

SAM ZURIER

April 15, 2012

Dear Fellow East Siders:

Last Monday, I hosted a meeting at Hope High School to discuss the proposed student apartments at 257 Thayer Street. The following night, the College Hill Neighborhood Association hosted its own meeting. You can read my notes of the two meetings by clicking on this link: [Notes](#). Among those issues, the basic ones are as follows. The project would occupy a corridor (defined by Cushing, Angell, Brook and Thayer Streets) that has been identified for two other possible developments, namely Brown University graduate housing and a hotel for Brown University visitors. Speakers referred to the corridor as “the doughnut hole,” as it is currently surrounded by institutional and commercial buildings. The corridor contains some institutional and commercial buildings, and a number of large houses that have been converted to poorly-maintained student apartments.

The proposed site for the apartments currently consists of nine houses owned by two partner-owners. They gave Gilbane an option to purchase the parcels in a single package with a short window of time. Gilbane stated that it requires an initial review of its concept over the next month or two; otherwise, it will move onto another project, and the property owner likely will sell off the parcels piecemeal. Gilbane proposes to invest \$28 million. This provides one possible measure of the taxable value – at this level, the project would produce additional tax revenues of approximately \$700,000 above the current yield of the nine houses. Supporters noted the benefits of increased density for street safety and the Thayer Street businesses, especially when compared to the current “demolition by neglect” occurring at the site. Opponents noted, among other things, the project’s monolithic design, the potential negative impacts of increased density and the designation of the existing houses as supporting structures in a national historic district. Opponents also stated their concern that approval of this project will lead inevitably to approval of the other two, thereby filling the “doughnut hole.”

This week, I expect the College Hill Neighborhood Association, the Providence Preservation Society and possibly the Planning Department to state their views concerning the project. The City Plan Commission has scheduled a hearing on April 24, and then to the City Council. Many of you have provided me with your own thoughts and suggestions about this project. I appreciate your feedback, and I will consider it along with any other information you wish to send me.

Last Wednesday, I joined Common Cause to present a proposal to change the City Charter to reform the ward redistricting process. The Charter Review Commission requested some revisions to the proposal, primarily to simplify the Charter provisions and delegate some of the procedural details to City Council ordinances. I will work with Common Cause on a second draft to submit to the Commission. The Commission plans to conclude its hearings in May. They will then submit a report to the City Council, which has the ultimate responsibility of proposing changes to the City Charter for consideration by the voters.

Last week, the Mayor’s office changed its previous plan, under which overnight parking would be introduced across this City in a single program. Instead, the administration will introduce overnight parking neighborhood by neighborhood, expanding gradually from its current operating base on the West End. You can read about the administration’s plan at this link: [Parking](#). Over time, the City will resolve implementation questions (what percentage is needed to opt in or opt out, whether decisions can be made on a block by block basis, etc.) before it is introduced to the East Side. The City Council will monitor the program’s expansion, and engage in a dialogue concerning its implementation in different neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

