

31 October 2016

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Dear Council Members

I am surprised and concerned by the council discussion of a ban of wood-fired grills and ovens. There are at least a dozen other restaurants in Cambridge that cook over a wood or charcoal fire. Several have been around for decades. The iconic East Coast Grill, which is in a densely populated neighborhood, has cooked with a wood fire for about 30 years. The Blue Room has been cooking over charcoal and wood fire for almost that long. Many other restaurants have opened in the past few years with wood-fired grills, ovens, and smokers, including Filipe's in Harvard Square and now the Smoke Shop in Kendall Square.

None of us were required by the building department or ISD to clear a wood-fired grill or oven, or even a smoker, for that matter. I'm sure everyone was told, as I was told, if there's an ansul system in place, nothing more is required. Fire is fire, according to the fire department.

Nonetheless, when neighbors complained about smoke from our grill at Shepard, we made every attempt to reduce and, most important, clean our exhaust. We were told particulate was the issue. The city prescribed installation of a scrubber, specifically one manufactured by SmokiUSA, which is the latest technology available. It eliminates 95 percent of the particulate. The Smoki reduces the odor by only 50 percent. But odor we were told by Richard Rossi and Sam Lipson, was not the issue. In fact, in an email dated February 3, Sam wrote:

"While we have emphasized particulates in these discussions we are all aware that for many who live immediately adjacent the associated odors are the other side of the problem. Of course once the best-available technology is selected and is maintained properly I would absolutely agree that you should be released form the risk of further enforcement on the basis of odor and smoke."

We have done everything the city has required--and more. But now we are being told it's not enough--despite promises to the contrary. What then of all the other restaurants using wood-fired cooking equipment? Will they also be required to shut down their grills and ovens. If not, why not? What about all the hundreds, if not thousands, of homes in Cambridge with wood-burning fireplaces or wood stoves? Would the council prevent anyone from burning wood? Focusing only on Shepard seems to be selective enforcement and not based on public health

codes, especially when I know we are the only restaurant, or home, in the city with a state-of-the-art smoke scrubber.

At this point, we have only anecdotal evidence about the odor and its potentially harmful effects. I have repeatedly requested, from the beginning, scientific analysis. I don't believe the council can make any sort of reasoned decision about wood-fired anything without substantial scientific evidence. There are guidelines for sound pollution and light pollution. The EPA has hard numbers for air pollution. Before the council shuts down any restaurant for operating a grill, whether it burns charcoal, wood, or even gas, there should be a hard number we can all live and work by.

Further, the council should also consider those in the neighborhood who are not bothered by the aroma of burning wood, including two people who live at Number 3 Shepard Street--right next door to the restaurant. Kelly Kulsrud and Callum Gow, among others on the street, are regulars at the restaurant.

I'd like to make one thing clear. If Shepard is disallowed its wood-fired grill and oven, we will be forced to shut down the restaurant and sell. The grill and oven comprise the heart of the restaurant. In other words, the entire kitchen would have to be completely reconfigured if we were to operate an 82-seat restaurant without that grill and oven. The expense, would be impossible manage. Moreover, I would fear for the future of the Hi-Rise Bread Co., which backed the loan for the restaurant.

Together Hi-Rise and Shepard employ almost 100 people. The two enterprises contribute mightily to the vibrancy of the community and Cambridge as a whole. So do all the other restaurants that use wood-fired grills, ovens, and smokers. There's a line down the street every Saturday for Formaggio Kitchen's barbecue. Shepard, named one of Bon Appetit's best new restaurants in the country, is jammed with locals every evening.

Think about what would happen if it all went away--or had never been. I can't imagine what Inman Square would look like today if it weren't for the East Coast Grill. That restaurant started a fantastic trend in Cambridge, which now has one of the best restaurant and food scenes on the east coast. These restaurants have helped make Cambridge a world-class city and a place where people from everywhere want to live. It would be a shame to see this great and thriving scene devastated by this ban.