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To : Tom Evans, Exec. Director, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

From : Stephen H. Kaiser, PhD

*December 2014 & January 2015 drafts of Amendments to the KSURP*

In my public comments of January 21, 2015 I offered both commentary and suggestions for possible changes to the proposed plan and rezoning of the MXD district. This letter is intended to elaborate on those concerns, with additional proposals.

It is my understanding that the first step to alter the zoning in the MXD district is to prepare an Urban Renewal Plan amendment. This step is as it should be, with zoning following later and being consistent with the plan.

The January 16, 2015 memorandum on the KSURP Amendment is intended to reflect changes centered on “innovation, creativity and technology,” It also seeks to move “in furtherance of the recommendations from the 2013 K2 Planning Study.

Chapter 1 of the draft Amendment of December 15, 2014 contains sections on boundaries, plan objectives, procedural execution, and proposed Urban renewal actions, land acquisition and relocation. I have only the first four pages of the draft, and see nothing about consideration of alternatives.

- \* alternative densities, of more or less than that one million gsf.
- \* different mixes of housing, office and retail.
- \* different roadway treatments, especially for Binney Street and Broadway.
- \* different setbacks or step backs of upper floor of buildings from the street.

The one section in Chapter 1 that stands out is Section 102 on Urban Renewal Plan Objectives. I leave it to the Board to define the meaning of “decadent” and how much of existing architecture at Kendall Square may be sufficiently dated and obsolete to qualify as “decadent.” Outside the Kendall Square district, it is my opinion that identification of

decadent modernist buildings in Cambridge should include the Sullivan Courthouse, the Tobin School, the William James Hall at Harvard, the Green Building at MIT, 675 Mass Avenue at Central Square and the Carpenter Center at Harvard.

Section 102 (b)(1) includes changes with an inherent class bias, by deleting the promised emphasis on blue collar jobs and instead including an emphasis on knowledge economy yuppification. As a minimum, some sort of balanced and inclusive goals should be expressed here.

The same section includes a reference to “upgrade Cambridge workers' skills” : was it intended and does it remain so that an education and training component would be one of the CRA responsibilities at Kendall Square?

Section 102 () (2) makes a reference to facilitating multimodal use. I think the 21st century goal is not to facilitate auto usage, and that the true goal should be zero growth for cars at Kendall Square and instead a transportation plan that is based on transit, pedestrians and bikes. I can find nothing in the documentation that indicates what is needed to “facilitate transit facilities” in the Kendall square area. This is a constant concern I have raised at many meetings, and it has yet to be responded to.

In Section 102(b) (3) and (c )reference is made to “public transportation facilities”: - a better wording would be “both public and private transit service.”

Section 102 (c ) : the term “appropriate” should be replaced by “transit-oriented”

Section 102 (e) : add after “the public interest” the word “the common good.”

Add at the end of Section 102 (g) the words “consistent with good planning practice and reasonable public participation.” The intent is to avoid the sometimes common bureaucratic fascination with “fast-tracking.”

Section 102 (i) the goal of stabilizing surrounding neighborhoods” needs some explanation given the overheated development pressure in Cambridge. I presume that such stabilization would not include rent control, which I believe was in existence in 1977.

Section 102 (j) should not include alleviating problems of auto or truck movements. Other modes yes, but vehicles – status quo at best.

Proposed Urban Renewal Actions in Section 104 should include planning and monitoring of construction and usage.

In section 106 ((b) relocation, where are the ten families and individuals who are referred to in the draft?

In the memorandum of January 16, what are the “provisions that would assist the CRA in linking transit investment to development.” I have heard no discussion of transit investments at Kendall. What are some of the options?

Reference to “fall-out shelters” sounds somewhat quaint.

The last paragraph of Section 108 to establish a transit mitigation fund needs more definition, especially a funding ratio, based either on square footage or project cost. One option is for a developer to do in-kind work rather than a cash payment. I suggest that the first action in this regard is that Boston Properties perform an analysis of improving capacity and reliability of the Red Line.

Does section 402, I would suggest a higher residential component, since there is little inclination on the part of Boston Properties to build housing at Kendall Square, probably the most needed land use.

The five exemptions of GFA listed on page 4 as part of Section 402 should be deleted. The current trend in writing zoning is to make too many exemptions from GFA and FAR, thus reducing the meaning of FAR as a control on density,

The building heights contained in Section 402 (c ) are excessive in the sense that they provide for 25 to 30 story buildings that could create a canyon effect on the streets. In the past street-level setbacks have been excessive and not conducive to good human activity along the sidewalks. Limiting setbacks for the first four stories makes sense, followed by stepped set-backs of the building for the next ten stories, and then some upper level limits of floor plate size for taller towers.

Already, with construction not completed, Ames Street is showing problems with canyon effect for building in the range of 0 to 15 stories.

Limits should be placed on rooftop mechanicals, so that only ten feet of rooftop mechanicals are exempt from height limits.

I would be opposed to the Middle Income housing bonus as described on page 7 under Section 411 Housing, The Kendall experience on housing incentives for height has not been wholesome. The 2001 ECaPS study supported such an arrangement, and in less than a decade Alexandria proposed new zoning that would remove the special incentive for housing and would allow residential and office building to be the same maximum height. The result is that Alexandria had proceed in what was a housing incentive area by building only non-residential structures.

Again on page 7, item (b), all housing should be included for its actual floor area, with no exception.

The provision of benefits for middle income housing which can include people at twenty percent more than the median family income is not good public policy, when the proper incentives should be for housing for lower income citizens. It is not clear whether funds contributed to the Affordable Housing trust Fund can be used for Middle Income housing construction.

At the bottom of page 7, item c) should either be deleted or clarified. The word "also" is most puzzling.

Under Section 412 (a), the reference to "Existing Gross Floor Area" must be clarified or deleted.

Section 5.01 (2) is most puzzling. What is the reference to "the rapid transit station within the portion of the project area..."??? Is that the Kendall Square station? If so, say Kendall Square.

Section 502, Development Guidelines and Design review. I would not be in favor of verbatim adoption of the K2 Design Guidelines. There should be the option for amendment of those guidelines by the CRA board.

I think I am missing pieces of the proposal, since what I have is 101-106, 108, 402, 403.411, 412, 501, 502, and 503.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink on a light gray background. The signature is cursive and reads "Stephen H. Kaiser".

Stephen H. Kaiser, PhD  
Mechanical Engineer