

Simplex Steering Committee
274 Brookline Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
August 23, 1982
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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

City Council
Cambridge, MA

Dear Councillors:

We write to express our opposition to MIT's purchase of eight townhouses in our neighborhood and to request that the city manager instruct the city's solicitor to seek an injunction barring MIT from violating the city's institutional expansion law [Section 4.56(a)(8) of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance].

The spirit and letter of this law forbids such incursions into residentially-zoned areas of the city. The site of MIT's almost \$1 million purchase is in a C-1 zone -- low-density residential. The decision as to whether to take this action should not turn on the definition of "dormitory." The eight townhouses are reserved exclusively for MIT affiliates for rental or purchase. MIT arguments before the Rent Control Board in the past have defined and established such housing as dormitories.

In this instance, by design or coincidence, the FAR Group has been used as a block buster by MIT. This middle-of-the-summer purchase is characteristic of major MIT moves of the past. With the City Council in recess, even formal notification to councillors would not result in substantive opposing action. Instead, formal announcement was decided on because the word had already gotten out into the street three weeks before. The MIT administration wanted to establish a firmer political and legal position. It was gambling that once the purchase was made, it would be politically more difficult to force divestment. The use of this tactic put MIT in the ignominious company of the worst, unprincipled, real estate speculators in this city.

Mr. Walter Milne, public relations specialist for MIT, has not responded to the Institute's violation of Cambridge law. He has responded to charges of bad faith vis-a-vis MIT land purchases in the Cambridgeport Industrial District (CID). Despite Mr. Milne's protestations, MIT has not complied with the request of the City Council. In March, 1980, the City Council asked MIT to agree to a moratorium on all land purchase in the CID, until the Community Development Department's (CDD) Planning Study was completed. That planning study included the establishment of a design plan and the adoption of new zoning for the area. These steps have yet to be completed. As to Mr. Milne's claim that the townhouse site is not in the study area, that is a total falsehood. From the very beginning, and to this day, the study area included the whole area from Brookline Street to the railroad tracks.

Basically, what it comes down to is that, once again, MIT is trying to wield its enormous monetary power to selectively shape Cambridgeport in its own image. Here it has chosen to support luxury housing for its affiliates and the rich instead of homeownership for working people -- that is, native Cantabridgians and their children. Elsewhere, it has chosen to facilitate the relocation of manufacturing uses to Malden so that research and development firms could go in East Cambridge. It further plans to plop down a huge, non-profit, bio-genetic laboratory in the midst of the Kendall Square Redevelopment Area -- an area intended exclusively for tax-producing purposes.

CAMBRIDGEPORT HAS DECIDED ... STOP MIT'S EXPANSION

No co-development of Technology Square, nor acting as a vehicle for the construction of elderly housing, nor providing space for a senior citizen's picnic can diminish or undo such major interventions in Cambridge real estate and planning. The impact of MIT running roughshod over the CID with \$30 million of its endowment funds for the past 13 years cannot be offset by a tutoring program for high school students.

But this is nothing new in Cambridge. It has been going on for decades. No one that was around will ever forget MIT's support for an Inner Belt super-highway that would have displaced 1500 families in the eastern part of the City. The average Cantabrigdian wasn't fooled or bullied then as MIT cauched its position in technical mumbo-jumbo and "national security interests." Similarly, the average Cambridgeport resident isn't fooled now when MIT says it has the neighborhood and city interests in mind.

Instead, the Cambridgeport neighborhood has been carrying on a valiant, ten year struggle against MIT expansionism. Led by the Simplex Steering Committee, several hundred residents have participated in one way or another in an effort to gain more control over development of the industrial area adjacent to where they live. Our goal is to keep our neighborhood affordable to poor and working people, and open to all racial and ethnic groups.

Over one hundred people participated in a ten-week planning process to establish priorities for development of the land. The priorities were overwhelmingly approved in a community-wide referendum. As you know, these priorities include light industry with a diversity of job opportunities for Cambridge residents, affordable housing, park space, small stores, a community center, and better transportation. You supported these priorities in 1974 and again in 1980 in votes in the City Council. A city-wide Comprehensive Planning Advisory Group reaffirmed these priorities in 1976. There is clearly a broad base of support for them in the city. And yet, MIT's bulldozer (or the MIT octopus, as we have come to refer to it) moves on, with only a passing hesitation to acknowledge your and our existence.

It is past time for this to stop. MIT, as a chartered non-profit corporation and educational institution, supposedly acting in the public interest, must start acting as a responsible neighbor and cease its single-minded pursuit for the highest return on its investment. More importantly for now, the lawlessness must cease. We urge that legal action be initiated against MIT and that sanctions be imposed. If the City Council fails to act, Harvard and MIT will interpret such inaction as a license for wholesale violation of the institutional expansion ordinance and other laws that have attempted to create a balance between town and gown interests and needs.

Respectfully,

The Simplex Steering Committee

Mary Shea, 27 Acorn Street
Sam Schlosberg, 94 Pearl Street
Nancy Savoy, 180 Chestnut Street
Steve Krasner, 279 Pearl Street
Gary Quinton, 5 Newton Street
Ilene Horowitz, 75 Magazine Street
Molly Fontaine, 280 Brookline Street
Mary Darcy, 808 Memorial Drive
Bill Cavellini, 274 Brookline Street

cc/City Councillors, city manager, Community Development Department, Planning Board, seven area newspapers.

12. 11 5-558
Comm. from Paul E. Healy, City Clerk, transmitting comm. from the Simplex Steering Committee Re: opposing the recent purchase of eight townhouses by M.I.T.

In City Council,

September 13, 1982

- Placed on File -