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Planning Board
City of Cambridge
Cambridge, MA 02139

RE: Hearing on Change of Use permit applications for EJS Courthouse from Leggat McCall -
January 7, 2014

Dear Members of the Planning Board

This letter will put forth my request that you deny the permit applications submitted by Leggat McCall – subject of this hearing.

The land and Bulfinch designed buildings were originally donated by a private citizen to the City of Cambridge for public use in 1813. Despite overwhelming neighborhood opposition, the City granted a public use exception for the existing courthouse to be built as a high rise court and jail facility – again a public use. The County created a poorly designed and built structure tainted by scandal that has been the bane of the City of Cambridge and the East Cambridge neighborhood for over 40 years.

Now the Commonwealth, in an effort to obtain maximum dollars for this building, selected a private developer who ignored the principal interest expressed by the neighborhood; reduction of height. The building will no longer be a public use building. The Commonwealth seeks to have the City approve this sale through special permits granted to Leggat McCall to change the use going forward. The RFP was a flawed and unfair process acknowledged even by the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance. The building went to the highest bidder despite a complicated matrix which purportedly factored in neighborhood interests.

Why would the City now reward the Commonwealth by allowing it to grant the development rights to a private developer who, to date, has not incorporated in its design the principal request from the neighborhood?

The East Cambridge Planning Team has met numerous times with City agencies, Leggat McCall and City Councilors in an effort to create a more reasonably sized building which complements the surrounding buildings and neighborhood. These meetings have failed to develop a comprehensive plan for this building which responds to the many neighborhood concerns. The Planning Board has a chance to require the developer to reconsider the neighborhood issues, or to deny the permits requested and let the Commonwealth deal with its difficult building.

The Commonwealth may have the legal permissions to sell these rights to a private developer. It seems to me and others on the East Cambridge Planning Team that this is morally wrong given the history of the building. The City and its agencies should not support this route.

Sincerely,

Rhoda S. Fantasia

January 6, 2014