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Subject: 892 Mass ave

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Hello Jenny,

I'm not sure how best to make comments on this evening's hearing for 22 single bedroom apartments on the Toraya site. I do have a couple of observations. Maybe they are entered into the project or meeting notes...

For background, I am an architect, a resident of the Town for more than 15 years and nearly a neighbor to this site. I also have an office in town and I drive by this building almost daily. It is a very prominent site.

1. To call this 'mixed use' is not really accurate. It is an apartment building with an absolute maximum number of units pressed onto the lot with a very small 'office' space on the first level to gain the mixed use qualification. To further elucidate the point- there is actually an apartment and a bedroom which has the exact same relationship to the sidewalk (and bus stop) as the office space right next to it! And the situation repeats itself on Lockeland Ave... It seems that as a town we should be asking if this is how we want to give over space which sits very prominently within the public realm.
2. The sidewalk. The existing building steps back and has a very generous sidewalk in front of it. I often see people lingering here because of this extra space. It is a feature which is critical to good civic space (and it is good for business). In direct contrast, the building across the street has a sidewalk that barely allows a person with a stroller to pass another pedestrian without being forced to move out of the way. I have never seen anyone linger over there despite multiple entrances along the street and it being a daycare center. To further my point there is lots of space in front of the Blue Ribbon BBQ building and again, it is inviting, gives refuge and relief from the vehicular dominated roadway and it encourages people to linger. I think it would be a big mistake to press this new building so close to the street and turn our sidewalks into narrow thoroughfares rather than generous public spaces that actually encourage small business activity.
3. What is the office space going to be? An office which puts block-out shades in the windows and turns its back to the town? Why not make a fantastic restaurant space that opens to the street and is inviting and will make all the singles who live in the building actually want to move here? Why give the most prominent corner to the residential lobby instead of something which opens to the street and Mass ave, like a cafe? Give the business use on the first level the locations which can activate the streetscape.
4. And finally, is it possible to insist on commercial leases with programming that actually gives back to the greater community? We are losing a great restaurant, a media center, food link and other small shops. I think it would be a real missed opportunity to have another unfriendly and totally private facade jammed right up to the very edge of the sidewalk along this stretch of Mass ave. Have we not learned anything from the building across the street?

I am not anti development by any stretch. I just see an unfortunate pattern to much of it which minimizes civic engagement and responsibility in favor of shorter term gain. This stretch of Mass ave is way too important to not have a broader conversation about how the development of the site will give back to the community in exchange for being permitted to put up an entirely new building.

Many thanks and I hope you are well.

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