

Perez, Lori

From: Patrick W Barrett III <jbrealtyllc@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 4, 2025 10:23 AM
To: City Council
Cc: City Clerk; Michael Monestime; Huang, Yi-An
Subject: RE: Policy Order 2025 #49

Honorable Mayor Simmons and Cambridge City Council,

Re: POR 2025 #49

The policy order filed by the Mayor and Councilors McGovern, Siddiqui, Sobrino-Wheeler, and Wilson sets what I believe to be an inappropriate precedent for private citizen engagement. The policy cites 27 vacant storefronts presumably throughout the city yet names only Gerlad Chan, a private citizen and notable philanthropist, to come before the economic development committee. The standard set here sits in stark contrast to how the City has dealt with vacancies by much larger institutions like MIT and Harvard and further sets itself apart from other more direct action like the taking of Vail Court; which remains unresolved in the courts 11 years later.

MIT, for instance, purchased the entire block of Main St from Windsor St to Portland St around 2001 when Polaroid went bankrupt and kept the block empty up until 2022 when they reopened as The Engine, recently sold to Biomed. For 20-years MIT held that entire block, which fronts a low income residential community, hostage to the sound of crickets from this legislative body. Maybe if the neighbors were in a better financial position, as they are in Harvard Sq, there would have been more pushback or maybe it's easier to name a private citizen? Further, when MIT went before this Council to share their grand scheme for Volpe, I personally handed to this Council a map and locations of over 600,000 square feet of vacancy and over 3 acres of land vacancy to use as leverage in the negotiations and to highlight the utter hypocrisy of an institution that prides itself on being a "good neighbor." The Council declined to push back.

Vacancies, wherever they may be, happen for only a handful of reasons. Cambridge has one of the largest, most expensive, and ultimately backwards set of regulatory hurdles for development as compared to nearly anywhere else in the country. You may remember that Chan did propose a wonderfully modern building for this site that was mired in a protracted 2 year historical process and attacked on multiple fronts by entitled neighbors who happily dragged the process out while the City sat on its thumbs. Article 19, Article 22, Inclusionary Zoning, anachronistic commercial zoning regulations, the CDD application process in general, and the list literally goes on as to why most people hit the pause button on development in this City.

Lastly, where is the vision in this City? How many meetings and charettes and studies must we engage before this Council recognizes their role in the lack of vision this City has? You should not be dragging private citizens into the Sullivan Chamber to explain themselves, instead you should be asking your planners what they can do to spur development and what the City is doing to meet the extreme financial challenges of this moment. For all these reasons and more please vote NO on this policy order.

Regards,

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