

Porter Square Neighbors Association



To the Honorable, the City Council

October 12, 2000

The front-page article concerning possible conversion of the old VFW hall to affordable housing in the October 11 issue of the Cambridge Chronicle, and the July report by the City Manger to which the article refers, give a mistaken impression of the community process that has been followed. As President of the Porter Square Neighbors Association I would like to clarify several points, and to request that the community be given more input into the basic decision pending before the City Council.

As indicated in the report and article, there have been two meetings with the PSNA. The first was billed as purely informative. The second meeting did call for some feedback from the residents. However we were left with the clear impression that there would be further opportunities to make our opinions known. Nowhere in the process to date were alternative uses considered.

As I remember the discussion, feelings were distinctly mixed. There was general support for affordable housing as a goal, and a willingness to consider using the VFW hall for affordable housing. On the other hand, quite a few of our members expressed concerns about practical issues, including lack of parking, no play area for children, high traffic levels on both Massachusetts Avenue and Russell Street, and inadequate light and ventilation. The plan presented called for six apartments, which many of us felt was too much. We wondered if affordable housing was really the best use of a building facing directly onto Massachusetts Avenue and surrounded by businesses. Somebody recalled a past plan to use at least part of the space for an art gallery. Somebody else suggested studio apartments for transitional housing. There was no consensus asked for nor reached.

While the report and article mention the meetings, they do not mention the concerns we raised. We felt they were important, and would like them to be addressed substantively the building is committed to an unsuitable use. We would be glad to host another discussion in which alternative uses are a serious possibility, and we do hope that we will not only be listened to but also be heard next time.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Howard".

John H Howard
President

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Consent Communication #3 /

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A communciation was received
from John H. Howard, President,
Porter Square Neighbors Association,
relative to the VFW hall being
converted to affordable housing.

In City Council October 23, 2000

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