\$ thousands



Assumes 30% of household income towards housing costs.

March 15, 1998

Paul Dietrich
Chairman, Cambridge Planning Board
c/o Community Development Department

SECTION 10.472 of the Zoning Regulations for the City of Cambridge requires "resubmittal of an application for a special permit" by the applicant.

Substantial changes have been made -- and "negotiated" (albeit *out of* public view) -- AFTER the conclusion of the public hearing.

The submission of revised design material (and additional alleged "data") once again not made available to the Board or to the public until the very last micro-second is appalling and requires a reasonable extension for adequate review and deliberation, in any case.

A four-page letter from Jeanne Strain regarding retail tenant issues is extremely troubling. Citizens, if lucky, have only seen this "document" as a result of their own persistent efforts to track this appallingly shoddy "process" on Friday, March 13 at 5 o'clock. This "document" demands **EXTREMELY CAREFUL SCRUTINY**.

This "document" appears *contrived* to indicate that everything is just "hunky-dory" in Central Square, and especially with the Holmes project.

Well, everything is *not* just "hunky-dory."

Ms. Strain is not available this morning to confirm any of this and Ms. Schlesinger does not know the answers to important questions regarding this "document."

One example: On page 3 Ms. Strain says she could not reach the Golden Donut (no phone) and they would not "speak with" her (they are scared!) She *then* says on page 4 that the Golden Donut are "relocating" to the Starbucks building. Hunh??

On March 3, I spoke with Vicki Choy and she said they were still looking. I have telephone numbers for the Choy family.

Anybody at the so-called "Community Development" Department interested?

Summary of Material presented to the Cambridge Planning Board:

- 1) Summary of Status of Present Retail Tenants ("Protect Existing Businesses"?)**
- 2) Holmes "Letter of Intent" -- market-rate plus net-net-net manifestly does not meet the criteria regarding either protecting existing businesses or "providing retail establishment that serve people of diverse economic and social groups..."**
- 3) Residential member of the Central Square Advisory Committee Scott Levitan's letter to Elaine Thorne (and included by Rafferty in submission to Planning Board) on "Harvard Planning and Real Estate" letterhead -- what's wrong with this picture?**

- 4) **BankBoston** letter of support for Holmes from "Ned" Robertson to Planning Board calling for "upgrading" in Central Square: Pictures of entrance to **BankBoston ATM branch, 622 Mass. Ave., Central Square** -- "...in need of upgrading..." **Supporters of Holmes are phony** -- manifestly do not care about Central Square.
- 5) List of **Commercial Real Estate Landlords** who received **\$35,000 each of public money** to fix up their **private** facades: The attached accompanying letters illustrate the **high correlation** of receiving public subsidy-Central Square Business Association membership with support for Holmes. This is further evidence of the **appalling degree of insider manipulation of the public process -- including large amounts of public money for private gain** (as if these well-heeled out-of-town owners really need it!) -- by narrow, private beneficiaries. **These same commercial landlords squeal about "subsidies" for retail tenants!!**
- 6) Holmes support letter from **Stu-Lin**, widely considered one of the worst and most irresponsible landlords in Cambridge.
- 7) **Arnold Goldstein** (who lives in Brookline) letter describing the need for Carl Barron (who lives in Belmont) -- in his capacity as a member of the Central Square Advisory Committee -- to *appear* "publicly" impartial.
- 8) Further material from **Mr. Goldstein** (\$35,000 "grant" recipient) showing the staged nature of the support for Holmes and the insulting distortions regarding **ACTUAL CAMBRIDGE PEOPLE** who demand Holmes do better! -- and comply with lawful permit criteria and development guidelines.
- 9) **Arnold Goldstein signature** on "petition" listing his address as "485 Mass. Ave." **Mr. Goldstein lives in Brookline.**
- 10) "Petition" with names **not one of whom lives in Cambridge.**
- 11) Two letters from and to **Stuart Pratt** -- including one from **Susan Schlesinger** -- indicating confusion, inaccuracy or downright dishonesty in regard to the true status of the retail tenants.

Sincerely,
James M. Williamson

Manning Apartment Residence
237 Franklin St.
Cambridge, MA 02139
March 17, 1998

c/o Les Barber:
Mr. Paul Dietrich
Chairman
Cambridge Planning Board
57 Inman St.
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Mr. Dietrich:

We, the undersigned tenants of the Manning Apartments, would like to address a number of issues of public safety in Central Square that are of particular concern to our predominately elderly and disabled residents.

Most of us have special needs. Some of us are wheelchair-bound, must use walkers, or must walk very slowly and carefully. Many are blind or visually impaired. Still others are hearing-impaired. Therefore, we would make the following general recommendations for the whole of Central Square: install audible walk signals (such as the ones in Watertown Square) at all busy intersections and increase considerably the amount of time that all walk signals give pedestrians to get across the street. (Many of us find that the 'WALK' lights are just too quick and we get stuck in the middle of moving traffic.) A final general consideration is the fact that each time a change is made to the architecture and general layout of Central Square, a blind individual is thrown into complete confusion and must sometimes spend several days or more getting used to the new layout and internally mapping it out and memorizing it.

Another area of concern is Green Street between Western Ave. and Pearl St. The 'STOP' sign at the corner of Green and Magazine is ineffective and dangerous, due to the preponderance of drivers who ignore the signs without slowing down and the frequency with which those motorists who do stop do so by pulling up and blocking the intersection. We would like to see a stop light at this intersection. Next, the buses that park all along Green Street are noisy, emit noxious fumes, block visibility of a 'NO PARKING' sign, and at times block accessibility to the back door of City Foods. We also ask that you enforce ticketing of the vehicles which park on the sidewalk all along the Green Street Grill (a practice which

Mr. Paul Dietrich
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has been a regular, daily occurrence and is hazardous particularly to blind residents and the wheelchair-bound, who must navigate around the cars and trucks and out into the street) and look also into creating a larger area of snow-clearing to the back door of City Foods in the winter, since customers frequently park their vehicles right in front of the door, blocking the one narrowly shoveled path. Finally, we would ask that you look into insuring that trucks do not load their wares at City Foods during peak hours.

Additionally, we are greatly concerned that the upcoming construction project of Holmes Realty will bring even more traffic problems, including more parking by vehicles from outside the city at Green Street Grill and other locations.

We thank you for your time and attention to these issues. Please feel free to call Viola Sheppard at 547-1069 or Sharrhan Williamson at 576-3489 if you have any further questions or wish to discuss these matters further.

Sincerely,

Sharrhan Williamson	Carol A. Coyle #18A
Jonathan Beckstrom	George Clarke
Viola Sheppard	ISRAEL TROCK
Ernie Kingone	Patricia Moakley
Dorothea Duncan	Lucille Adams
Albertha Johnson	William Allen Spruick
Mary Ann Hall	Clayce Feltner
Ernesta Henderson	Helen Johnson
Kentance Harvey	Mary Battle
Elizabeth Churchhill	Solange Chalar
Theresa Martin	Tabitha McConney
Myrtle R. Garland	Ethel Shallow
Sever James	Gladys Walter
James Shultz	Joan Simpkins

Lucille Cornsall	Burtman Burtner
Veronica Moore	Happy Foreto
John Russell	Ruth Young
Margie Russell	Carol Woodell
A. G. Jenkins	Don Stevens 14D
Offette Montiques	Maria Pinto
Karen Richmond	GEORGE COPITAS
Seymour Reyzin	Vida Beller
Boris Reyzin	Barbara Mc Mail
Allen Fried	Helen Smith
G. Kelso	May Christopher
Hilda Parrella	Cathy W. Sted
Virginia Acker	Matthews Capen
Chris Fosh	Ed Cosgro
Krisin'slie	Mike Blenhard
Hatbor R. V. W. W. W.	Emily Stoeck
Welcome Legal	Edris Stoeck
Zhen An Liu	Varite Andreu
Maree Bonnet	Florence Ramsey
Nina R. Henley	Mary Jane Reed
Clarence T. Huel	Ellen Clayton

cc: Mayor Francis Duehay
(To be read before the Cambridge City Council)

cc: Police Commissioner R. Watson

cc: Manning Tenant Council

Dear Council Members,

Wrs. m, March 19,
1998

Please find enclosed in your packet:

- 1) "Last Minute Responses (to Holmes proposal)..."
- 2) Revised letter (cover) re. Material Submitted to the Planning Board (some of which was submitted last week to the Council).
- 3) An important letter from 70 Residents of Manning Apts. re Holmes + traffic! (ignore by Planning)

Sincerely,
James M. Williamson

Consent Communication #15

S-190

Communication was received from
James M. Williamson, transmitting
a packet of information regarding the
Holmes Proposal.

In City Council March 23, 1998

PLACED ON FILE

Referred to the City Manager

*for report on motion of
Councillor Sullivan.*