

John Long

From: Charlie McKenzie [charlie@hamlen.net]
Sent: Wednesday, March 31, 2010 9:31 AM
To: John Long
Cc: smackey@somervillechamber.org
Subject: Re: 188847 proposed amendments to IA and IP zones

March 31, 2010

Aldermen Sean O'Donovan
Land Use Committee Chair
c/o John J. Long, City Clerk
City of Somerville
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville Ma 02143

Re: 188847 proposed amendments to IA and IP zones

Dear Aldermen O'Donovan;

I am writing to you to express some concerns that I have regarding the proposed amendments cited above. First, the proposed amendments will cause restrictions on "higher" commercial property uses. Second, the proposed amendments will place serious restrictions on existing businesses which for decades have established themselves as good, responsible corporate citizens who run profitable going concerns. Third, the proposed zoning amendments will strip commercial property owners of numerous existing property rights and in substance transfer those rights to the City's Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals through the special permit review process. Fourth, the proposed amendments are an attempt to control and run property without taking the risk of ownership. Fifth, the proposed amendments will place the City at a competitive disadvantage with surrounding communities who do not require the special permit process. These amendments are clearly a blockade to commerce which will diminish the value of the City's commercial property tax base. The adoption of these amendments will force business and property owners to file for tax abatements for the devaluation of their properties due to the restrictions placed on their property rights.

May I suggest you pass a rule or ordinance requiring that notices be sent directly to property owners when proposed zoning changes are being made? This will allow those being affected the most by these proposals an opportunity to weigh in on the particular subject during the early stage of the process.

If the City by these proposals is trying to attract different businesses, then it should do so by incentivizing those businesses with tax breaks or targeted infrastructure investment rather than removing property rights from current businesses and commercial property owners.

Given our concerns, I feel this is a good time to acquaint you with our opinion on how to leverage the existing attributes of the Inner Belt Park to expand the City's commercial tax base and property values.

As you may know, Hamlen & Company has been a significant owner of property in the Inner Belt Park since 1985. We have worked with the City of Somerville over the years, been represented on the Chamber of Commerce, paid a huge amount in property taxes, and have not received much in return. We have sought ways to improve the future of the Inner Belt Park, both from a long term property and land use perspective, in particular working on various concepts of "What is the future of Inner Belt." Some of these undertakings included working with the City to create way finding signage to the Park, signage at the Park's gateway, kiosks and directories within the Park - we were even willing to share in the cost of a City master plan study for the Inner Belt Park, but no one asked for our participation.

In the meantime, we have had to fight off proposals that would be detrimental to the Inner Belt Park, from both the prospective of the current value of the property as well as its potential value, which could also lower the tax revenue that has been so coveted by the City. These proposals would include locating a "materials recycling facility" next to 70 Inner Belt Road which now has an assessed value of nearly \$34,000,000 the most valuable property in the Park; the proposal to relocate the MBTA green line maintenance facility, which would have a soccer stadium attached to it, and the potential of having numerous buildings taken by eminent domain. We still have concerns on where the MBTA's green line maintenance facility is going to be sited. Is it yard 8, mirror H or option L, all of which options will have a variety of impacts on businesses, property values, commerce and the City's commercial tax base.

Throughout this time, we have asked the City to bring focus to the "tubes" under the MBTA tracks, fill in pot holes, keep the sidewalks in good repair, find a second access road into the Park, and help us with storm drain issues due the MBTA's ineffective drainage designs. You may not be aware, but most properties in the Park have drainage rights which tie into the MBTA storm drainage system. The City has done very little on these fundamental infrastructure concerns even though the businesses and property owners located in the Park pay millions of dollars a year in real estate taxes and require very little in City services. We do not burden your school system, we remove our own trash, and we have buildings with modern life safety building systems that protect lives and property and the City's first responders should there be an emergency at our places of business. THIS PARK IS A MAJOR CASH COW FOR THE CITY.

As everyone knows, the greatest asset of the park is its location. The proximity to the interstate highway system, Boston, Logan Airport, and Cambridge is of great value. But perhaps what everyone does not recall or does not know is that Metro Media Fiber Networks invested millions of dollars of private capital into the telecommunications fiber loop that is now running through the Park and the City.

The loop provides for redundant multicarrier internet connectivity to the United States and the world through Verizon's Bent Street switch. As you may recall, the fiber trench was both welcomed and encouraged by the City. The fiber combined with the millions of dollars in private capital invested in upgrading the Everett electrical power station and bringing redundant sources of power to the Park places the Park in a unique situation, since power and connectivity are the two fundamental ingredients that technology companies seek. The closer those companies are in physical proximity to the power source and the Verizon switch, the better they like it because the possibility of disruption to their 24X7 fault tolerant operations decreases. The Inner Belt Park is about a mile from both the power station and the Verizon switch. So it is extremely logical for the property owners and the City of Somerville to take huge advantage by leveraging on this situation. If the City is serious about its desire to attract green industry, biomedical and technological companies, and data resource centers, it should do everything in its power to support, contribute and even invest in this great asset in order

to create added jobs and revenue. To date, the City has not invested very much in the Park's infrastructure - it's all been done by others.

That is why it seems totally inconsistent for Somerville to consider the concept of making most users seek a special permit in order to receive approval for doing almost everything in the Park. The proponents of the proposals might say that the special permit is for certain sizes, but almost any use is for a larger size because the properties in the Park range in size from 10,000 to 200,000 square feet. If a user is interested in staying or relocating to the park, they could be easily discouraged to do so if they have to go through the hurdles of a special permit. In addition, even if they receive the special permit, it is subject to appeal, which could be long, cumbersome and expensive – which is not exactly an inviting situation.

In speaking with a property owner who approached a medical industry firm to come to the Inner Belt Park I was informed that the company's representatives commented that there were no amenities in the Park like, restaurants, coffee shops, and health and banking facilities. These proposed amendments would make it more difficult to provide the ancillary services these firms desire.

Realistically, as long as there are rail yards surrounding the Park and rail lines running through it and having two large rail maintenance facilities in and about the Park and as long as the MBTA is the Park's largest land owner the City will have difficulty in attracting new users, since those users do not want to be next to rail maintenance facilities because that use/environment is contrary to the image they want to project.

Finally, the proposals will have a detrimental affect on businesses, commercial property owners and the City's commercial tax base. Moreover, the proposals will place the City in a competitive disadvantage with surrounding communities. Please defeat these proposals!

Sincerely Yours,

Charles McKenzie

Devens H. Hamlen