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Greetings!

I have attached my public comment to this email. It is regarding the Copper Mill development project in Davis Square.

Thank you!

Abigail

Public Comment on Copper Mill

I am writing to express my objections to the Copper Mill development project in Davis Square. Having attended the most recent public comment meeting, I found the developer devoid of concrete answers to any of the substantive questions asked. The willingness to put in 20% affordable housing was frequently cited as an example of their willingness to work with the community (despite this being required by law), as is their willingness to make minor cosmetic changes like moving which side of the structure the entrance is on. The fact that their response to being asked what they would do if they weren't allowed to move forward with this plan was to not renew any of the existing leases and thereby shut down a large chunk of the square in and of itself belies any willingness to work with the community.

Several substantive questions were asked and dodged. I asked about a completion bond, given their frequent statements that the size of the development was necessary to make it economically viable and that their margins are much thinner than one would expect. If margins are indeed so thin, especially as the Trump tariffs are expected to hit the construction sector hard, it's a very reasonable question. Yet the developer simply said they aren't at that stage yet. The exact amount might be something for a later stage, but willingness to commit to having one at all should not be a late-stage thing. It should be done quite early, as the project should be absolutely prohibited from going forward without one. Davis Square is too central to Somerville to risk the very high likelihood of economic downturn stopping the project in the middle and leaving the square in shambles. Yet they were not willing to commit or even discuss having one in concept.

They were also asked what they would be using for Area Median Income to calculate the affordable housing prices. This question was also unanswered, and yet it's a very important one, for the affordable housing is being given as the main reason we should permit this development. The formula for affordable rent is based on 80% of the area median income. Without a commitment to set the affordable rents at a lower rate than the maximum allowable for affordable housing, this is not going to result in anything that's useful for the lowest-income people who are the ones being pushed out by Somerville's rising rents.

As for the idea that adding additional units of expensive housing will exert downward pressure on existing housing, when we do that with taxes it's called trickle-down economics and we've been establishing for decades that it doesn't work. Housing is not susceptible to the laws of supply and demand in quite the same way as a commodity, especially in an environment without both a substantial tax on empty units and a citywide AirBnB ban.

These were not the only substantive questions brought up with no concrete answers. What is it going to do to the parking, what is it going to do to the sunlight in the square, what is the effect of adding that many new cars to an intersection that's already a problem in a city where we are already making efforts to decrease available parking? (I would particularly put this in the context of the presentation given at the last city council meeting regarding parking, where efforts to cut down on available parking within the city were discussed, but also just the fact that Davis Square is already a hazard to drive through and that intersection something of a hazard to walk through.) For every one of these questions, no answer was given.

It was, quite honestly, attending the public comment meeting and learning about the project that galvanized me against it. There are no concrete specifications, just a lot of architectural drawings, a

request for “thought partners,” and “we’re not at that stage yet.” There seems to be an effort to discourage objections by having nothing concrete for people to object *to*. Additionally, future public comment meetings must be better advertised—most of those attending only became aware the meetings existed because of a circular presented by those against the development and extensive criticism was offered during the meeting towards those who have not been “participating in the process” for the entire length of the project. This reads as nothing more than an attempt to shroud the details from those who would object until it is far too late.

As it is now, it must not be allowed. Before *any* approval can be given, any variance granted, they must answer these questions and others in a concrete fashion, and they must do it early enough in the process that there is time for citizens to mount objections while their objections can still be taken into account, before the project as moved so far ahead that it cannot be stopped if we do not like the answers to those questions.

Abigail Walzer

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Somerville