

M-C News

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

Vol. 12, No. 2

April, 2003

Longfellow School to close

City Manager Axes Community School

The School Committee voted April 8 to close the Longfellow School, Mid-Cambridge's one elementary school, this year. The school's program, principal, teachers, and most of the students are to move to the Kennedy School, in East Cambridge.

In a related move a few days later, Longfellow Community School coordinator Penelope Kleespies was informed that her position has been cut from next year's city budget. Part of the city's Department of Human Services, the Community School provides educational, cultural, and recreational services to residents of all ages.

Although the final disposition of the school building has not been announced, it has been mentioned as a temporary facility for the Main Public Library during its planned expansion project.

Since it was built over 70 years ago, the Longfellow School has educated generations of Mid-Cambridge children. Recently, however, it has served fewer of the

neighborhood's children. As the result of redistricting and the city's school choice program, large numbers of Mid-Cambridge children attend the city's 14 other schools. For many years, the Longfellow has also housed the citywide middle school Intensive Studies Program.

For over three decades, the Longfellow Community School, using space in the building, has served neighborhood residents and strengthened the community by providing a range of programs and services.

These activities have included an afterschool program for children with a broad range of classes from karate and sports to music and calligraphy, a program for toddlers, music and other classes for
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Could library addition go underground?

On April 30, Mid-Cambridge residents will get a progress report from library architects on two critical areas of design of the proposed addition to the main library. In January, the project received preliminary approval from the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission for the size and location of the proposed addition.

The architects are expected to address how much of the addition's 68,000-square-foot proposed floor area will be below grade, and how the addition will join with the existing historic library building. The public will have an opportunity to speak at the meeting, which starts at 6 p.m. in the City Senior Center at 806 Mass Ave.

When the Conservation District Commission gave its preliminary approval for locating the addition to the
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Brown-bag kicks off MCNA annual meeting

The annual meeting of the MCNA will be held Wednesday, May 21, at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School media cafeteria, 459 Broadway.

This year's meeting features a brown-bag dinner and social hour starting at 6:30 p.m., followed by a business meeting from 7:30 to 9 p.m.

The MCNA will provide refreshments, drinks, utensils, paper plates, and desserts. Those planning to attend should bring your own dinner. Or, if you're interested in ordering pizza, please call John Pitkin at 617-492-4035. Members are also encouraged to bring desserts to share with their neighbors.

The agenda of the meeting includes:

--Election of Coordinating Committee members for the coming year;

--A vote on proposed changes to the MCNA bylaws (see Page 2 and insert for details);

--An update on plans for the Longfellow School building and the future of the Community School program in Mid-Cambridge.

Longfellow community program faces axe

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residents of all ages, folk dancing, summer programs in the park, a summer drama camp, and an annual ski weekend. These programs are almost all organized by Ms. Kleespies, the Community School's coordinator, with guidance and assistance from the residents on the Longfellow Neighborhood Council.

The closing of the Longfellow is part of a comprehensive consolidation plan to address the problems of declining enrollments, empty seats in classrooms, and the city manager's refusal to increase funding to meet future increases in the school budget, which is already one of the highest in the state. The plans directly impact nine of the city's fifteen schools through consolidation or move, and closes two buildings, the other being the Graham and Parks School on Upton Street, in Cambridgeport.

Several hundred parents, teachers, and others attended the School Committee meeting where the plan was passed by a 5-2 vote. The vast majority of the public spoke against the plan because it is a radical restructuring of the entire primary school system, as well as its impacts on specific programs and neighborhoods. Parents from several schools were there in large numbers in opposition to the plan but few, if any, were from the Longfellow.

After the plan was first announced and two weeks before the vote, the Longfellow Neighborhood Council met and decided to petition to keep Ms. Kleespies and the Community Schools program in Mid-Cambridge, either in the Longfellow building or another space. By eliminating Ms. Kleespies' position, the city manager may have forestalled this effort.

The Council met April 16 to consider how to respond to the manager's decision, and as a first step, decided to meet with assistant city manager Jill Harold to communicate their concerns and discuss options for continuing programs that serve the neighborhood.

What next for Longfellow?

An update on plans for the Longfellow School building and the future of the Community School program in Mid-Cambridge will be on the agenda of the MCNA's annual meeting Wednesday, May 21.

The Community School's 14th and probably final music recital will be held in the Longfellow School cafeteria Friday, May 9, at 3:30 p.m. The recital is open to the public and all are welcome.

The closing of the Longfellow School will mark the end not only of a venerable institution but of over a century and a half of public primary education in Mid-Cambridge.

While regrettable, the closing appears to be necessary and justified. Cambridge cannot afford in these times to keep schools open merely for the sake of tradition, and the School Committee has an educational rationale for choosing to close the Longfellow.

Our neighborhood is set to lose almost all of its activities and services for children and residents of all ages.

However, the collateral effects of the closing on Mid-Cambridge are considerable and need to be thought through.

Our neighborhood is set to lose almost all of its activities and services for children and residents of all ages. Kids will need transportation to programs in schools a mile or more away if they are to take advantage of Community Schools activities. In Ms. Kleespies, we are losing an extraordinarily able, dedicated, and caring public servant.

The Longfellow is the one public space that is dependably available for neighborhood activities of many kinds. The meetings that led to the founding of the MCNA were all held in the school, and most of the meetings since have been held there. The neighborhood is going to need new space for community activities and meetings.

The disposition of the Longfellow building and its courtyard playground will greatly affect the little neighborhood that has evolved around the school. Many questions need to be addressed. If the library is there in the short term, how will that work? Then what? Housing? School administration? Who will decide? Would there be space for a community center?

Since the one other school building being closed is in Cambridgeport, Central Square will become more like Harvard Square in the respect that there will no longer be a school within walking distance. The resulting separation of neighborhood and commercial activities goes against the city's many planning goals that are often described as "smart growth."

—by John Pitkin

Special meeting on changes to MCNA bylaws

The Coordinating Committee has recently reviewed the MCNA's bylaws and is proposing some revisions for consideration by the membership. A special MCNA neighborhood meeting will be held on May 6 at the Longfellow School from 7 to 8:30 p.m. to read the new bylaws aloud, as required by the existing bylaws, and to discuss the changes. A vote on these revisions will be taken at the Annual Meeting May 21.

A copy of the proposed version is in this newsletter. There are some simple corrections, some clarifications of policies, and substantive changes regarding the number of meetings, number of officers, and procedures for voting on and amending bylaws.

Copies of the existing bylaws and a copy with the complete mark-up of all of the changes can be found at www.mcna.org. If you would like to see the marked copy of the bylaws and/or have comments about the revisions, please e-mail or call Rachael (617-576-2576, rachael@irvinghouse.com) or Keren (LEILA5@greenmail.org).

Proposed MCNA bylaws

Version : April 25, 2003

In order to coordinate and promote efforts to improve and maintain neighborhood life and the things that we share because we are neighbors, without engaging in partisan political activity against any group or individual, we the people of Mid-Cambridge form the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association.

1. Mid-Cambridge neighborhood means the area bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, Peabody Street, Cambridge Street, Quincy Street, Kirkland Street, the City of Somerville, and Prospect Street and bordering areas.

2. Membership in the Association is open to any adult resident of Mid-Cambridge or anyone who operates a business located in and serving the residents of Mid-Cambridge, who has read this Charter and who signs a statement that he or she supports the purposes of the Association. Membership continues as long as a member is a resident or operates a retail business in the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood.

Any person may resign from the membership of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association by informing the Secretary in writing. The resignation becomes effective on the date of the resignation paper.

3. At least one Neighborhood Meeting shall be held each year. All members are asked to attend these meetings. The agenda of these Neighborhood Meetings

shall be generally publicized by the Coordinating Committee and will address subjects that concern the Neighborhood and that merit the attention of the Membership. Policy positions of the Association must be adopted by a two-thirds vote of Members attending the Neighborhood Meeting. Other issues to be decided at a Neighborhood Meeting require a simple majority vote of the members present. The presiding officer shall be in charge of the rules for the meetings that he or she chairs. His/her decisions may be over-ruled by a two-thirds vote of those present. The Association by a two-thirds vote of those present may expel an unruly member from a meeting.

4. The members shall elect the Coordinating Committee of eleven people from the resident membership at the Annual Meeting which shall be held on the third Wednesday in May. Nominations require the signatures of ten members and must be submitted to the Membership Secretary at least three weeks before the election. If there are more than 11 candidates, voting shall be by secret paper ballot. The ballots shall be prepared by the Membership Secretary and shall include only the name, address, and designated office, if any, of each nominee. Every member at the meeting shall receive one ballot and may vote for up to eleven candidates by marking an "X" or a check next to their names. The ballots shall be counted by the Membership Secretary, Treasurer, and Recording Secretary. The eleven candidates receiving the most votes shall be elected. If there are 11 or fewer candidates, voting may be on the entire slate of candidates, by a show of hands, if there are no objections from the Members present. No elected official, and no one who is employed by the City of Cambridge as a department head or assistant department head or who is not a resident of Mid-Cambridge may serve on the Coordinating Committee.

5. The Coordinating Committee shall hold office until the next annual election. The Coordinating Committee may elect, for stated cause, to remove a member of the Coordinating Committee by a two-thirds vote of the standing committee. If a vacancy occurs in the Coordinating Committee, a replacement may be chosen by a two-thirds vote of remaining members of the Coordinating Committee. The Coordinating Committee shall have frequent open meetings to discuss the means of improving and maintaining neighborhood life, and to further the purposes of the Association and policy positions adopted at Neighborhood Meetings. The Coordinating Committee shall adopt rules to regulate its own meetings. The Coordinating Committee calls

Neighborhood Meetings in addition to the Annual Meetings and sets the agenda for these meetings. Its members are collectively responsible for the fulfillment of the duties of each of the Officers. The Coordinating Committee shall

- ensure that the minutes of all Neighborhood meetings and Coordinating Committee meetings are kept,
- represent the Association in all matters,
- maintain records of activities of the Association and of the Coordinating Committee,
- gather information and carry out research on issues affecting the neighborhood,
- publicize Neighborhood Meetings and other activities of the Association and neighborhood issues, and
- encourage and assist the formation and activities of small neighborhood groups affiliated with the Association

All powers not given to the Coordinating Committee are held by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association in the Neighborhood Meeting.

6. Officers shall be chosen by the Coordinating Com-

mittee from its elected members. The Officers of the Association shall be:

- Presiding Officer, who shall chair Neighborhood Meetings and Coordinating Committee meetings.
- Membership Secretary, who shall maintain a file of members' names and provide a current copy at Neighborhood Meetings, recruit new members, receive nominations for the elections to the Coordinating Committee and provide ballots for the elections.
- Treasurer, who shall solicit donations from members and raise funds in other ways as necessary for the operation of the Association, and keep records of revenues and expenditures and shall prepare a written report to be presented at the annual meeting.
- Recording Secretary, who shall take and provide the minutes of the Coordinating Committee and the Neighborhood meetings.

Each of these positions, and any other positions deemed necessary by a majority vote of the Coordinating Committee, shall be filled by the Coordinating Committee at its first meeting after the Annual Meeting.

Will the library addition be built underground?

(Continued from Page 1)

east of the existing library, it indicated that the project would receive final approval only if it meets criteria for maintaining the integrity of the old building and avoids overwhelming the adjacent Joan Lorentz Park by locating as much of the new space below-ground as possible. The Commission's decisions on the design of public buildings in Mid-Cambridge are binding.

The Commission set these and other conditions on January 6, when it reviewed a proposal, known as Scheme 4A, for a two- and three-story wing attached on the east (Ellery Street) side of the existing building and facing Broadway over Joan Lorentz Park.

At its meeting on January 29, the MCNA membership supported the Commission's position by voting to require the library design team to make every effort to increase the below-grade floor area of the library to reduce the above-grade mass of the building.

In the discussion, members felt the placement of library elements underground would help preserve the character of the park without overwhelming it. Members also expressed concern that the new addition, because of its size and scale, would diminish the historic structure.

The meeting also voted to seek qualified park advocates for Joan Lorentz Park to join the official

design advisory committee. The committee has several qualified advocates for the library and CRLS high school, but none for the park, although the park is one of the three public uses on the site.

These votes followed a presentation and discussion of the current plans, which included a computer-modeled view of Joan Lorentz Park with the proposed new library building superimposed.

Since the January meeting, MCNA members David Szlag and David Davison initiated research on below-grade structures and found over 300 in the U.S. alone, many of which are libraries and/or library expansions. The list includes the Louve and the National Gallery in Washington. Although many people assume sub-surface spaces are dark and dim, many of these examples show that with creativity, a sub-surface space can become an appealing environment.

The Coordinating Committee has requested that Szlag and Davison have an opportunity to present their information to the MCNCDC when it next takes up the library project.

The city has received preliminary cost estimates for the project, though these have not yet been made public. For background information on the project, see: <http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CPL/booksandmortar/connews.html>

if the library addition is built below ground.....

?... the historic library building will be respected.

?... the problems of connecting to the existing library will be resolved.

?... there is room to build approximately 80,000 sf on two floors below the existing tennis courts and existing library parking lot.

?... the diagonal pedestrian circulation path, as well as the overall site character can be preserved and enhanced .

Notable Subsurface Building Examples



National Gallery, Washington DC



Library, Alexandria, Egypt



Fort Snelling Visitor Center - St. Paul, MN



Fisher/Watkins Library, Ashburnham, MA



The Louvre,
Paris, France



Dispute over 'carriage' house before M-C Commission

Over neighbors' objections, plans to build a new house in the back yard at 46 Highland Avenue received preliminary approval from the M-C Conservation District Commission at its April meeting.

After looking at alternative options, the Commission indicated that it would approve an "as of right" back yard building, which does not require a zoning variance, at two stories instead of the proposed three. It also made the setback on one side three feet larger than first proposed.

In order to obtain a final approval, owners Drs. David Himmelstein and Steffi Woolhandler, who now live on Hancock Place, will have to submit a new plan that meets these conditions.

Many abutters living on Highland Avenue, Highland

Park, and Maple Avenue opposed any new building of the size the Commission said it would accept.

Speaking for the neighbors, Carolyn Thall said that they were grateful for the changes that the Commission had made, but were still opposed to the project and had filed a downzoning to block it.

The so-called Thall Petition, which has been filed with the city, would expand the Maple Avenue Residence-B district to include several lots on Highland Avenue. If approved, the downzoning would effectively block the ability to build the proposed house.

Ms. Thall is seeking broader support for the petition. If you are interested in learning more about or signing the petition, please contact Ms. Thall at 617-492-9147 or cthall68@attbi.com for further information.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Wednesday, April 30, 6 p.m. Library Design

Update. Library architects will present an update on the schematic design phase of the main library expansion project. The public will have the opportunity to speak. Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

Tuesday, May 6, 7-8:30 p.m., MCNA Bylaw

Reading. Proposed new MCNA bylaws will be read aloud and discussed at the Longfellow School cafeteria, 359 Broadway.

Friday, May 9, 3:30 p.m., Longfellow Community School Music Recital, "Down by the Riverside," Longfellow School, 359 Broadway.

Wednesday, May 21, MCNA Annual Neighborhood Meeting, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, media cafeteria, 459 Broadway.

Brown-bag dinner from 6:30 to 7:30, followed by business meeting till 9 p.m. For agenda, see Page 1.

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editors:* Joan Pickett, Paula Lovejoy, John Pitkin. *Reporters:* Joan Pickett, John Pitkin, Rachael Solem. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

M-C NEWS

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ANNUAL MEETING

AND BROWN-BAG DINNER

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21