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April 9, 1998

City Clerk
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Dear City Council:

The Proposed North Massachusetts Avenue Project Is Good and Cannot Be Delayed

Elimination of the combined sewer overflows necessitates that Massachusetts Avenue from Porter Sq. to the Arlington border will be reconstructed. Separation of the sewer pipes is both legally unavoidable and environmentally wise. The process cannot be delayed because delay will dramatically increase the expense of the project to Cambridge taxpayers.

The Process the City Has Followed Has Been Outstanding and Effective

Given that the sewer work will go forward, and that Mass Ave will be torn up, the decision is how best to do the job. I have been amazed at the process that has been followed to reach that decision. Other cities and governmental bodies simply minimize public involvement—holding meetings at times inopportune for working people to attend, keeping knowledge of meetings shrouded. The City of Cambridge has taken the opposite approach—trumpeting the public meetings with large signs placed on the roads, flyers mailed to local residents, announcements on the city's web site. And at these meetings, the design team has solicited suggestions and acted on them. As the direct result of the succession of public meetings, numerous changes have been made to the multiple initial designs.

A letter to the *Cambridge Chronicle* (March 5, 1998) by Susan Clippinger, Ralph Dunphy, Steven White, and Susan Schlesinger details the great lengths to which the City has gone to make the process public. I encourage you all to read it again.

The design team has followed a tortuous, iterative process of seeking public input, redesigning, and then again seeking input—working to reach a consensus. These efforts have been successful. Consensus (but not unanimity) on a design has been achieved. Consensus is not easily obtained—it takes hard work, listening to numerous, conflicting viewpoints and making compromises. I applaud the effort that has gone in to achieving consensus.

At the last public meeting held by the design team (January 24th), public comment was very favorable towards the form of the proposals put forth that day. Nonetheless, myriad

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suggestions (sometimes conflicting) were offered and numerous changes have been made to address perceived shortcomings. Evidence of these changes can be seen in the DPW's most recent mailing, mailed prior to last week's meeting at the Fitzgerald School.

Some of the Proposal's Opponents Have Misrepresented the "Median" Issue

Surprising as it may seem, during the time for large-group comment at the well-attended January 24th meeting, no one got up and said that the medians must be kept in their entirety. Some now say that the medians need to be kept, apparently every inch of them.

Those objecting to this project have attempted to define it in terms only of the medians—overlooking both that are numerous other changes involved (more, better crosswalks and bicycle lanes) and that the current proposals retain one-half of the existing medians.

A careful inspection of the design plans shows that the proposals have been crafted through painstaking efforts that confront the realities of North Mass Ave's many uses.

Nine New Crosswalks Will Make North Mass Ave Safer

Some argue that, for reasons of pedestrian safety, all of the medians must be kept, putting forth an argument that people are going to jaywalk anyway, so we should facilitate it. The design team has taken a contrary approach—increasing dramatically the number of crosswalks and making those crosswalks safer by such changes as shortening the distance pedestrians need to travel to get across the street. Enforcement of jaywalking ordinance is an additional option that the City might consider.

The presence of a median encourages higher speeds—even for short stretches. Slowing cars and trucks down in the places where speeds currently routinely exceed the posted limit will aid pedestrian safety.

Adding nine crosswalks to this stretch of Mass Ave will encourage pedestrians to use the crosswalks and cross Mass Ave at intersections—where motorists expect them to be. This too will aid pedestrian safety.

Bicycle Lanes Will Make North Mass Ave Safer

Mass Ave is a dangerous place to bicycle. Still, Mass Ave is heavily traveled by bicycles. Studies show that bicycle lanes *increase* safety (confirming what one would guess anyway), and that these safety benefits derive not only to bicyclists but also to motorists. Cara Seiderman, Community Development Department, has compiled a lengthy, detailed collection of studies showing the safety improvements resulting from the installation of bicycle lanes. In brief, bicycle lanes encourage both motorists and cyclists to drive in a straight line and to recognize each other's presence and rights. I encourage you all to look at the evidence documenting the safety improvements bicycle lanes bring.

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Next Steps

Now, design for the Fresh Pond sewer work is underway. The public meeting on March 7th was well attended. We still don't know exactly what the work will entail (although proposals have been circulated), but at the meeting Steve White took numerous comments and questions from people, and gave the impression that our concerns would be addressed. Mr. White's credibility rests not only in his own hands, but also in the hands of the City Council. I trust that after looking into the present matter you will find that due process has been followed, public input has actively been solicited and incorporated, and that the City workers have performed their jobs admirably.

The current proposals are excellent, and should be acted upon favorably.

Best Regards,



Michael J. Quinn

Consent Communication #16 5-268

A communication was received from
Michael J. Quinn, transmitting a
letter regarding the proposed North
Massachusetts Avenue Project.

In City Council April 13, 1998

Referred to

7:00 pm hearing