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August 4, 1997

Dear Members of the Cambridge City Council,

As a resident of the Central Square area in Cambridge, who also works in Cambridge, I am writing in response to the letter from John Clifford of the Green Street Grill, dated July 30, 1997. I have in the past confined myself to making statements at the hearings organized by the Central Square Advisory Committee on the Holmes Realty Trust development, but after a highly misleading letter such as the one by John Clifford I had to set the record straight in writing.

John Clifford writes of past meetings of the Central Square Advisory Board: "Over the past several years, there have been hundreds of meetings, all of them advertised and open to the public. I think everyone had a chance to voice their opinion." Well, there is a vast difference between merely advertising an event to satisfy the legal requirement for a public meeting, and *making an effort to reach the community*. I have lived in the Central Square area for two years and I, as well as friends of mine who have lived in the area much longer, have never heard of any of these bodies and their meetings till very recently.

To advertise meetings in newspapers is clearly not enough. Where were the posters announcing the event? (How many public bulletin boards are there anyway, for people who do not have the means to pay for newspaper advertisements to announce their events?) Where were the volunteers standing by the roadside handing out flyers and asking people to come for the meetings to voice their opinion? Recently, the good people at Lucy Parsons Bookstore have done this job admirably, standing for hours in the hot sun at the street corner, handing out flyers announcing meetings and hearings, asking people to attend them, and engaging in discussion on the issue. For this alone they deserve much better than the criticism that Clifford levels at them.

Where were the flyers in people's mailboxes? I certainly did not get them at my previous residence on Pleasant St., and I have started receiving announcements of meetings and hearings at my present house on Western Avenue only very recently- *after* a similar effort by the Save Central Square group. I had myself done a mailbox drop of flyers prepared by the Save Central Square group announcing the July 23 hearing of the Central Square Advisory Committee. The only reason that the energy of volunteers like me could not be tapped by the Central Square Advisory Committee themselves is that they had made *no attempt* to reach people like me who do not read newspapers regularly but walk the Central Square neighborhood every day. It is a disgrace that other people have to do their work for them.

The effect of this half-hearted attempt at publicity has been that a small clique of "good old boys and girls" has dominated the decision-making process. As someone who has been here only two years, I have *as much* right to participate in decision-making in my neighborhood as a long-time resident who is a veteran attendee at neighborhood meetings. Only the select few who made it to the meetings were in the know of the development plans and that is precisely why there was no opposition. The reason there has been a sudden explosion of opposition is not due to any conspiracy, but because people who were in the dark about the project for years have finally come to know of

what is being done behind their backs. And they have come to know of it thanks to the effort of the Lucy Parsons Bookstore, the Save Central Square group, and others like them.

The worst recent example of a clique of "good old boys and girls" trying to dominate the decision-making process was the refusal of the (clearly outnumbered) "old guard" at the Central Square Neighborhood Coalition (CSNC) to relinquish power. The Coalition had announced in the agenda they had mailed out for their July 15 meeting that they were planning to hold elections. A slate of candidates was also announced, including the incumbent President, Bob Boulrice. Many of us who live and/or work in the Central Square area heard about the meeting (once again, thanks to the people of the Save Central Square group) and went for the meeting to voice our concerns. In the meantime, members of the Save Central Square group had proposed another slate of candidates. Bob Boulrice clearly felt that his slate was likely to lose the election and, in response, announced an agenda different from that originally mailed out in one critical aspect- there was to be no election! This was clearly a ruse to avert losing the election. If these people are so confident that they represent the community, why are they afraid of facing elections? Or is it that they really do not care for the democratically expressed wish of the community, and intend to hold on to power by any means?

The outvoted slate at the CSNC still call themselves the CSNC, though they have lost all legitimacy to do so. There was a secret ballot election after the incumbents and their few confirmed supporters left the meeting - in all some 20 persons. The remaining 60 or so of us voted to choose between two slates- the original slate of Bob Boulrice, Geneva Malenfant et al. and the alternate slate of Ellen Al-Waqheyian, Jon Bekken et al. The latter slate won by a clear and convincing margin. The members of the CSNC present and voting have clearly expressed their view and the old slate should stop calling themselves the CSNC now. However, they still do, and this is symptomatic of what has been wrong with the process regarding soliciting of public input for the Holmes Family Trust project. A small coterie of people who "matter" know and control everything and make every attempt to exclude public opinion while trying to make it appear that they are involving the community.

A final word in response to Mr. Clifford - he accuses the Save Central Square group as follows: "Rather than working with the community, they're dividing it." Wait a moment - we *are* the community, how could we be dividing it?

Sincerely,

Basav Sen

(Basav Sen)

CC: Ellen Al-Waqheyen, President, Central Square Neighborhood Association
Courtney Brigham, The Cambridge Tab
Ken Maguire, The Cambridge Chronicle
Jennifer McKim, The Boston Globe
Andy Costello, The Boston Herald
Mayor Sheila Doyle Russell, City of Cambridge

Consent Communication #73

S-492

Communication was received from
Basav Sen, regarding the Central Square
Advisory Committee on the Holmes
Realty Trust development.

In City Council August 4, 1997

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