

October 8, 2020

President McLaughlin, Vice President Rossetti and Members of the Somerville City Council  
City Hall  
93 Highland Ave  
Somerville MA 02143

Dear Councilors McLaughlin, Rossetti, Ballantyne, Clingan, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Niedergang, Scott, Strezo and White:

As the owner of the Knights of Malta Hall (343 Medford Street), I am writing to make an urgent plea that the Council postpone its final vote on the proposal to up-zone specific parcels in Gilman Square.

I have made an effort to participate in the Land Use Committee's review process for this change and have already raised well-substantiated concerns about the effect it would have on historic structures in the Square. Giving favored developers the right to develop 6-story buildings, with fewer required public reviews and approvals, flies directly in the face of the stated goals of the City's own 2014 Gilman Station Area Plan, which asserts that "Anchor buildings like the Knights of Malta Hall, the Litchfield Block, Mad Oyster Studios, and the Pearl Street Park senior housing will be preserved and celebrated."

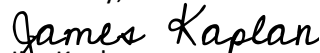
***Moreover, while it is clear that this new up-zoning proposal has been made and discussed in good faith, it is equally clear that its existence and its consequences are still not widely known or understood by many of the key stakeholders in the Gilman Square community, including many of the residents, businesses and property owners that will be most affected by the change.***

While this lack of public outreach and inclusion may have been entirely unintentional, its omission raises important questions about the timing and desirability of making a significant change to a zoning ordinance only recently adopted by the City after a long, careful and deliberate review.

Increased density, transit-oriented development, historic preservation and the enhancement of shared, open and civic spaces are equally welcome and desirable goals – but they are also goals that can sometimes end up in competition with one another. Striking a workable balance in achieving these goals requires a truly inclusive and transparent process. This change would undermine the possibility for such a process.

On behalf of my fellow property and business owners, and of the tenants of my building, several of whom are valued contributors to members to Somerville's creative economy, I urge the Council to delay this piecemeal zoning change until the proponents and the Gilman Square Neighborhood Association engage in a fuller and more direct discussion with the stakeholders most directly at risk for unintended consequences from this significant change.

Sincerely,

  
Jon Kaplan  
Malta Realty Trust, LLC

Cc: Mayor Curtatone; George Proakis