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Lindsay MacIndoe & Wendy Holding  
120 Magazine Street

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November 8, 2018

Charles M. Sullivan  
Executive Director  
831 Massachusetts Ave., 2nd Floor  
Cambridge, MA02139

Dear Charlie and Members of the Cambridge Historic Commission,

I write to you today from a place of near desperation. My wife, Wendy, and I are the happy, yet-now-unlucky, owners of 120 Magazine Street, the house that was largely demolished without our knowledge or consent in mid-October. We are writing in the hopes of being added to the agenda of your upcoming meeting and getting the opportunity to tell you our story in person.

When we purchased 120 Magazine Street in September of 2016, we set about looking for an architect that could help us renovate and rejuvenate this old house that had been poked and prodded since being built in the Greek Revival style in 1844. We settled on David Foley at Foley Fiore Architecture after seeing a Greek Revival they had worked on in East Cambridge. We spent many months researching, designing, and making countless reiterations to give us the layout we needed for our family: the two of us, our daughter (3), and our son (6), and our dog, while also trying to thoughtfully rehab a building which had not been well cared for in a long while. We consulted with Historic and the Building Department along the way and then went through a Variance Hearing with the BZA in order to work on our non-conforming structure. Our variance was approved.

We recognized we needed a contractor that knew old buildings and knew Cambridge, and those two factors kept leading us back to S+H Construction. Although they were said to be on the expensive side, we wanted the project to be done right and the process to go smoothly. Before talking with S+H, Wendy and I had already enlisted the help of a highly reputable house lifter to assess how we could take care of the old building while rebuilding its foundation. With S+H's reputation and confirmation that they had done many projects similar to this one in the past, we entered into a contract with them and began.

As the project got underway, I would visit the site every day, often with our kids in tow. This summer, the house was lifted into the air inch by inch, the foundation re-poured, and then it was lowered back down. The framing began and it finally began to feel like, after 2 years of planning, our dream would start to take shape.

During our weekly site meetings with S+H and Foley Fiore, there were technical discussions, most of which I didn't really understand, about the framing and joists, etc. Whatever was happening was challenging but we were reassured that S+H had done it all before, they could handle it, and that it was just going to take some extra thought and consultation. At a later site

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meeting, we started to hear concerns that things were becoming unsafe with the framing. S+H said they would consult with someone and talk to the City. Wendy and I, along with the architects, reiterated at this meeting (and others), that while removing more of the building may make the process more efficient or safe, we did not have approval to do so.

Roughly a week later, I came to the site, and all but the first floor of the house was gone. I was shocked. I even made a video at the site to send to my parents about my shock. The architects were also shocked. The S+H site manager had apparently determined that he had no choice but to take much of the old framing down for safety reasons. After receiving a phone call from the City and meeting with the Building Department, S+H understood the gravity of their error and has repeatedly taken ownership for their action and lack of communication. Unfortunately, for us, this doesn't change our current situation. We are frustrated this mistake was made by the organization that we hired because of their expertise in old building renovation and knowledge of Cambridge policies.

We understand that there are city ordinances in place that can't be broken. And we understand why they are there and fully respect the intention of these laws. The last thing we want is for our City's history to be easily bulldozed just by saying something was "unsafe". A huge reason we chose the home on Magazine Street was because of its classic proportions (though a bit marred from previous renovations), the brick sidewalks, and old trees. We desperately want you to understand that we, as the owners and Cambridge residents of almost 20 years, had every intention and expectation that our building would be cared for in this construction process. The fact that it has not been is devastating to us. We went through every effort and expense through our choice of architect, contractor, house-lifter, etc. to AVOID this very outcome. The terrible thing is that we can't un-do what has already been done, and this fact is creating tremendous stress for us, not to mention financial burden. Additionally, it has a great negative impact on the daily environment of our future neighbors, with whom we have forged great relationships. This has already been a long construction period, and they have been amazing to us. What's happened at our site now has the potential to put that in jeopardy too.

For the sake of the neighborhood and for our family, we ask you to please allow us onto the agenda of your upcoming meeting and to consider relief from the construction moratorium at our house. We are asking for you to allow us to continue to build the plans that have already been approved. And though we did not approve or know that the house would be taken down, we are saddened by it, burdened by it, and apologize for it ever having happened at all. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lindsay MacIndoe and Wendy Holding