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Cambridge Civic Association

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January 29, 1987

Joseph Connarton
City Clerk's Office
City Hall
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Dear Mr. Connarton,

Last year, several dozen Cambridge taxi drivers attended a City Council hearing relative to Boston police practices regarding customer pick-ups by out-of-town cabs.

At that time they stated the resulting impoundments of cabs, fines, and lost revenues were a substantial and continuing loss. They also noted the complete lack of reciprocal protection in Cambridge, and the resulting loss of revenue to out-of-Cambridge cabs, in particular, those from Boston. At that time a Council Order sponsored by Sandra Graham requested the City Manager to implement a ticketing and towing policy for non-Cambridge taxis and emphasized the problems at the Marriott Hotel and other locations around Kendall Square.

Enclosed is an article by Mike Barnicle (Boston Globe, 1/28/87, page 17) vividly describing the arrest of a Cambridge cab driver, John Bielakowski, and his problems and financial losses following an ill-advised, kind-hearted, but illegal, pick-up at Boston's Lafayette Hotel. This incident dramatically reveals the problem.

(more)

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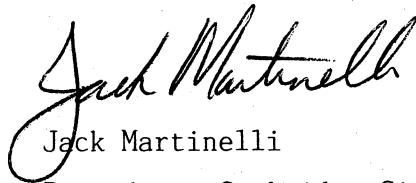
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While I can understand an argument that says this is an appropriate policy to protect the value of Boston taxi medallions, I do not think the public need for quick taxi service, nor the considerations of efficient use of taxis and their gasoline are served by the present policy. Clearly, a "cabbie protectionism" policy is not a long-term solution. However, a prompt and comprehensive Cambridge "ticket-and-tow" policy involving non-Cambridge cabs may be necessary in the short term to force a better response from Boston. No one can deny that Cambridge taxi drivers deserve equal access and protection. Heretofore, they have been courteous and moderate in their demands. The C.C.A. urgently requests the City Council and the City Manager to devise a prompt and appropriate solution to this longstanding problem.



Jack Martinelli

President, Cambridge Civic Association

cc: Robert Healy, City Manager
Joseph Connarton, City Clerk
Mayor Walter Sullivan
John Bielakowski
Mike Barnicle, Boston Globe
William Cavelinni

Councillor Thomas Danehy
Councillor Frank Duehay
Councillor Sandra Graham
Councillor Sheila Russell
Councillor David Sullivan
Councillor Alfred Vellucci
Councillor William Walsh
Councillor Alice Wolf

Boston Globe
1-28-87
page 17



MIKE BARNICLE

Taken for a wrong turn

Saturday, 7 p.m.: It's colder than a banker's heart. Feels like Vladivostok. Looks like Warsaw. John Bielakowski is sitting in his office.

Bielakowski's office is the front seat of a Cambridge cab. He is 52 years old and for the last 32 of those years he's been driving a hack.

So, Saturday night, there he is, as always, on the job. He's waiting for a customer - any customer - in front of the Hyatt Regency on Memorial Drive.

A guy comes out of the hotel and gets in the back seat of Bielakowski's cab. He wants to go to the Lafayette Hotel in downtown Boston. No problem. When Bielakowski pulls up to the Lafayette with his customer, there are two women standing there, plus the hotel doorman.

"He holds the door for the guy," John Bielakowski was saying yesterday. "Soon as the guy gets out, the doorman says, 'Will you take these two girls to the Back Bay?'"

"I tell him I can't 'cause Cambridge cabs are only supposed to drop off in Boston, not pick up. There's a city ordinance says we ain't supposed to."

"He says, 'C'mon. It's cold out. They been waiting 10 minutes. It's on your way home.' So I say to myself, 'What the hell,' and they get in."

Then, they got right out.

This rapid about-face occurred because of the alert and vigilant efforts of the Boston Police Department. You see, within 30 seconds of accepting the fare, John Bielakowski was pulled over by two men in an unmarked police car. They immediately charged him with ... Are you ready? ... violating Municipal Ordinance 14, Chapter 11, Sections 3 and 4. Whew!

Thank God they were there to handcuff John Bielakowski. And thank goodness there was a station nearby - Area A - so they could quickly haul his fanny over to New Sudbury Street and cuff him to a chair until he posted a \$15 bond.

His cab was towed to East Boston. The meter was removed and impounded. One more bad guy was off the bricks.

You see, Johnny Bielakowski knowingly attempted to take two people to an address in Boston even though he was driving a Cambridge cab. Talk about outrageous, criminal and antisocial behavior.

So Tuesday, it was time to pay the piper. That's why Bielakowski was sitting on a bench in front of Judge Sally Kelly at the Boston Municipal Court at 9 a.m. waiting for a clerk to call his name.

At 11:10, after a posse of prostitutes had defaulted, been fined or placed on probation, up stepped John Bielakowski, public enemy. He stood in the dock while the judge asked if he understood that his bold action constituted a criminal complaint and he listened patiently as she outlined his two choices: Clear the matter up now or schedule it for trial.

He picked Door Two: Trial. A date of Feb. 9 was set and Bielakowski was told the cab meter would stay at Area A until his case was disposed of.

"You gotta be kidding," he said later. "No meter means no work. What'd I do, anyways? I took two girls out of the cold. The doorman held the door and they jumped in. If I said no and drove off and ran over 'em and killed 'em dead, I'd be way better off."

Perhaps the ordinance would make sense if there were a lot of cabs around. It might even make sense if gypsy cabs were killing the industry. That's not the case.

Right now, one thing stands between most Boston cabs looking like shelters for the homeless in downtown Tehran: Capt. Donald Devine of the Police Department. He heads the hackney bureau and has made an extraordinary effort to attend to small details like making sure that drivers understand a bit of English, don't go to Coolidge Corner by way of Framingham and don't spit at their fares. Little things like that.

Now, there might be a few soft-hearted folks who condone Bielakowski's criminal behavior, who feel bad about his losing work, who think his arrest was a good waste of two policemen's time. Or that his trial will be merely one more ridiculous example of the judicial system getting bogged down in trivia.

Or maybe you think the taxi industry should be like other businesses: If a cabbie hustles, is presentable, polite, doesn't drive a cow pasture on wheels and knows where to go, he should be allowed to pick passengers up anywhere. But if that were the case, all the pinheaded bureaucrats who handle many of the silly and out-of-date municipal ordinances would end up exactly where the two women who almost got a ride home from Johnny Bielakowski finished the evening: Out in the cold.

5.

S-101

Comm. from Jack Martinelli, Pres., CCA Re:
Boston Police practice on customer pick-ups
by out of town cabs & transmitting an article
from the Boston Globe on the arrest & plight
of a Cambridge cab driver who picked up a
fare in Boston. Said comm. urging a solution
to this problem.

In City Council,

February 9, 1987

Placed on File