

# M-C News

A PUBLICATION OF THE MID-CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION  
AND THE LONGFELLOW NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

Vol. 17, No. 3

September, 2008

## Construction projects, open space issues in spotlight at annual neighborhood meeting

Members attending the May 21 MCNA annual meeting held at Cambridge College, 1000 Massachusetts Ave., were greeted with an art exhibition by local M-C residents arranged by Karen Carmean, refreshments from Broadway Marketplace, and a full agenda that focused on the many M-C construction efforts underway or about to launch, plus community efforts to preserve Joan Lorentz Park and Shady Hill Square.

### CRLS renovations, Longfellow School

Patty Nolan, School Committee member and chair of the committee's Building and Grounds subcommittee, said the CRLS project is scheduled to start by June of 2009 in order to qualify for approximately 25% in state funding. The entire project is scheduled to take 2 1/4 years, with completion in the fall of 2011.

Some work was to be performed this summer at the Longfellow School building on Broadway to prepare "swing space" for students displaced by the high school renovation. The high school extension has already moved out of the Longfellow to the Upton Building. The Longfellow School work is scheduled to be completed by June 2009 to enable the high school construction to begin.

The CRLS project was originally conceived as just a maintenance project, but during the five years it was on hold the school's needs received a more thorough evaluation, giving rise to the decision to upgrade all elements of the building in one integrated project.

The plan is for "occupied renovation" in as much of the high school as possible. The library is to be moved out of the Longfellow in spring 2009 to ready it for accommodating the "9th grade academy" which will use it for two consecutive 9th grade classes. Plans include meeting LEED silver certification standards and those of the Coalition for High Performance Schools.

### Main Library and War Memorial

Alan Burne, projects manager, stated that the Main Library project is on schedule for its planned April 2009 completion. The roof, gutters, and copper flashings of the

historic building are complete and all concrete has been poured on the new addition. Glass has been installed in the new building's exterior curtain walls. Construction mitigation has been excellent, with complaints at a minimum, primarily concerning truckers driving quickly in or out of the site.

The War Memorial renovation project is aiming for partial occupancy in September/October, although that may require deferring completion of some elements, such as the pool and/or the gym.

### Harvard University Art Museums

Museum Director Tom Lentz reviewed and illustrated with nine large display boards the background and concept of the Fogg Museum renovation, stressing that it is not just an architectural project, but the culmination of four years of academic analysis and planning. He  
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## Big MCNA Yard Sale set for Saturday, Sept. 13

For the fourth year, MCNA is sponsoring a yard sale with headquarters on Ellery Street (opposite #59, between Broadway and Harvard Street). The date is Sept. 13 from (gulp) 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Rain date is the 14th. We hope several of you, and your blocks, will join this sale so it can be a bigger draw for buyers, and of course a much more exciting event.

The MCNA tables will benefit charity. If you want to donate any items for this table, please bring them to the sale on the 13th, or you can drop off merchandise at Tuny McMahan's house, (14 Highland Ave; telephone 617-945-4440; email tunymcm@comcast.net ), or we can arrange to have things picked up.

Finally, are there any early birds out there who will help set up and price starting at the wake-up hour of 7 a.m.? And later manning the tables? Help is sorely needed: it takes most of an hour just to truck the stuff from storage to the street. Please call Tuny if you can volunteer.

We want this to be a community affair with as many blocks joining the effort as possible. Believe it or not, it's fun -- plus you get rid of all that "stuff," help a good cause, AND meet new neighbors!

# Annual Meeting passes resolution on park

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stressed the desperate need for a building that lets it carry out its mission while dealing with the current extreme physical problems and supporting the academic rationale and essential benefits to the university and the community this new building must provide. The severe physical problems of the current building endanger the collection, but have been left unremedied since the first major renovation was urgently recommended back in 1957.

Architect Renzo Piano's stated goal is to convert non-functional/dysfunctional space to functional space, make the collections more accessible to scholars and the general public, and create study centers where cross-discipline analysis of works from different time periods, countries and media will become a routine practice.

The renovated Fogg will have little if any greater external mass, but far greater security, access, circulation within the building, and all the 21st Century amenities now lacking. One of its major features will be a new grand entrance and public piazza on Prescott Street so that the Fogg will no longer "turn its back to the neighborhood."

The museum plans to reopen to the public in the fall of 2013. Selected elements of the museum's collection will be on display during the entire five-year period in the Sackler Museum, directly across Broadway.

## **Joan Lorentz Park resolution**

Margaret McMahon, Quality of Life Subcommittee chair, let members know of upcoming discussions seeking long-term open space protection for the Joan Lorentz Park (JLP). After discussion among the members of various options to protect further development on JLP, the following motion was passed:

"Because Joan Lorentz Park is a unique and important open space resource for Mid-Cambridge residents, and because the future of JLP is important to the overall quality of life for Mid-Cambridge residents, we request the MCNA Coordinating Committee to take all steps necessary to protect the park from any future attempts to reduce its open space including, but not limited to, obtaining formal designation of the space as a park under Article 97."

## **Shady Hill Square resolution**

President Joan Pickett reviewed the Association's ongoing support for the effort in neighboring Agassiz Neighborhood to protect the Shady Hill Square green from construction of a 5,000 square foot residence. The membership continued its support of those efforts by passing the following motion:

"Whereas the MCNA previously expressed support for the preservation of the Shady Hill Square green as open space at the MCNA November 2007 meeting, the

MCNA now votes to further support those residents' preservation efforts as they attempt to re-purchase the Shady Hill green from the developer by requesting Historic Preservation funds under the Community Preservation Act for this purpose."

## **Farewell to Hubley's, and Bowl & Board**

Remembering the experience of working together with the Skenderians on the redevelopment of their site on Cambridge Street and the loss of businesses a few blocks away on Cambridge Street at Maple Ave. has made us all more aware than ever of the importance of our business neighbors.

We agreed at our annual meeting in May that the Coordinating Committee should appoint a subcommittee to work with relevant parties to advocate for continued commercial use of the now-vacant former Hubley's Auction Gallery site at 364 Broadway and the vacant lot at nearby 360 Broadway.

John Pitkin and Margaret McMahon have agreed to co-chair this subcommittee, and pursue the use of these two sites. We'll keep you up-to-date on their progress via email and newsletters.

In the meantime, housewares and home furnishings store Bowl & Board, a much-loved and longtime neighbor on Massachusetts Ave., has closed and moved to Davis Square in Somerville. This also is a great loss to our community and we feel it is important that this site should also retain a commercial orientation.

## **MCNA film series in works**

The MCNA Coordinating Committee is considering a film series as a way to involve and entertain members. During the colder months we would meet indoors, but in the warmer weather we are considering an outdoor location.

Any suggestions for showings or other thoughts on this are strongly welcomed. Please contact either Chris Robinson at [chrisrobinson@rocketmail.com](mailto:chrisrobinson@rocketmail.com) or 617-661-4731, or Tuny McMahon at [tunymcm@comcast.net](mailto:tunymcm@comcast.net).

## **Tell your neighbors! Spread the news!**

If you're welcoming new neighbors this fall, let them know about the MCNA. Invite them to check out our Web site at [www.mcna.org](http://www.mcna.org), or sign up for the newsletter, and mention that the MCNA sponsors a number of interesting and varied events throughout the year. You might encourage them to stop by the yard sale on September 13, both to browse and to meet other mid-Cambridge residents.

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## Neighborhood News

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**Francis Fox Spinks, left, and MCNA president Joan Pickett at the Ice Cream Social in Joan Lorentz Park, during the ceremony presenting Mr. Spinks with this year's Good Neighbor award in recognition of his efforts to preserve neighborhood parks and green space.**

*(Photo by Robert Winters)*

### Joan Pickett (re)elected as MCNA president

Recently elected to the position of MCNA President is Joan Pickett, who formerly served as president for 2.5 years. She is replacing Doane Perry, who was president for the past three years.

Holders of other key MCNA coordinating committee positions include: George Bossarte, membership secretary, Frankie Lieberman, treasurer, and Margaret (Tuny) McMahon, scrivener (secretary). The remaining members of the 11-person coordinating committee include: Francis (Fritz) Donovan, Elizabeth Gombosi, Debby Knight, Doane Perry, John Pitkin, Chris Robinson and David Szlag.

The coordinating committee is organized around working committees with a special focus on key issues/topics that affect the M-C community. These committees are: Construction and Development chaired by Chris Robinson, Environment chaired by Chantal Eide, Quality of Life chaired by Tuny McMahon, Community Outreach chaired by George Bossarte and City Government chaired by Fritz Donovan.

We encourage members to join one of these working committees by letting the chairs know by email or writing to the MCNA at PO Box 380987, Cambridge, MA 02238. Email addresses can be found at [www.mcna.org](http://www.mcna.org). For more information on these committees, please refer to the September 2007 newsletter on the Web site ([www.mcna.org](http://www.mcna.org)).

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### Ice Cream in the park, and a good neighbor get his award

The annual Ice Cream Social on June 25 featured great weather, delicious Toscanini's ice cream and presentation of the Good Neighbor Award to Francis Fox Spinks of Bigelow Street.

About 65 M-C residents with families (and dogs) joined in the Association's annual summer kickoff event in Joan Lorentz Park. This event is always an informal way to catch up on neighborhood news, welcome new neighbors and members, and enjoy the park.

At this event, for the third consecutive year the Good Neighbor Award was presented. The inaugural recipient was longtime Fayette Street resident George Hinds Sr., followed by Penelope Kleespies, Longfellow Community School program organizer. This year's recipient, Francis Fox Spinks, was recognized for his

efforts to preserve and enhance M-C's largest and most important open space, the Joan Lorentz Park.

The award, voted by the MCNA Coordinating Committee, specifically recognized Francis "as our neighborhood's strongest and most respected advocate for parks and green space, he has used his knowledge to improve our city. His steadfast efforts for the design, construction, and maintenance of Joan Lorentz Park from its conception in 1975 to the present day have helped to make it a treasured public space."

As always, the Association is grateful for the generosity of Toscanini owner Gus Rancatore of Amory Street for supplying his mouth-watering ice cream to this event. We look forward to an equally wonderful event next year.

## Construction starts at new Mass. Ave. hotel

Construction of a new 32-room boutique hotel at 1131 Massachusetts Ave. is now underway, with the August demolition of an apartment building and adjacent car-repair garage that formerly stood at the site (at the corner of Mass. Ave. and Remington Street).

At the annual meeting in May, the MCNA membership had opposed the required curb cuts for the underground parking area due to insufficient information about the project.

The Coordinating Committee voted to approve the curb cuts after meeting with developer Rich Monagle at the offices of Jim Rafferty, his attorney, on Friday, May 30. Although somewhat constrained by the urgency to take action before the next Monday's City Council meeting, the majority of members present saw no reason to oppose the request. The Council also approved the request.

The Association has now asked to be formally part

of the communication and outreach efforts by Mr. Monagle so we can keep neighbors informed as the project moves ahead.

On July 14, the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported that Monagle had entered into a partnership with Thomas O'Connell, who has developed properties in Quincy, because he "always wanted to own a hotel and was in over his head." This spring Monagle had financial difficulties that resulted in a default on the mortgage.

Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, has reviewed the most recent plans and decided "The replacement buildings were appropriate for the site and the district as a whole." However, the Commission will continue to oversee the construction, and in Sullivan's words: "We don't want to have any slip-ups...and end up with a vacant lot."

## Budget rises 30% for CRLS renovation

City Manager Robert Healy reported on the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School renovation at the City Council's summer meeting on July 28. Healy is requesting a revised budget of \$125 million, a 30 percent jump over the nearly \$96 million figure presented one year ago.

The primary new construction factors contributing to this increase, according to Healy, total \$19.5 million. This leaves the remaining \$10 million consisting of nearly \$5.5 million in "project bid contingency" and other contingencies estimated at 8 percent, added to the professional services and construction budgets.

The figure drew consternation from members of the City Council, with Craig Kelley saying that he would have to oppose any further increases and the city manager assuring him that there would be none. Several counselors raised the possibility that Healy ask for private donations, but he expressed the opinion that this would be a conflict of interest.

Renovation is scheduled to begin July 1, 2009, in order to be eligible for \$28 million in Massachusetts School Building Authority funding, and to last for two full academic years.

Tied into this schedule is the neighboring construction of the new library, whose completion will free up the Longfellow School for needed classroom space. To achieve this goal and also driven by the start of the new school year in September, construction has recently lasted until 6 p.m. on weekdays and all day on Saturday.

This noise disturbance has resulted in complaints to Alan Burne, the library project manager, who says that he

is doing his best, and will post any developments on the project Web site at <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~cpl/booksandmortar/connews.html>.

Anyone who is affected by construction-related issues, please contact Mr. Burne at 617-349-4438 or Chris Robinson, chair of the major construction committee, at 617-661-4731 or [chrisrobinson@rocketmail.com](mailto:chrisrobinson@rocketmail.com).

### Zip Car invades MC?

Several MC residents have questioned whether it is legal for residents to rent parking spaces in residential areas to Zip Car, forcing long-time renters' cars back onto city streets. The answer appears to be that it is not.

Inspectional Services informs us that since Zip Car, an alternative rental car business, is a commercial enterprise, the city zoning ordinances make any leasing to Zip Car illegal unless the property owner first gets the residential space re-zoned as commercial or obtains a zoning variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal.

Zip Car's apparent willingness to pay more than double the going average residential lease rate seems to be fueling a rash of conversions in MC (most notably the Ashton Place/Irving Street overnight conversion of over 20 spaces), and has the potential to generate many more.

The Community Development Department informs us they are in the early stages of gathering information and looking into this recent trend. They are talking with Inspectional Services to determine how these conversions occurred. We will keep MCNA members updated about this situation.

## BZA delays Shady Hill ruling, OKs high-rise at Y

Two recent cases were reviewed at the Board of Zoning Appeal meeting held on July 24.

**The Shady Hill Square Case** was continued to October 16. That was a victory and a surprise. At the previous hearing (attended by over 75 residents wearing square green "Save Shady Hill Square" buttons), the BZA voted to take no action until the Land Court rules on the appellants' motion to merge their zoning issues into an already pending Land Court appeal contesting the developers' ownership of the property.

We learned the Land Court recently issued a 12-page opinion deeming the zoning issues "intensely fact-based" and requesting the BZA to provide the court with its interpretation of those facts. This clearly opened the door for BZA rulings on the zoning issues. But instead, BZA Chairman Sullivan noted that major progress is being made in negotiations for purchase of the property from the developers by the residents (with private and public funds).

He held that since it is still the city's policy to keep the Stop Work Order in force until ownership of the land is determined in Land Court, any ruling by the BZA on zoning issues prior to that ruling would be a waste of everyone's time.

The original BZA case appealing the developers' ownership had already been continued to October 16, so the Board voted unanimously to continue this zoning case to the same date. Requests by the developer's attorney to move both cases to an earlier hearing were denied.

Cambridge Affordable Housing Corporation Case

No. 9642 was approved unanimously, granting a Comprehensive Permit for new construction of a residential building at 7-11 Temple Street & 136-152 Bishop Allen Drive on the site of the YWCA swimming pool, which has been out of use for over 20 years. The proposed structure would contain 42 rental units and 19 underground parking spaces serving tenants at or below 80% of area median income.

### Neighbors object to size

Several residents objected to the 80-foot height (including roof structures) and general mass of the proposed building, and its undesirable impact on nearby buildings and the neighborhood as a whole.

Chairman Sullivan noted that demand for affordable housing is so great that no single project can make more than a dent in it, and asked the proponents whether they could possibly accommodate the residents by reducing the scale of the project at least somewhat below the maximum number of units that can be fit into the site. The proponents claimed that eliminating the top two stories would reduce the number of units by ten, raising the cost-per-unit to an unreasonable level and making the project economically unfeasible.

The board accepted the proponents' argument. Permit approval was made contingent on several factors, including accommodation of parking and construction mitigation concerns of area residents, including St. Mary's Church which abuts the site, and the use of non-reflecting material on the outside surfaces of the proposed structure.

## Volunteers needed for key Mid-Cambridge commission

Several vacancies have opened up on the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission (MCNCDC), and we encourage interested residents to consider serving on this important commission.

Anyone who is qualified—and you don't have to be an architect or architectural historian or a specialist in any particular discipline—should seriously consider applying if you are interested in this area.

This commission is one of the most important government organizations affecting Mid-Cambridge. Its purpose is to "Preserve, conserve and protect the distinctive features of the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood through identification, conservation, and maintenance of its areas, sites, and structures." It is here that residents review and influence the design of new buildings, major modifications, infill of yards, and demolitions in our neighborhood.

It is extremely important that interested and concerned Mid-Cambridge citizens apply for these openings. This is an opportunity that doesn't come up often, so please consider sending in your application. It doesn't take up an enormous amount of time—about one evening a month—but it is essential for the livability of our neighborhood that we continue to have a vital and proactive District Commission.

To be considered for this position, you must be a resident of Mid-Cambridge and submit a letter of interest and resume to Paul Trudeau, Preservation Administrator, at the MCNCDC office, 831 Mass Ave., Cambridge 02139 (fax 717-349-3116).

If you are interested and want more information about the commission and why it is so important, please contact MCNA board member John Pitkin at 617-492-4035 or email him at [john\\_pitkin@earthlink.net](mailto:john_pitkin@earthlink.net).

## NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

**MCNA Annual Yard Sale, Saturday, September 13, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.** Location: Opposite No. 59 Ellery Street (between Broadway and Harvard Street). Rain date is Sunday, Sept. 14.

**Longfellow Community School fall classes begin.** The Longfellow Community School offers ongoing classes in music and yoga, including private music lessons for adults and children in piano, voice, flute, and recorder. For more information, contact Penelope Kleespies at 617-349-6260. The school is located at 359 Broadway.

**Swiss Beach Day at the Charles, September 7, 2 to 5 p.m., Weeks Footbridge.** For more info, go to [www.thinkswiss.org](http://www.thinkswiss.org).

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**The M-C News** is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editor:* Paula Lovejoy. *Reporters:* Chris Robinson, Joan Pickett, Tuny McMahon, Fritz Donovan, John Pitkin, Debby Knight. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

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