



# City of Cambridge

37.

IN CITY COUNCIL

January 8, 1996

COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN  
COUNCILLOR BORN  
COUNCILLOR DAVIS  
COUNCILLOR DUEHAY  
COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO  
COUNCILLOR RUSSELL  
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY  
COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Director of Assessment regarding the attached letter from concerned residents of Grove Street-Blanchard Road regarding their property valuation increases, and to respond in writing to their letter.

In City Council January 8, 1996  
Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.  
Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury  
City Clerk

C. Sullivan

37.

Ordered: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to, ~~be consulted~~ with the ~~city~~ ~~manager~~ with the ~~Asst~~ Director of Assessment regarding the attached letter from concerned residents of ~~1111~~ Grove Street - Blanchard Road regarding their property valuation increases, and to respond in writing to their letter.

**Residents of  
Grove Street-Blanchard Road  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138**

January 2, 1996

Cambridge City Council  
City Hall  
Cambridge

To the Cambridge City Council:

There are thirty-three homes in Assessing District 15 which is made up of Grove Street and Blanchard Road and lies on the Cambridge-Belmont line beyond Fresh Pond Reservation. On November 8, residents from eighteen of those homes met to discuss what seems to be an apparent inequity in the recent Cambridge property tax bills. The following data was obtained by one of us either from an October 2 report which you sent to the City Council, or was provided by the Assessor's Office (whose courteous assistance in this matter we all appreciate.)

1. Although the average property tax increase for 1995-1996 on one family houses in Cambridge was 3.8% the average property tax increase for District 15 was **36.3%**. This was more than **twice** that of the next highest increase which in District 3 amounted to 16.5%.

2. The average property valuation increase for District 15 was **39.2 %** (with variations from 14% to 52% and the median increase being about **41 %**.) The disproportionality of this becomes clear when compared with the next highest average increase which was in District 8 and amounted to 21%. Thus the increase in District 15 was almost **twice** that of the next highest District. By contrast, some Districts even showed a decrease in their valuations.

3. During the period considered for tax purposes only three homes were sold in this District. This forms a small data set on which to base an unusually large increase in valuation for all homes in the District. Even if these sales were reflective of an increase in value in the district overall- a point we consider debatable- that would only justify an increase of 23-31.5% rather than the 36.3% increase we experienced. In fact, it seems as if the current assessed values of many homes in the District is now *above* market value.

We have all decided to file for abatements but we also feel that something more is needed. The discrepancy between the way this District was treated in comparison with all others in the city seems to call for an investigation of the way in which these valuations are computed. Any formula which treats one neighborhood so differently

(especially on what seems to be the slimmest of numerical data) seems to be suspect. The steep increase of property taxes which some homes face imposes a considerable financial burden. How is it that this small group of homes is taxed so heavily just at a time when, due to the cessation of rent control, one would expect that the city-wide value of residential housing is increasing and so removing the need for large tax increases?

We respectfully request that you give some consideration to this matter. In particular some analysis of the valuation formula or of the valuation districts themselves seems to be called for and, at the very least, some rescheduling of tax increases of this size. Our group will wait to hear from you before deciding on further action. Thanks very much for your time.

Yours truly,

*Juan D. White*  
*Andrew White*  
12 Blanchard Rd

*Miss Bernice L. Clarke*  
11 Blanchard Rd.  
Cambridge, Mass. 02138

*David and Karen Isles*  
10 Blanchard Rd.

*Laura Bondi*  
9 BLANCHARD RD

*Orosia R. Simha*  
6 Blanchard Road

*Evelyn Simha*  
6 Blanchard Road

*David J. Smith*  
4 Blanchard Road

*Suzanne S. Smith*  
4 Blanchard Road

*Deborah D. Bush*  
3 Blanchard Rd

*Lanuel B. Brubler*  
3 Blanchard Rd

Betty J Porter  
1A BLANCHARD RD  
CAMBRIDGE MA 0213A

Patricia A Corcoran  
370 Blanchard Road  
Cambridge, Ma 02138-1009

Elizabeth L. McLaughlin  
195 Grove St.  
Cambridge, MA. 02138

Kfawaz  
KARIM + LEILA FAWAZ  
181 GROVE ST  
CAMBRIDGE

John H. Muran  
255 Grove St.

Elizabeth Corcoran  
255 Grove St.

R. S. d. Khaliq  
225 Grove St  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Lloyd & Ann Seari  
169 Grove St.  
Cambridge, 02138

Responses should be mailed to: 10 Blanchard Road, Cambridge, Mass. 02138

Copies to Cambridge City Council and City Manager

**Residents of  
Grove Street-Blanchard Road  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138**

January 8, 1996

Cambridge City Council  
City Hall  
Cambridge

To the Cambridge City Council:

There are three comments which we should like to add to those included in the petition dated January 2, 1996 from the residents of Grove Street and Blanchard Road.

1. Of critical importance in determining the "FY96 1,2,3 Family Valuation Model" by which property taxes are determined, are the recorded house sales from mid-1992 through mid-1995 in District 15. According to the Assessing Department, although there were five such sales only two were used. For these two, the percentage increase of sales price over the 1995 valuation was 31% whereas the district increase in valuation was 39%. Why is there this discrepancy? Of the three houses whose sales were not included two were discounted for technical reasons. The third house was of particular interest to me. Had it been included among the sales data, the average percentage increase of sales price over the 1995 valuation would have been only 16% and it would have been even more difficult for the City to claim that its valuation model was treating District 15 fairly. When I asked why this house was not counted, I was told only that it was "taken out for unspecified reasons." That thousands of dollars of additional taxes should be demanded from a whole district on such an insubstantial basis seems hard to defend.

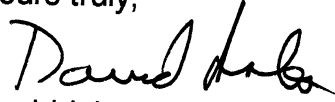
2. In arriving at the Valuation Model, repeated adjustments are made to various numbers until the model meets certain criteria. One of these criteria is to match known sales prices reasonably well. As Question 1 indicates, it is not clear that it meets even this goal in the case of District 15. Beyond this, it is fair to ask: Should not one of the criteria of an equitable Valuation Model be that it does not result in district-wide changes of the magnitude that District 15 has experienced unless the district as a whole has undergone some significant change in character? That has not been the case with District 15.

3. The Assessing Department has been very generous with its time in answering my questions. In particular, I am particularly grateful to Mr. Peter Helwig for taking over an hour to explain to me how the Valuation Model is arrived at. Although by trade I am comfortable with such technical matters, I still find the whole procedure murky in spite of Mr. Helwig's excellent presentation. The mathematical idea behind the model is

quite clear; the devil lies in the details. The procedure by which the final numbers are arrived at seems to involve such a great number of ad hoc and judgement-biased adjustments, that it cannot be clearly described to a reasonably intelligent citizen. Does the City Council really want the Cambridge property tax, a tax which is becoming increasingly onerous in comparison with other taxes, to be determined in a manner which is not accessible to concerned Cambridge residents?

For the residents of District 15,

Yours truly,

  
David Isles



# City of Cambridge

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IN CITY COUNCIL

January 8, 1996

COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN

**ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Director of Assessment regarding the attached letter from concerned residents of Grove Street-Blanchard Road regarding their property valuation increases, and to respond in writing to their letter.

Born, Davis, Puchay, Galluccio  
Consent Order #37  
Russell, Toomey +  
Councillor Sullivan re: Concerns  
from residents of Grove Street,  
Blanchard Road regarding their  
property valuation increases. CM 7

Triantafilon

In City Council January 8, 1996

Order Adopted