

M-C News

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

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'Our Town:' Hear voices of neighbors past at M-C annual meeting May 20

The Mid-Cambridge neighborhood is defined as the area bounded by Mass. Avenue, Peabody Street, Cambridge, Quincy and Kirkland Streets, the city of Somerville and Prospect Street. However, the M-C community is much more than a physical location, and this year's MCNA annual meeting will focus on the most important asset of our neighborhood---its residents.

We hope you can join us on Wednesday, May 20, at 7 p.m. at the Cambridge Family YMCA Theatre, 820 Mass. Ave., for a unique opportunity to learn about the Mid-Cambridge community from the residents--current and past--who are shaping and have helped shape the community in which we live.

Inspired by the Longfellow Neighborhood Council Oral History Project now almost complete, the MCNA is hosting a presentation of Mid-Cambridge's history in the spirit of Thornton Wilder's classic play "Our Town" that will highlight the richness and vitality of our community.

Started in 2005, the Oral History Project has been an ongoing effort of the Longfellow Neighborhood Council, led by council director Penelope Kleespies. About 82 Mid-Cambridge residents have been interviewed for the project, most of them longtime residents who represent a wide range of backgrounds, social classes, and ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds that reflects the diverse population of the neighborhood. Their memories go as far back as the early 20th Century and provide an interesting perspective on life in Cambridge today.

The Council plans to publish the interviews in book form this fall. The current working title is "From the Heart of Cambridge, Massachusetts: Voices from the Longfellow Neighborhood."

Drawing from this wonderful resource, the MCNA's annual meeting will provide a preview of the some of these stories told in the voices of the residents themselves about the Mid-Cambridge community they grew up in, moved into and currently live in to this day.

**Will a Zipcar zoning change put the squeeze on residential parking?
See story, Page 3**

MCNA Annual Meeting: Our Town, Mid-Cambridge

Hear stories of life in Mid-Cambridge past and present as told by neighborhood residents and

Annual meeting of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association (MCNA)

**Wednesday, May 20, 7 p.m.
Cambridge Family YMCA Theatre
820 Mass Ave.**

The annual meeting will be for the purpose of electing Coordinating Committee members. The highlight of the evening will be a special presentation of stories produced by the MCNA in collaboration with the Longfellow Neighborhood Council's Oral History Project.

The Y Theatre: A special place

In 2001, the Cambridge Family YMCA Theatre had not been active for over 30 years. The challenges of preserving its architectural integrity while installing up-to-date lighting, sound, electric and video technology were great, but the need for civil, lecture and theatre space in the city of Cambridge was even greater.

The YMCA board and staff knew that a full-scale theatre arts program would add an exciting new level and dimension to existing programs. They vowed to restore the Cambridge Family YMCA Theatre.

Through an aggressive renovation program that began with a substantial private gift, followed by board and management commitment, and aided by YMCA staff and student volunteers from Philips Brooks House, the Public Service Center at MIT and City Year, the Cambridge Family YMCA successfully opened and re-dedicated the Cambridge Family YMCA Theatre in December of 2002.

The restoration project was so complete and successful that in May 2003, the Cambridge Historical Commission presented the YMCA with an award for outstanding achievement in historic preservation. Please join the MCNA for its annual meeting May 20 which will take place in this beautiful space.

Tot-lot to re-open by summer as park gets overhaul

As the main library expansion project moves into its final months, the time has come to focus upon improvements to the grounds of Joan Lorentz Park, specifically that portion of the park which had remained available for public use during construction.

According to project manager Alan Burne, the current plan is to keep the newly seeded area (the eastern lawn portion) fenced from public use—principally from the impact of canine waste—through the summer and fall growing seasons until April of 2010.

He expects that the new Tot-Lot and some portion of the park in front of the historic library will re-open early this summer, after plantings and irrigation lines are placed and the area's amended soil is covered with sod.

The overall work of the project will continue through the summer, with completion scheduled for roughly the beginning of September. The site work itself—including earth removal, manufactured soil replacement, placement of irrigation lines, grading, planting and finishing—will continue concurrently as the library's interior work is completed: the new shelving is placed; books are relocated from the Longfellow School; signage, new telephones, computer systems, furniture and equipment are installed; and the library staff begins its re-organizational operations processing.

The landscaping and site work of the newly fenced easterly portion of the Joan Lorentz Park (that area which up until now had been accessible to the public) will involve modifying the currently fenced-in 'limit of work' in order to maintain the security of the on-going construction activities within the library site; stripping the unsuitable existing soil and loam from the park; removing

MCNA Coordinating Committee election to be held May 20

At the annual MCNA meeting on May 20, the membership will elect the 2009-2010 slate of 11 members to the Coordinating Committee (CC). The CC, the MCNA board, meets monthly to manage the overall business of the association, discuss approaches to pending neighborhood issues, plan for neighborhood meetings and prepare our newsletter.

All 11 members of the current CC slate are running for reelection. We have 11 nominations for the 11 positions to serve for the 2009-2010 term. As per our charter, nominations closed on April 29, 2009.

Nominees are: George Bossarte, Francis (Fritz) Donovan, Elizabeth Gombosi, Debby Knight, Frankie Lieberman, Margaret (Tuny) McMahon, Doane Perry, Joan Pickett, John Pitkin, Christopher Robinson, and David Szlag.

the trailers, the fractionalization tank, and other equipment; rough grading, placement of the new irrigation system piping, 'amending' the soil; and then finishing the seeding, planting, hardscaping, and landscaping of the site. Alan Burne can be contacted at 617-349-4438.

Recollections of times past

Following are a few excerpts from the Longfellow Oral History Project's interviews with people living in the neighborhood. The interviews will be a focus at the MCNA annual meeting on May 20 (see Page 1 for details).

The Inman Square Theater

"Where the East Cambridge Bank and S&S Restaurant are now, there used to be a movie theater. Every Saturday, you'd spend all afternoon at the movies. When I was a kid, they were silent movies. You'd see two main movies and cartoons from one o'clock to five. Tickets were 15 cents. They used to have girl ushers, real tough girls. They'd go around with a flashlight, and if they saw a little kid in one chair, they'd flash the light, and say, "Come on, two in a seat." Then the kid would have to move, two in a seat, to fill up the place."

--Mary McKenna, 51 Fayette St

Central Square in the 1950s

"We spent a lot of time shopping in Corcoran's department store [in] Central Square. There was Kresge's. There was Woolworth's with a lunch counter, and you'd get an ice cream sandwich there on a waffle for nine cents. I used to get goldfish to feed my snapping turtle, and they had a big fish tank, and parakeets. Harvard Donuts was at the corner of Mass. Ave. and Prospect Street for a long time. They made the best chocolate peanut-butter muffins, with huge toppings of good chocolate."

--Glenn Koocher, formerly of 373 Broadway

Matching gardeners with gardens

You might have noticed—gardening is now IN and everyone wants to do it. But not everyone has space. One interesting response is yard sharing. Do you have (or know someone who has) a few untended square yards where someone else could put a few tomato plants, or containers with lettuce, or whatever? If so, contact Helen Snively at HMSnively@aol.com. She is keeping a list so people can match up and garden with neighbors.

There is now a local gardeners Listserv. Originally it was for people who want to swap plants more than twice a year, but now it's starting to carry events and resources and how-to questions. About 40 people on it, and 1-2 messages a week on average in gardening season.

Zipcar parking proposal to impact neighborhood

The City Council is considering changing the zoning laws to make it easier for vehicle-sharing companies like Zipcar to use parking spaces currently reserved for residential and other use.

Apparently Zipcar has been having trouble finding parking spots for rent. The spaces are used as drop-off and pickup points for customers sharing the cars. But under current zoning, commercial organizations are not allowed to rent residential parking spots.

To remedy this, the Council has proposed changing the zoning laws to allow vehicle-share parking in up to 10% of all residential spaces and unlimited spaces in public parking facilities. (For a complete copy of the legal notice and proposed language, please go to the www.mcna.org home page and look for the link to the ordinance amendment.)

Since there is currently only one company that offers a vehicle-share program, the sole beneficiary of the proposed amendments would be Zipcar, a for-profit alternative car rental company.

Public Meetings

This proposal will be open to public discussion at two upcoming meetings:

□ The City Council Ordinance Committee will hold a hearing on Thursday, May 7 at 5 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber, Second Floor of City Hall, 795 Mass Ave., on proposed changes to the zoning laws to allow Zipcar to rent parking spots in residential neighborhoods.

□ The Planning Board has scheduled a public hearing for Tuesday, May 19, at 7:30 p.m. at the Second Floor Meeting Room at City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, to review the zoning petition.

Zipcar has positioned itself as the environmentally friendly alternative to car ownership. However, part of the discussion is more fundamental and has nothing to do with the environment, but rather with the simple question: Should this activity be allowed in residential neighborhoods versus allowing the activity in commercial or municipal areas?

One point of view suggests that commercial use of residential parking spaces in a neighborhood is simply not compatible. Renters will be coming and going at all times of day and night. Evidence from the Irving Street Zipcar lot suggests that trash and upkeep of the space can be an issue and needs to be factored into the neighborhood view. Otherwise, well-maintained residential lots may become less so. Another consideration for residential use is liability issues: if a Zipcar renter trips and falls on your property, who is ultimately liable?

\$225 a month for parking?

Lastly, and more problematic, is the economic issue that pits resident parking rates against Zipcar rates.



Zipcar has positioned itself as the environmentally friendly alternative to car ownership. But permitting a commercial operation to operate in a residential area has economic repercussions for neighborhood residents.



Zipcar has been known to offer to pay higher rates than most residential rates. "Last year I was told that Zipcar would pay over \$225 per space and that the parking rates in my residential lot were increasing to that level," reports MCNA president Joan Pickett. "At the time I was paying \$130 per month. We were able to push back the rent increase by letting the landlord know that it would be illegal to run a commercial operation in a residential area."

So, how does this mix of commercial and residential use affect the economics of parking in M-C? An unintended consequence of the proposed amendments would be to push some residential renters back onto the neighborhood's already-overcrowded streets as spaces are lost to Zipcar.

On the other hand, Zipcars may be an excellent environmental alternative to car ownership, so why not let them have access to the commercial and municipal lots without potentially changing the dynamics of an already difficult residential parking situation? We need a healthy debate, and encourage M-C residents pro and con to offer their opinions to the City Council and to the Planning Board at their upcoming meetings.

M-C artists open their doors at Cambridge Open Studios event

There will an Open Studios in Mid-Cambridge from noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, May 9 and 10. It is the first time the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood will be participating in the event.

Meet hundreds of artists and discover unique paintings, jewelry, fiber arts, ceramics, film, mixed-media, literary works, and more. Much of the artwork is available for purchase. For a complete list of participating artists and their addresses, go to http://www.cambridgeartscouncil.org/COS09_artists.pdf

Open Studios: Central is part of the first city-wide Cambridge Open Studios (COS) during three weekends in April and May. COS is a collaboration of the Cambridge Arts Council, Cambridgeport Artists Open Studios, North Cambridge All Arts Open Studios and artists and arts organizations throughout the city to enable significant interaction between the local arts community, residents and visitors to Cambridge. For more information, contact cos@cambridgema.gov or 617-349-4385.

Longfellow Community School summer programs

Celebrate summer with family entertainment in the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood parks, sponsored by the Longfellow Neighborhood Council and Community School Summer Programs.

Park Days 2009 is a free summer program running from June 15 through August 7. The morning sessions consist of simple craft and play activities, such as chalk drawings, face painting, bubbles and music. The program is designed for young children and their families.

Morning sessions run from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays the program is held at Hancock Park, at the corner of Hancock and Centre Streets. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the program is held at Maple Avenue Park on Maple Ave.

Thursday evening desserts and music

Evening events are potluck desserts and family

musical entertainment on five Thursday evenings.

This summer's scheduled events are:

June 25: Soleil, A Recorder Ensemble

July 2: TBA

July 9: Lorraine & Bennett Hammond: Singing with banjo, dulcimer and harp music.

July 16: Jazz evening with Harvey Diamond and Mihoko.

July 23: TBA

July 30: Rain Date

All events are held from 6 to 8 p.m. at Hancock Park. Please note: Programs are cancelled on rainy days. There is no program on Friday, July 3. All classes and activities are subject to change.

For more information, please call Penelope Kleespies, Longfellow Community School director, at 617-349-6260.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Wednesday, May 20, MCNA Annual Meeting and 'Our Town' Presentation, 7 p.m., Cambridge Family YMCA Theatre, 820 Mass Ave. next to the Senior Center. See Page 1 for details.

Thursday, May 7, 5 p.m., City Council Ordinance Committee public hearing on changes to the zoning laws to allow Zipcars to park in residential neighborhoods. Sullivan Chamber, Second Floor, City Hall, 795 Mass. Ave.

Weekend of May 9 and 10: Visit Mid-Cambridge artists in their studios, Noon to 6 p.m. For more info, see Page 3.

Tuesday, May 19, 7:30 p.m. Planning Board public hearing on the Zipcar zoning petition, City Hall Annex, second floor Meeting Room, 344 Broadway.

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editor:* Paula Lovejoy. *Reporters:* Joan Pickett, George Bossarte, Paula Lovejoy, Alan Burne. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

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