Residents oppose MIT Simplex plan

To the Editor:

As MIT's "University Park" development plans become public, some questions have come up about the effect on neighborhood residents. More than anyone, we want to see the area developed. We live here. But there are serious questions about the plan that MIT's developer, Forest City Development, has proposed. We have expressed our concerns before, but we have been ignored. Therefore, we ask the community to support the residents. Accordingly, we wish to state our cases clearly to the MIT community in this letter.

We object because the plan is too big to conform to a residential community. It contains over 3.2 million square feet of primarily residence and office space and parking garages, in some 20 large structures. Forest City is, in 1986 environmental impact review, admits that the plan will cause serious problems in the areas of traffic, noise, and air pollution, and will strain the capacity of utilities and city services such as water and sewer systems.

We object where there is no way near enough housing in the plan. Forest City is considering building just 110 new units of housing, a quarter of which would be affordable. Yet, the recommendations of three recent studies call for at least 200 to 450 new housing units in this area. There is no student housing of any kind provided. And, since 1969, MIT's Real Estate Department has purchased and removed nearly all of the housing on the 31-acre tract; now they say that the continuous unifying the site is "inconceivable" and must also be leveled. In a city with an acknowledged housing crisis, this policy cannot be called progress.

In addition, over 15,000 industrial jobs have been lost to the community since 1969, as a consequence of MIT's aggressive policy of buying and selling local businesses. University Park offers the neighborhoods no blue collar work to replace what MIT has taken.

We object because the plan can be devastating to the residents in the three surrounding residential neighborhoods. The thousands of new people that the development is hoped to attract will demand housing and will be able to outbid current residents for accommodations in their own communities. Indeed, the battle to maintain the city's effective rent control laws — which keep housing affordable for thousands of local and student tenants — is already under way, in anticipation of the windfall profits to be made from the new demand. Many of our neighbors are elderly people living on fixed incomes, and the rise in rents and property values will force them out of their homes, certainly the cruellest effect of University Park.

It is our experience that MIT's Real Estate Department has amassed a shameful record of insensitivity to the Institute's neighbors, while promoting a public image of co-operation and respect from the community. It is hoped that MIT's plan will cause serious problems in the areas of traffic, noise, and air pollution, and will strain the capacity of utilities and city services such as water and sewer systems.

The Tech

Feedback

EFD not popular choice for Class of 1987 gift

To the Editor:

In response to the letter by Julian West '87, "Class gift will be meaningful," Feb. 3, I would like to explain the Class of 1987 Council's decision not to select a donation to the Endowment Fund as the class gift. I hope to dispel some misconceptions.

Suggestors for a senior gift were obtained through a survey distributed during fall term, at a class study break, and by calling or contacting University Park Volunteers. From these ideas, the Senior Class Council, as elected representatives, discussed the feasibility of the most popular choices for a class gift.

There is a brunch in March to kick off the Senior Gift Pledge Program. Its activities are worthy of a world-class university. They demonstrate MIT's reputation and are the source of controversy, and indeed of the hostility you may perceive from Cambridge residents.

For these reasons, we will continue to lobby for responsible development, and we will continue to speak out against University Park. No state approvals or city building permits have been granted to the developer, and we will contest all their plans until a more appropriate plan is finalized. By following the course of action, MIT is losing a significant opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the community. It is pledged to serve, and is acting contrary to its own ultimate best interests.

Phillip Barber

The Green Street Tenants' Alliance (Editor's note: The Green Street Tenants' Alliance is a group formed in Dec. 1985 of approximately 50 Cambridgeport residents.)