



City of Cambridge

IN CITY COUNCIL

December 6, 1976

COMMITTEE REPORT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 19, 1976, 2:30 P.M.

WALNUT ROOM, CITY HALL

COUNCILLORS CLEM AND SULLIVAN

MEETING CONVENED BY COUNCILLOR CLEM AT 2:40 P.M.

REPORT

Councillor Clem explained that the purpose of the meeting was to hear from Mr. DiGiovanni who has a proposal to build a 700 car parking garage on his Nutting Road site if and only if he is permitted to lease the adjacent MBTA lot and operate on-grade parking at competitive rates. In that parking is essential to the economic viability of Harvard Square, Councillor Clem pointed out that this Committee had an obvious interest in the proposal, although it in no way intends to usurp the statutory powers invested in the MBTA Project Review Board. Beyond that, this Committee might choose to recommend to the City Council that it formally endorse Mr. DiGiovanni's proposal and forward its endorsement to the Review Board.

Mr. Ben Thompson, of Benjamin Thompson & Associates, made a visual presentation of his plan for the S.W. Sector, including the proposed parking garage of his client, Mr. DiGiovanni. He stressed that the parking garage would be only one part of an overall plan for the area. With respect to visual impact, Mr. Thompson pointed out that the parking garage would not be visible from either Mt. Auburn Street or the neighboring residential area.

Mr. DiGiovanni explained that it was essential that he have a degree of control over competitive on-grade parking before he moved forward with his proposal in that financing would be highly unlikely in the absence of such an assurance. This assurance must extend up until that time when development begins in the S.W. Sector, at which time he would be unafraid to bid for parking rights. He went on to point out that although there are only 150 legal parking spaces on the MBTA site, up to 800 cars are using this location for parking. He felt strongly that "turnover" parking is necessary for his garage to be financially solvent and that unless he can control on-grade parking it will be used by the turnover shopper and his garage will be used primarily by the all day parker, thus making the enterprise less attractive financially. He concluded by saying that the need for a parking garage is obvious and he is prepared to move and fill that need if he can attain the requisite assurances. If later developments mandate such a move, Mr. DiGiovanni gave his assurance that he would vacate his property within twenty-four hours.

Mr. Walter Henneberry from the Treasurer's Office of the MBTA made several points concerning the MBTA's interest in the S.W. Sector. First off, the MBTA must vacate the property by February, 1979, although they may and in fact are encouraged to do so at an earlier date. The MBTA could enter into a lease agreement with Mr. DiGiovanni, although if the lease were to be extended beyond a period of one year, it would have to be subject to the statutory requirements of open and competitive bidding. He conceded that the MBTA could enter into a "day to day" leasing arrangement, yet he felt that MBTA counsel would reject such a plan as being an attempt to circumvent the intent of bidding statutes. He went on to point out that the MBTA has some internal decisions to make before consenting to any plan and that some of its decisions must be made in concert with the City of Cambridge.

Mr. Donald Moulton, Assistant Vice-President for Government and Community Affairs spoke in behalf of Harvard University. He stressed that everyone's best interest is served by a coordinated development. He felt that the MBTA Project Review Board should deal with Mr. DiGiovanni's proposal and that those in attendance had no formal right one way or another to decide. Whereas four developers are already supposedly interested in the S.W. Sector, he suggested that early and non-integrated support for this proposal was inappropriate. He further stated that a premature monopoly on parking by Mr. DiGiovanni was unwise in that it might preclude other development possibilities that included parking for the area. He urged the Economic Development Committee to meet with other owners and abutters in the S.W. Sector who were not present. Beyond that, he urged the Committee to take no action on Mr. DiGiovanni's proposal but instead ask the MBTA Project Review Board to consider this and other proposals as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jim Quinn of J. Henry Quinn Realty made an observation after Councillor Clem pointed out that studies show a 5700 space parking deficit in Harvard Square right now which might double by 1985. He stated that if the garage is built, the Square will have at least one permanent solution underway. If someone wants to build another later, so much the better. He feels that the worst situation is the present one and any plan that addresses the problem is an improvement deserving of support.

FURTHER ACTION

Councillor Clem explained that he will have his Committee meet with other owners and abutters of the S.W. Sector. He will also receive a written statement from Mr. DiGiovanni which sets out the assurances he seeks as well as those he is prepared to make. Those in attendance as well as those invited will be given notice as to further action which this Committee intends to take.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 3:55 P.M.





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Report of the Committee on Economic Development re: to a proposal to build an off-street parking facility in the Harvard Square area.

In City Council,
December 6, 1976

12/6/76

*Report accepted -
Copy to City Manager.*