

M-C News

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

Vol. 17, No. 1

February, 2008

City plans \$96M CRLS renovations

A third major municipal construction project is underway in Mid-Cambridge. Along with the new library and the War Memorial, a thorough-going rehabilitation of Rindge and Latin High School (CRLS) is planned to begin by June 30, 2009.

Current planning is that this project will last for three summers and two school years, and will be completed in the fall of 2011. The budget now stands at \$96.7 million, making it the most expensive project undertaken by the city.

The need for a revitalized high school is the force motivating the project, as it has been over 30 years since there has been any major construction to the building. Quality of education, as reflected in resources, facilities and morale, will greatly benefit from the proposed improvements, school officials said.

On December 12, the School Committee held a special meeting to present its plans for CRLS and to give the

Cott zoning petition expires; backers plan to re-file

The Cott Petition is dead. Its goal of downzoning the area bounded by Broadway, Lee, Harvard and Hancock Streets from a Residence C-1 to Residence C zone attracted wide support from residents opposed to what they see as excessive infill in an already crowded neighborhood.

MCNA endorsed the petition at the November meeting, and it was argued enthusiastically at a series of hearings before the Planning Board, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission and City Council. Concessions and compromises were suggested and adopted, and several City Council members publicly stated their support.

In the end, it was defeated not by a vote but simply by the City Council's failure to act; the classic "pocket veto." Petition supporters at the Council meeting of Dec. 17 sat hopefully through long hours of end-of-year tributes paid by the councilors to each other and to political colleagues. When that session adjourned late in the evening, no action had been taken on the Cott petition. It expired automatically on Dec. 18.

Sponsors have vowed to file a new petition and continue the anti-infill campaign. The new petition would likely encompass a larger area of Mid-Cambridge, as the Planning Board indicated they would consider such a petition.

public an opportunity to comment. The first hour was given over to a PowerPoint presentation by the project architect, George Metzger, with additional information by James Maloney, COO of the school system.

If construction begins no later than June 30, 2009, Cambridge is eligible for a \$23.4 million reimbursement from the Massachusetts School Building Authority. To achieve this starting date, bids must be received from contractors in the spring of 2009. Areas of upgrades include: science rooms, kitchen/cafeteria reorganization, auditorium, and common areas with centralization of
(Continued on Page 2)

MCNA rejects infill, backs zoning change

A special meeting of the MCNA was held Nov. 26 to address issues of infill and zoning changes in Mid-Cambridge. The meeting was prompted by then-Mayor Ken Reeves, who questioned why the Association had not taken a vote on the issues of infill and zoning during a City Council debate on the Cott Petition. This meeting was, therefore, called to obtain a vote specifically to address infill and the Cott Petition, and to present the results to Reeves and the City Council.

Four motions were voted on. A two-thirds majority is necessary for a motion to pass. Results were:

(1) The first motion was to support the Cott Petition. It passed with a vote of 28 approving the motion, 8 opposed, and 4 members abstaining.

(2) The second motion was to request the Mid-Cambridge Conservation District Commission (MCNCDC) to stop excessive infill. It is the written mandate of the MCNCDC to stop excessive infill in Mid-Cambridge. Members voted to again request the MCNCDC to stop issuing building approvals where there was an issue of excessive infill. Although the term "excessive infill" has not been defined by either the MCNCDC or MCNA, most members believed building of new homes in backyards of Mid-Cambridge would constitute such infill. The motion passed on a vote of 35 approving, 3 opposing, and one member abstaining.

(3) A motion was made that the MCNA believes excessive infill to be detrimental to the health and quality of life in Mid-Cambridge. Discussion centered on what the future use of such a motion would be: would it become a general endorsement of no further infilling in
(Continued on Page 2)

Library, War Memorial construction on schedule

The main library expansion project is now roughly 40 percent complete and proceeding on schedule for a 2009 finish date, according to Alan Burne, project manager. The structure of the underground parking garage is complete, as are the walls of the 350,000 gallon storm-water retention tank.

Renovation efforts at the historical building are ramping up, with new basement slabs poured, mechanical/electrical/plumbing along with a new steel frame at the historical stacks wing. Next up is a composite metal deck, concrete floor slabs and masonry restoration work.

For the new addition, the concrete foundation and

structural floor slabs will be the primary focus of activity over the next two months. Expect to see structural steel erected soon. Excavation and foundation work where the garage connects to the new addition will continue.

The contractors' green efforts continue with a significant recycling record of 98%. This figure refers to the percentage of demolition material that is diverted from the project's waste stream through recycling. This is over four times the historical amount of demolition material that is diverted from entering landfills and disposal sites. As this project progresses toward LEED certification, it may become eligible for an additional point for innovation.

War Memorial project

The War Memorial project at 1640 Cambridge Street is in full swing—slightly over 25 percent complete on the way to a scheduled September end date. The structural steel contractor is working on interior supports. The next major activity will be installation of the exterior mechanical penthouse steel on the roof, followed by the roof replacement and exterior masonry.

On the inside, the space is now taking shape with the interior partitions being framed and the mason gearing up for the locker area glazed block. Many of the mechanical trades are moving forward ahead of the finishes. Miles of pipe installed in the crawlspace are now coming up for their final connections. Much of the duct work is ready for the state-of-the-art cooling and heating plants.

For construction information and photos of both the War Memorial and library projects, see <http://www.cambridgema.gov/TheWorks/contents/constInfo.html>.

CRLS renovations

(Continued from Page 1)

learning communities. Also planned are physical plant improvements, such as flooring, lockers, toilet rooms, elevators, plumbing, electrical systems, interior painting and exterior building aesthetics. In addition, there will be green components to achieve LEEDS (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Standard) silver certification, and the city manager has mentioned a cogeneration energy production system that is able to multitask, e.g., use exhaust for steam heating.

Impact on students

The second hour of the meeting was devoted to comment from the public. About 15 people voiced their concerns. The major issue had to do with the educational impact on students during construction. The plan is for two facilities, the Longfellow School and the Upton Street building, to be used as “swing spaces” for displaced students.

Parents questioned the timeline, fearing that the project could well extend to a third school year, with the result that many students will spend most of their high school years in a temporary and disrupted learning environment. CRLS Principal Christopher Saheed assured parents that there is adequate planning to ensure that this will not happen. Construction noise and other such issues are to be handled with “mitigation” plans.

MCNA takes a great interest in this project and its impact on neighbors. We wish to thank Joseph Grassi of the School Committee who spoke to concerns that the neighborhood may have. MCNA's new Major Construction Subcommittee has made the CRLS project one of its agenda items. Anyone with questions or concerns can contact committee chair Christopher Robinson at 617-661-4731 or chrisrobinson@rocketmail.com.

The Cambridge Public Schools Web site has an information page, http://www.cpsd.us/cpsdir/CRLS_renovation.cfm, which contains updates and video archives of meetings on the issue, as well as an email address to send questions and concerns.

MCNA votes on infill, zoning

(Continued from Page 1)

Mid-Cambridge? No definition of “excessive” infill was provided. The motion failed with a vote of 25 in favor, 11 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

(4) A motion was made to state that the MCNA agreed with a letter from Stavros Macrakis stating that “building on Shady Hill Square would irreparably destroy part of the historical and cultural fabric of our city and is unthinkable.” This motion carried with a vote of 27 in favor, 0 opposed and 9 abstaining.

As a result of this meeting, several things occurred. MCNA voted to support the Cott Amendment and urged MCNDC to stop excessive infill with its power of issuing building approvals. The MCNA membership is now on record with these motions when future zoning and infill issues are brought up. More work with the MCNDC needs to occur, and identification of zoning issues also needs to be discussed. MCNA's City Government subcommittee chaired by Fritz Donovan (617-497-6634) is involved in these activities.

Cambridge Police report rash of M-C housebreaks

Ten Mid-Cambridge homes were burglarized between Jan. 5 and Jan. 23, in what Cambridge Police describe as “an emerging pattern.” Streets affected include Inman, Hancock, Fayette, Bigelow, and Clinton. The breaks usually occur in early afternoon, and entry is gained through a first-floor window or door.

Details on these and other crimes can be found on the Police Department’s information-packed Web site. Commendable features include a list of neighborhood contacts, a Mid-Cambridge crime log, Mid-Cambridge crime statistics, neighborhood profiles containing incident reports and links to full descriptions, citywide news and events, and community quick links.

You can also sign up to be notified by email whenever a serious problem occurs. MCNA recommends that you check out the Web site at <http://www.cambridgema.gov/cpd/index.cfm> and bookmark it.

Reports on the Web site say that “residential burglary is naturally highest in a neighborhood with the largest number of residences [in Cambridge]. Though the rate of

this crime has been cut in half since the 1980s, it still remains a serious problem.”

Police contacts for Mid-Cambridge: The Mid-Cambridge neighborhood team is focused on issues of M-C:

Lt. Steven Donahue: 617-349-3322

Sgt. John Fulkerson: 617-349-3386

Sgt. George Sabbey: 617-349-4365

Holly Bernier, neighborhood coordinator, 617-349-6009, handles police/neighborhood relations.

Peter Kunzel, Web site coordinator, 617-349-3235, welcomes suggestions for improvements to the Web site.

Tips for Dialing 911: During a meeting with Mid-Cambridge neighborhood residents in December, police recommended that folks program the business number of 617-349-3300 into their cell phones to get quicker service. 911 calls made from cell phones go to the State Police first and then get transferred to the Cambridge Police. Dialing 911 from your home land line will automatically go directly to the Cambridge Emergency Communications Center.

Neighborhood News

Shady Hill Square neighbors battle plan to build mansion on ‘village green’

Residents of Shady Hill Square will challenge the legality of a developer's plan to build a single-family mansion in the middle of the square at a Board of Zoning Appeals hearing on Feb. 7 at 7 p.m. at the Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

The proposed new home would replace the parklike open space which has been at the site for 92 years. The neighbors assert the proposed building violates zoning laws in five different ways. Their goal is to preserve the architecturally significant “village green” space in the center of the square as a public park for all to enjoy.

Anyone interested should write to the City Council at council@cambridgema.gov. To sign an electronic petition, email hnhgold@yahoo.com. Following is a link to an article that further describes the situation: <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=520139>.

Support MCNA with your contribution

We hope by now you have received (and hopefully even responded) to our letter asking for your continued financial support of the MCNA. As an all-volunteer organization, we rely on the support of members to fund our activities, such as the City Council Candidate’s forum, neighborhood meetings, our annual Holiday party, Web site and newsletters.

It has been two years since our last fundraising

effort, and our coffers are running low. We greatly appreciate your past support and hope you will continue to support us by making a contribution. If you did not get our letter, please contact us through the Web site, www.mcna.org, or contact Frankie Lieberman at 617-492-1335 and we'll send a letter to you. Thanks in advance for your continued support!

Lights on Lorentz Park

The interior lights in Joan Lorentz Park were disconnected last spring when construction started on the library expansion. On several occasions, residents have expressed concern for pedestrian safety when walking by the unlit park. Most recently, neighbors addressed the issue at the neighborhood meeting with police on Nov. 26.

The Cambridge Electric Department has responded, and two temporary fixtures were installed in early December. The new fixtures light a view into the park as pedestrians walk along the Broadway and Ellery Street sidewalks. Thanks!

Neighborhood Green Group

A member of the MCNA Green Committee reports that she was at the Whole Foods on Prospect Street recently, where they were giving away reusable bags. She asked why, and they said they are trying to phase out plastic bags in their store before Earth Day, on April 22 this year. For more info about the Mid-Cambridge green group, e-mail mcna@greencambridge.org.

Don't miss the Longfellow Council's Energy Fair

Discover how to stay warm, cut your energy bills, and reduce your carbon footprint at an Energy Fair presented by the Longfellow Neighborhood Council on Monday, February 11.

The event will run from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Longfellow Neighborhood Council offices in the former Longfellow School at 359 Broadway. Please use the Fayette Street entrance and ring the bell by the door. The Council offices are on the second floor.

Come learn what your neighbors are doing to save the planet. Come and share what you are doing. Learn about energy audits, alternative transportation, measuring energy, windmills, solar panels, and much more.

At the fair, you'll find:

- Representatives and displays by the Energy Alliance, Zipcar, NSTAR, and others.
- Antrim Street's Amy Meltzer will be on hand to speak about her solar panels.
- Sue Butler will discuss her wind turbine installed on the roof of her home on Clinton Street.

Check out the What's Watts display by Walter Lenk and George Bossarte and learn about the energy consumption of various products in your home.

Watch "An Inconvenient Truth," Al Gore's slide show about climate change, presented by Peter Prun, a Climate Project volunteer. Originally presented by the Longfellow Council in January, it will be shown again at the Energy Fair to accommodate the people who couldn't make it through the snow. The slide show will be at 7 p.m., with a discussion following at about 8 p.m. If you haven't seen this Oscar-winning movie, come to this interesting and informative presentation.

Copies of "Low Carbon Diet, a 30-Day Program to Lose 5000 Pounds" and "Journey for the Planet, A Kid's Five Week Adventure to Create an Earth-friendly Life" will be available for sale.

Questions? If you have an energy-related subject you would like to present, please contact Penelope Kleespies at 617-349-6260.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Thursday, February 7, Board of Zoning Appeals hearing on Shady Hill Square. The BZA will decide whether to allow developers to build a large new home that would destroy the Square's 'village green.' Meets at 7 p.m. at the Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

Monday, February 11, 7 to 9 p.m., Energy Fair presented by the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. Find out everything you need to know about going green! See story above for details.

Tuesday, February 12, Annual Town/Gown Meeting. Harvard, Lesley, MIT and Cambridge College will present their plans for the future. Reports are at <http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/cp/tg/index.html>. 7:30 p.m., Citywide Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editor:* Paula Lovejoy. *Reporters:* Chris Robinson, Fritz Donovan, David Szlag, Doane Perry, Doug Myers, Sue Myers, Joan Pickett, George Bossarte, Chantal Eide. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

M-C NEWS
P.O. Box 380907
Cambridge, MA 02238
www.mcna.org