

Making a Living, Not a Killing

Neighborhood vs. "Development" of Central Square

Friends and Neighbors: I've lived in Cambridgeport since 1984. My house, on Laurel Street, is over 160 years old. I like it here, and I like Central Square. I like the feeling of neighborhood when I drop into Moody's Falafel Palace for a falafel sandwich to take home for supper (no onions, please), and Moody tells me he's going to make a trip to Syria and will get married. I like exchanging greetings with Kirk, the pastor at the landmark red brick First Baptist Church as he works on the compost pile facing River Street, or stopping in for a chat with friends at the Lucy Parsons Center Bookstore, or just dropping into Alan Wiener's corner tobacco shop and looking over the daily papers to decide which one, if any, to get. And the friendly folks at John and Anne's Classic Copy are always good to talk to, or sometimes to kibbitz with. I'd like to keep it this way: friendly, local, gently-paced, small businesses run by ordinary people doing honest work, trying to make a living, not a killing.

The Greedheads are coming!

Now we learn from the May 15, 1997 *Cambridge Chronicle* of a proposal to demolish the two-story buildings that curve around the south "corner" of Mass Ave and Magazine St, all the way from the CVS pharmacy on Mass Ave to the Ethiopian Restaurant at the corner of Magazine and Green Streets. The buildings currently house the CVS and eleven local storefront shops on the ground floor, and dentists and five firms in the offices on the upper floor.

Why destroy these buildings and the associated functioning modest livelihoods? Plainly and simply, to make a pile of money for the current legal owners of the property, the Holmes Family Trust, and the "developers." According to Ken Maguire's article in the *Chronicle*, they want to put up a huge new building—the price tag floated by James Rafferty, their lawyer: possibly \$20 million—with two levels of commercial space and up to 110 apartment units above.

From Mr. Maguire's article you'd never know their goal is to make money. Oh, no, dear reader. They want to provide housing. By having people living above the new upscale shops, Roger Booth of the city's Community Development Department is reported to have said, "It becomes their neighborhood, as opposed to an area that's just business. There's that 24-hour concern and surveillance and caring."

And Mr. Rafferty assures us that the demise of rent control was no factor. As evidence to support this absurd assertion, he says they've been considering the project since 1988, when they included demolition clauses in their leases. If so, why did they not make a move for nine years, and why now? Anyone who believes Mr. Rafferty must have been born yesterday. They're after money, and nothing else.

Glaringly absent from the *Chronicle's* boosterism piece is any consideration or concern—to say nothing of *caring*—about the impact of this grandiose project on the lives of the current small business proprietors. They get one terse sentence: "The current stores would likely not be offered new leases because of space limitations."

Is it remotely possible that the real reason is because big corporate chain stores—they've mentioned a Barnes and Noble bookstore, a Gap clothing store, a Borders bookstore, an expanded CVS pharmacy—might pay a lot more rent than small local businesses ever could? You bet it is!

It's not that the owners and developers *want* to hurt the small business people. Rather, they want to make a financial killing, and they know the local proprietors can't provide that kind of money. Progress, say the rich, always requires sacrifice. But it's always sacrifice by someone else!

Proposal for real improvement of Central Square neighborhood

No doubt the motivation for the proposal by the Holmes Trust is not a desire to improve our lives; so forget all the false propaganda their hired agents put out. It is lust for huge profit. The same lust—for maximum profit—is causing massive destruction in many parts of the world, and it needs to be openly confronted. It is wrong to destroy local communities, whether indigenous Indians in the Brazilian Amazon, indigenous tribes in Indonesia, or our local community centered about Central Square. We ought to have the right to structure our lives and our communities the way we want.

Instead of entering into a strenuous effort to ameliorate

the worst aspects of the profit-seekers proposal, we should insist on a real, total solution. We should call upon the City to recognize the uniquely rich cultural character of Central Square in Cambridge and to exercise the right of Eminent Domain. The property currently belonging to the Holmes Trust should be taken by Cambridge: the Trust should be compensated for the full value, as determined by the tax evaluation: and a broadly representative Central Square Neighborhood group, including local business people, should then take on the task, with the City, of formulating a development plan not dominated by the profit motive.

The 11 local storefront shops at immediate risk

On the street level, starting from next to the CVS pharmacy on Massachusetts Ave, in order:

Irving's Shoes; in business 70 years at this location.

Golden Donut;

Wiener's Pipe & Tobacco Shop; retail tobacco and sundry items, in business 31 years at this location, member Central Sq Business Assoc and Cambridge Chamber of Commerce.

Emily Rose; in business 58 years at this location.

Lucy Parsons Center Bookstore; a volunteer collectively-run non-sectarian radical bookstore, 3 years at this location.

Oriental Buffet;

Central Cleaner;

A & S Diner Restaurant; Sayed Eltoury, from Egypt, speaks Arabic and German,

Surman's Clothing;

—Please see other side—

Anthony's Greek Market; Tekle Maasho, from Ethiopia, speaks Amharic and Tigrinya, Ethiopian Restaurant; Tekle Maasho, opened 14 months ago.

The 2 dentists and five firms on the upper floor who are at risk

Dana Dental Associates, Dr. Richard M. Dana, D.D.S. and Dr. Nibaldo Morales, D.M.D.

Shine Dental Associates, Dr. Shahrok Soltani, D.M.D.

Kruger, Kruger and Albenberg, Architecture Engineering Planning, Environmental Designers

MBA Publications, Legal Support Systems

Law Offices of Corey R. Cutler

Eileen F. Lippe & Associates, tax and booking services for individuals and small businesses, local arts organizations and social service non-profit agencies, speak Spanish, Hindi and Cape Verdean.

Desai & Graves, Attorneys, P.D. Desai and Wm E. Graves Jr.

Note added: The subheading "The Greedheads are coming!" has been on my mind since writing the first draft, I think on May 31st. In fact, I wrote to Courtney Brigham (*Cambridge Tab* correspondent) a few days later that I needed to change it. Then on June 13, James Rafferty said to me that it was insulting to his clients, and I was inclined to think he was right, because it's a mistake to demonize people (even rich people).

My initial impulse to use it came from my admiration for author Hunter S. Thompson's and artist Thomas Benton's wonderfully spirited, colorful (though ultimately unsuccessful) struggle against the "developers" of Aspen, Colorado in their Aspen Wallposter series back in 1970-71, where they used the term "greedheads." Thompson, trying to "head them off at the pass", ran for Sheriff of Pitkin County. He lost, Tom lost, and so did Aspen, now a playground for the wealthy— "Fat City U.S.A." in the wallposters.

What we need to acknowledge is that the dominant culture exerts powerful influences on us to become acquisitive, to become greedy. Competition for material wealth is promoted as a virtue. All people are human beings, including of course those who become very rich and greedy. The trouble is that if they are also powerful and act to try to satisfy their greed, then poor people, who are also human beings, and should enjoy basic human rights, as recognized in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are made to suffer. Under such circumstances, it seems to me appropriate to designate their actions as those of "greedheads", and so I will leave the subheading unchanged.

George Salzman, 6/17/97



David Hiser photo

WOULD YOU SELL PEYOTE TO THIS MAN?

Dr. Hunter S. Thompson, defeated candidate for sheriff in the recent election, is shown here accepting a collect telephone call from Argentina in his Jerome Hotel headquarters two days before the deal went down. Dr. Thompson declined to comment on the nature of the call and later Mace a wire service reporter who attempted to check it out through the switchboard. In this — the ill-tempered Freak Power candidate's official campaign photo — he appears in full battle regalia: Gold-rimmed Greaser glasses, Magnesium police badge, 69th Infantry Division lapel flag, wireless wristband transceiver....and his silver Aztec "eternal life" pendant, a gift from Emiliano Zapata's grand-daughter, Jilly. Dr. Thompson, who carried three of the four city precincts, was massively rejected by voters in the populous down-county suburbs around Agnewville, Snowmass & the sprawling Gerbazdale trailer court. In his final, election-night speech for the national press and TV, the candidate lost control of himself and had to be restrained: "This is my last press conference!" he shouted. "You won't have Hunter Thompson to kick around anymore, you pigfuckers!" He then rushed out of the room to confer with his personal Swami, who later told reporters that Dr. Thompson had decided to "depart this country in the spring" and take up permanent residence at a luxurious Ashram on the Bay of Bengal.

SCUMSUCKER OF THE WEEK: REALTOR NORM JOFFEE — for sending his son out on the streets with a sandwich-board sign saying: "Buy a piece of ASpen. — see Norm Joffee or phone 925-2214."

The photograph and the text beginning with "Would you sell peote . . ." are from *The Aspen Wallposter* No. 7, January 1971, published by the Meat Possum Press, Inc., Box K-3, Aspen, Colorado 81611.

From another place

Why Eminent Domain for Central Square?

Friends and Neighbors: I'm the guy who wrote the broadside "Making a Living, Not a Killing" in which I criticized the Holmes Trust proposal for "developing" Central Square. There's a slew of solid reasons for opposing the proposal, and I'll give some of them below. But first a related note to show "where I'm coming from." It's for those whose immediate reaction to the idea that the city ought to exercise the right of Eminent Domain to take the Holmes Trust parcel is one of shock.

A month ago (5/12) I drafted the following letter, concerning my house, to Friends and neighbors:

I'm writing this note to seek your advice.

For several years now I've been thinking about the disposition of the duplex house at 12-14 Laurel Street after I die. My primary interest is that it become a source of neighborhood community, because I believe that only through real community, beginning with local communities, will it ever be possible to have a better world — for children, and for all of us. Those of you who know me more than casually know already that I believe the buying and selling of real estate, especially for speculative ends, ought not occur. I hope at least to be able to prevent this one parcel from being sold again.

My thought is to set up a neighborhood ecological resource, based on the house and lot, which will be administered by a trust established for that purpose. I see it as a "hands-on" educational project directed towards increasing, as much as possible, the self-sufficiency of the neighborhood in terms of energy, food, water, and the other basic requirements for human — and *humane* — existence.

Among the kinds of projects I would like to see pursued are development of solar heating, solar hot water, composting toilets, gray-water systems, photovoltaic electric energy, edible tree crops, berry bushes and grapes, organic gardening of vegetables, high-grade thermal insulation and efficient wood-burning stoves, bicycle-safe areas for children, instruction in bicycle repair and maintenance, neighborhood day-care facilities and meeting places. This is of course not meant to be an exhaustive list — just indicative of the kinds of things that interest me.

In my view the trust ought to be administered by a group that includes a number of members who live in the immediate neighborhood and who share the values expressed above, and a number who are actively involved in grassroots groups working towards similar or closely related goals. I've mentioned some of these thoughts in casual conversations with a few of my immediate neighbors, and I've met with some friends from each of the two grassroots groups Bikes Not Bombs and EarthWorks for some preliminary discussions.

If these things are of interest to you and you have thoughts about them you would like to share with me, I would appreciate hearing from you. Probably within the next couple of months or so I'll arrange a meeting to pursue this further.

This is not a gimmick. It's for real. When I wrote it I had no idea Central Square was about to be threatened. My point is very simple. We are living in a culture which actively promotes greed. In fact, at the University of Massachusetts/Boston where I teach, I just finished a series of short articles titled: Greed 101, Teaching Greed; Greed 102, Screwing the Students and Part-Time Faculty; Greed 103, Teaching Hierarchy; Greed 104, More on Hierarchy, the first two of which the student newspaper has already published. More are in the works, temporarily set aside for this effort.

The unrelenting pursuit of huge profits by big money interests is driving the world towards destruction of the biosphere, on which all life depends, and it is forcing over a billion human beings into conditions of extreme destitution, even death. Compared to destruction of rain- and temperate forests worldwide, what is threatened in Central Square (Forest City, ha! ha!) seems insignificant, but both are driven by the same fundamental cause—a desire to exploit the land (and people) for as much profit as can be squeezed out. It is not a sustainable way of life. It is, ultimately, a way of death. If we want humane survival, indeed if we want long term survival of life itself we've got to give it up! The great Plains warrior of the Lakota peo-

ples, Chief Crazy Horse perhaps said it best when refusing to be bought out by selling the sacred but gold-rich Black Hills of South Dakota,

One does not sell the land upon which the people walk.

We have to learn from the world's surviving indigenous peoples to cherish the earth, to revere the sunlight, to stand in awe at the miracle of photosynthesis by which green plants snatch inorganic elements from earth, air and water and transform them into the very food that supports all animal life, our own included.

We, the ordinary people who live locally, who walk the streets of the Central Square neighborhood, who revel in the cultural and linguistic diversity of the area — we ought to have a determining voice in the development of the area. Central Square is the real America of everyday working people, of hard-working immigrant families seeking to make better lives for their children than the lives that drove them to leave their native countries and to come here. The scale, in spite of some chain stores like CVS Pharmacy, Purity Supreme, Radio Shack, Dunkin Donuts, is still human.

Some reasons why I oppose the Holmes Trust proposal and advocate the city's use of Eminent Domain

1. Perhaps my major objection is the undemocratic process by which the proposed plan was formulated. Since it would have a large (and in my view undesirable) impact on the neighborhood, planning ought not be in the hands of a relatively small group unrepresentative of the much larger affected constituency.
2. "The current stores [in the targeted buildings] would likely not be offered new leases" — *Cambridge Chronicle*, May 15, 1997. In all likelihood these small locally-owned businesses would be driven out of the area, if not immediately then by higher commercial rents in the entire area resulting from the privately-driven "upscaling" development envisioned by the large real estate owners.
3. Increasing rents, already responsible for driving many lower-income residents out of Cambridge since repeal of rent control, would be further accelerated in the neighborhoods surrounding Central Square. At a recent Community Development Department forum in Cambridgeport, a participant reported that 46 children at the Morse School in June 96 would not be back in September 96 *because their families were moving out of Cambridge*. I don't want poorer families and individuals driven out.
4. Small local businesses throughout the area would be threatened, not only the 18 commercial tenants at immediate risk. For example, what would happen to Classic Copy—one of my favorite local businesses—if with all the anticipated "upscale" clientele, one of the chains, say Kinko's or Copy Cop, decided to move in and undercut Classic Copy with (temporarily) lower prices? Could Classic hang on? Should our local businesses be faced with this?
5. Although large corporate chains are promoted as job-providers, in fact many of the jobs are at minimum pay, and company profits, gained from the local community's purchases and cheap labor, are sent off to corporate headquarters. McDonald's profits, for example, go to Oak Park, Illinois corporate headquarters, which then decides where in the world to peddle more hamburgers for profit.
6. Any new building by private developers **must be for higher rentals** than those paid in current structures they would replace. If motivated by a desire for profits, there is no other possibility. The "thrust of market forces" (a euphemism for the "power of greed") invariably overcomes any small tactical initial concessions to popular opposition to which a developer may agree. The only effective way to prevent the otherwise inevitable rise in rents is to make development a truly public, that is to say, a democratic process.
7. It is because of the preceding reasons, and No. 6 in particular, that I advocate the city moving to recognize the unique cultural richness of Central Square, and to take, by the power of Eminent Domain, the parcels currently owned by the Holmes Nominee Trust (with compensation for the full value, as determined by the tax evaluation) so that a development for the benefit of the diverse constituency can then be accomplished.

—George Salzman, 6/18/97

***3rd Meeting to save Central Square
Wednesday, June 25, 1997
at 7:00 pm
at the First Baptist Church***

**(It's at the corners of Magazine St, Green St, River St, and
Franklin St, a block from the Central Square T-Stop.
Enter Franklin St door, one flight down)**

Central Square is unique in Cambridge as a focus of rich cultural and ethnic diversity. It still retains much of the neighborhood character that used to be a part of small-town America. Plans by the current owner to demolish the buildings that line the South "corner" of the Square and replace them with a mammoth corporate-scale structure would destroy this quality.

An *ad hoc* group, a committee to save Central Square, which formed to stop the demolishers (who prefer to be called *developers*), will be meeting as announced above. If you are interested to join in this effort, we hope you will come to the meeting and take part.

— George Salzman, one of the *ad hoc*-ers, June 18, 1997

Consent Communication #18

5-397

Communication was received from George
Salzman, transmitting notice of the
thrid meeting to save Central Square
on Wednesday, June 25, 1997 at 7:00P.M.

In City Council June 23, 1997

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