**Letter to Cambridge Neighborhood Organizations Tue-16Jun15**

**NEIGHBORHOOD ALERT**

What would you think of having an hourly “carshare” rentacar coming and going outside your bedroom window 24 hours a day? Read on. That could happen.

At 530pm on Wednesday, June 17 in the Sullivan Chamber of City Hall, the Cambridge Ordinance Committee – comprised of all nine members of the City Council - will conduct a zoning hearing on amendments to the Zoning Ordinances which include a proposal to allow multi-family and condo land owners in Residential Zones to lease reserved spaces in their driveways and parking areas to commercial short-term rentacars.

The issue is a hot one, and the hearing will be memorable. ZipCars, a multi-billion dollar worldwide operation since its purchase by Avis two years ago, emailed a call last Friday to all its enrolled members, urging them to come down to City Hall on Wednesday and tell the Council how fond they are of “carsharing” in Cambridge. The email portrays the upcoming hearing as a forum to decide for or against the carshare program. It is not.

These proposed amendments began simply as an attempt to bring the sprawling “carshare” program into conformity with Cambridge zoning ordinances. But somewhere in the drafting process, a provision was inserted which now seeks to allow Avis/ZipCar, Enterprise, and other qualifying worldwide rentacar firms, to expand their commercial activities beyond the current limits of Commercial Zones, and into the driveways and parking areas of Cambridge’s Residential neighborhoods.

Cambridge’s Zoning laws have kept commercial activity out of residential zones for almost a century now, and residents of those zones are willingly paying a premium for the safety and serenity that protection provides. The current proposal is a radical departure from that tradition, and should be allowed only if the facts show a major need, and if there is no better way to serve that need, and if strong provisions are included to protect the rights of affected residents.

The current proposal fails on all counts. A recent study by the Community Development Department shows that the vast majority of Cambridge residents already live within a 5 to 10-minute walk of a “carshare” rentacar. The minute or two saved by stationing these rentacars a block or two closer can hardly be called a crying need. And protections to mitigate the harm and preserve residential zone occupants’ rights are missing altogether.

The rentacar corporations tell us a typical “carshare” vehicle is in use an average of 9-11 hours per day. They would be identified by commercial signs to help renters find them, their reserved spaces would be marked off to exclude other cars and lighted all night for safety and convenience. They would expose abutters to door slamming, car lock beeps and honks, cellphone calls and conversations at all hours, plus car washing and vacuuming. In many cases, barely a foot or two from adjoining ’ windows.

But the car companies would be allowed to lease parking spaces in the driveways or parking areas of condo or multi-family dwellings simply by getting approval of the land owner, many of whom live nowhere nearby. Neither the abutters nor even renters in the owner’s own building would have any say. The owner would get the revenue, and the , abutters would get the noise and commotion of hourly rentacars coming and going at all hours of the day. Vehicles which now use those spots would have to search for spaces on the street or elsewhere.

The City backers behind this proposal hope that by stationing commercial short-term rental cars in residential driveways and parking areas, the rate of such “carshare” use may increase slightly, and the City may somehow benefit.   But nobody knows.  Not even the most zealous advocates can promise those hopes will be realized, since they are supported only by questionable statistics from other cities in other states years ago.  None of those studies comes close to the realities of this time in our unusual City of Cambridge.   That is hardly justification for such a major, noisy commercial intrusion into our Residential Zones.

At 530pm tomorrow, Wednesday, June 17, in City Hall, you have a chance to go say something about it. And with every councilor up for re-election in November, you can bet they will listen to you. The rentacar giants have rolled out their big guns to push this totally unnecessary zoning revision. You can make a big difference, particularly in a City Council election year.

We ask you to notify your association members, forward this letter if you wish, refer them to our Letter to the Editors in last Thursday’s Chronicle, and urge them to come and bring a neighbor to tomorrow’s hearing. Those who can’t come should email their concerns to council@cambridgema.gov.

Now is the time for action. Later may be too late.

Sincerely,

Francis Donovan, Irving Street

Joan Pickett, Ellery Street

Elizabeth Gombosi, Irving Street

Frankie Lieberman, Ellsworth Street

Paula Lovejoy, Clinton Street

Margaret McMahon, Highland Avenue