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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

May 6, 1999

To the Honorable, the Cambridge City Council:

As all of you know, a number of properties owned by the Gerrish family and Squirrel Brand Company are now being marketed for sale, including the site of the Broadway and Boardman Community Garden. Bids on the properties are expected within two weeks, so this is a matter of some urgency.

This garden has been in use by gardeners for over twenty years thanks to the generosity and civic-mindedness of Mr. and Mrs. Gerrish. Some of you may know that previous to its use as a community garden, a church occupied the site. Some would say that this garden remains hallowed ground. The generosity of the Gerrish family over the last twenty years should be matched by an equally generous gesture by the City of Cambridge. If one considers the purchase price of this land amortized over the past twenty years and into the future, it should be clear that, even in today's hot real estate market, the City will have obtained a significant bargain.

This is not a matter of a parcel that *could* become a garden and a community resource. This is not an abstraction nor has it anything to do with political leverage to stop an unpopular development proposal. This is about holding onto something that is beautiful and functional and which has been cherished by many people for many years.

I am not a gardener at Broadway and Boardman nor do I live in the immediate neighborhood of the garden. My association with the garden began in helping with its compost bins. As I visited to speak with the gardeners about composting and other matters, I realized that I knew many of the gardeners and have come to know many others. These are among the finest people I have ever met in the City of Cambridge. They have been and continued to be very respectful of the Gerrish family and are enormously thankful for the generosity that has been bestowed upon them.

Consider the words of Juris Smiltens, a gardener at Broadway and Boardman since its earliest days, at the March 30, 1998 City Council meeting:

"Our garden is the place where the tension goes away. I have tried many times cold drinks and other things when things are hard with me. At the garden, I can sit down, see other people's flowers and I feel saved. I see the trees swaying gently and the birds coming and going. This is a paradise. Perhaps our good Council, in a Solomonic wisdom, will decide somehow that we could keep the garden and remain "the children of the earth."

I believe the City Council should heed Mr. Smiltens' advice.

Another aspect of the Squirrel Brand properties now up for sale is the possibility of family-sized housing units that could be constructed on the other parcels. I understand that the City, through its nonprofit housing partners, is aggressively pursuing these properties for housing and open space. Please do whatever is necessary to successfully secure these properties for these most worthy purposes.



Robert Winters

Consent Communication #13

A communication was received
from Robert Winters, regarding
the Gerrish Family and Squirrel
Brand Company.

In City Council May 10, 1999

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