

M-C News

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

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First Public Comment On Harvard Tunnel Set for Dec. 11

The city manager will hold a public meeting to hear neighborhood comments on Harvard University's request for permission to construct a tunnel on city-owned land below Cambridge Street. Scheduled for Tuesday, December 11, the hearing will begin at 6 p.m. in the City Council Chambers on the second floor of City Hall.

The tunnel would connect two proposed new academic buildings, one on the north side, east of Sumner Road, at 1737 Cambridge St., the current site of Coolidge Hall. The other is on the south side, west of Prescott Street, at 1730, the current site of the University Information Services building. The new buildings will be part of Harvard's Center for Governmental and International Studies (CGIS) project, formerly called the Knafel Center.

Approval of the public easements requires a vote of the City Council. By ordinance, the Planning Board will also hold a hearing on the proposal, and both the city

Would Cambridge St. Tunnel Be 'In the Public Interest'?

Harvard's architect has said that they would reshape the city. If a matched pair of academic buildings are built facing each other on Cambridge Street, they will certainly do more to reshape our neighborhood than any development since the construction of the Rindge and Latin High School in the late 1970s. The new buildings would, in effect, create a large gateway to the campus on Cambridge Street and move the campus edge further into the Mid-Cambridge residential neighborhood.

All residents who care about the future of our neighborhood – not just the project's many abutters – should pay close attention to the tunnel proposal and be prepared to voice an opinion when the City Council takes it up in early 2002.

The university's application for final discretionary
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manager and the board will make reports before the council votes on whether the easement is "in the public interest" (see related story, below).

The council may also hold a hearing before its vote, which is not expected until late January at the earliest. The Planning Board hearing is not yet scheduled.

The tunnel would provide pedestrian and service access between the two new buildings. To allow construction of the matched 5-story buildings, the project requires demolition of two existing buildings, relocation of a frame house, extensive underground construction on both sides of Cambridge Street, and closing of the north end of Prescott Street for 27 months.

Harvard's project has been under public review for
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Meet your Neighbors at MCNA's Holiday Party

The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association (MCNA) cordially invites you to its Annual Holiday Party.

This year our gracious hosts are Sara Mae & Larry Berman, 23 Fayette Street. Please join us on Friday, December 14, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Please bring a snack to share (such as cookies, dips, veggies, crackers, etc).

A \$3 donation for adults would be appreciated; kids and seniors are free. Also, donations to the MCNA will be gratefully accepted.

Remember to save the date--Friday, December 14. And don't forget to check out our new Web site (<http://www.mcna.org>) for the latest neighborhood news, copies of past newsletters, and a suggestion form for comments to the MCNA Coordinating Committee.

You'll also find a calendar of community events, current and back issues of the *M-C News*, a neighborhood map with links to listings of services and resources in the area, and more.

Public Can Comment on Harvard Tunnel Dec. 11

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almost two years. It is still before the Mid-Cambridge Conservation District Commission, which has yet to approve a construction impact mitigation plan. On Dec. 10, the commission is meeting to consider this plan.

A Forum for Residents

The City Manager's meeting will be the first opportunity for residents to voice opinions and ask questions about the proposed tunnel. The issues for our neighborhood include: the need for the tunnel as part of the overall project, the long-range implications of having such a tunnel as part of the permanent infrastructure, and the disruption caused by construction under a major public roadway.

Many residents who recall the severe disruption of the recent Cambridge Street water/storm sewer project are concerned about noise and traffic impacts of building this tunnel. According to Harvard spokespeople, the tunnel is an essential part of the overall project, but they have not indicated whether the rest of the project would proceed if they do not obtain permission for the tunnel.

Purchase Price of Easement

Harvard submitted its preliminary report dated October 5, 2001 to the city manager and the City Council, outlining its offer to purchase the easement to build the tunnel, as well as the mitigation documents for the project. Harvard is proposing to pay the city a one-time cash payment of \$269,200 for both the permanent easement granting Harvard the right to construct the tunnel, and a temporary easement allowing Harvard the right to occupy portions of Cambridge Street during the tunnel construction. Harvard hired two independent appraisers to value the proposed easements.

Scope of the Tunnel Project

According Harvard's submission, the tunnel will be 29 feet wide and range in depth from as little as 2 feet below ground to a depth of about 14 feet below ground. In order to encourage students and faculty to use the tunnel, it will contain e-mail kiosks, public pay phones, and display areas for artwork and informational materials. The tunnel will also facilitate consolidation of loading facilities and service access for the entire project beneath the North building.

In order to construct the planned tunnel, the project will require relocating two large water supply lines, as well as re-routing the main Cambridge Street sanitary sewer line up Sumner Road to Kirkland Street. Relocation of all existing private utility infrastructure, such as natural gas supply lines, and cable and television lines in

the area of Cambridge Street, will also be required. Harvard will pay the cost of relocating all utilities.

Construction Challenges

The tunnel construction is expected to take approximately 20 months. Harvard is working with city and private utilities on plans to ensure that utility services are maintained during construction.

During the construction, Harvard will relocate the travel lanes of Cambridge Street onto temporary Bailey bridges to ensure an uninterrupted traffic flow. As Cambridge Street is a major route to/from the fire station and Cambridge Hospital, there is little room for any reduction in traffic capacity during construction. It is unclear from Harvard's submission what the anticipated impact will be of construction traffic, worker parking and access to streets around the construction site, and how the impacts of these particular elements of the project would be mitigated.

For more information on the Government Center project, see the May and October 2000 issues of the MC-News, available at www.MCNA.org, and Harvard's project site, www.fas.harvard.edu/~planning/cgis/.

Library Project Design Expected to Start Soon

Four months after the city selected William Rawn and Associates to design a new main library, representatives of the city and the architect said they had nearly completed their negotiations and expected to sign a contract for design services within a few days. According to Mid-Cambridge residents who applied to serve on the city's official design advisory committee, the committee will be appointed only after the design contract is signed and the design process has started.

Last May, the MCNA appointed a Library Design and Open Space Committee to monitor the process. This committee held an organizational meeting in early December, anticipating that the process will get underway early next year. The committee's chair is Margaret McMahon (email: tunymcm@mediaone.net).

The committee has been asked to participate in the design process and to inform association members of key choices to be made.

Is Harvard's tunnel 'in the public interest'?

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approval is now before the City Council in the form of a request to purchase an easement to build a tunnel beneath Cambridge Street to link the two buildings of a new Center for Government and International Studies.

Ever since the two-building scheme was put forward in 1998, the university has described the connector as an essential part of the project. If the tunnel easement is not granted, it is unclear whether – or how – the project would go forward.

A meeting to be held by the city manager at 6 p.m. Tuesday, December 11, in City Hall, will provide a good first opportunity for the public to learn more and raise questions. Required hearings before the Planning Board and the City Council are still to be scheduled.

'All residents who care about the future of our neighborhood should pay close attention to the tunnel proposal and be prepared to voice an opinion to the City Council.'

The city ordinance that governs the granting of easements sets as a standard that they should be "in the public interest."

At this time, the negative public impacts of building the tunnel seem obvious and substantial. They include the kind of disruption from under-street construction and utility work that Cambridge Street experienced during the 1997-1999 sewer separation project, and creation of a potential barrier to future public utilities under a major traffic artery. All of these impacts are in addition to those of the proposed demolition, excavation of Harvard's property, and construction of the buildings themselves.

As of now, the public benefits of the easement appear to be a fee of \$269,000 that Harvard has offered to pay the city, and a reduction in the number of Harvard staff and students who will walk on the street when the buildings are completed. The access provided by the tunnel would allow loading facilities for the new buildings to be consolidated. Harvard has stated, but few residents have so far agreed that a consolidated loading dock would also be a public benefit.

Although university spokespeople have argued that the new academic complex will itself benefit the public, these claims should not be weighed unless they are reviewed and accepted by a public or independent body.

Once the city manager has held his meeting and issued a report, the Neighborhood Association needs to

convene a meeting of residents to take a position on the easement and to present our position to the City Council. At the same time, MCNA members may want to restate their 1999 demand for an overall plan for the "edge" between the campus and residential Mid-Cambridge before this major project goes forward.

Construction Mitigation

Well over 100 people live in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project. Even if the best possible mitigation measures are taken, the demolition, excavation, and construction will be enormously disruptive to these residents for over two years. One index of the potential scale of disruption is that many thousands of large truckloads of material will need to be moved to and from the site.

To make sure that disruption is kept to a minimum, representatives of Harvard, the abutters, and city officials have been meeting over the last several months to develop a comprehensive, effective plan for construction mitigation. They appear to be near agreement on a plan, but final details still need to be worked out.

The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission is wisely requiring that a mitigation plan acceptable to the neighbors be in place before it signs off on the project. The commission will meet to review the plan on Monday, Dec. 10. For the same reasons, the City Council should also ensure that an acceptable mitigation plan is in place before it considers the tunnel easement. --By John Pitkin

More Parking Spaces for Sumner Road, Irving Street?

A few neighbors met recently with Susan Clippinger, director of Cambridge's Traffic, Parking & Transportation Department, to discuss mitigation issues related to Harvard's construction of the Knafel Center. In the course of the meeting, Ms. Clippinger suggested that one way to increase the amount of resident parking in the area is to allow parking on both sides of Sumner Road. Most of the buildings on the street are owned by Harvard, and they have agreed to go ahead with this idea.

The question was then raised about doing the same thing with Irving Street between Cambridge Street and Kirkland Street. In this case, Ms. Clippinger was interested in getting some feedback from the neighborhood before proceeding.

Anyone who has comments or suggestions about these ideas is encouraged to send an e-mail to parking@beberts.com or drop a note to the MCNA.

Snow: Our Winter Challenge

As you read this, winter is almost upon us. Soon Cambridge will experience several dumps of snow, and worse: storms that can leave the pavements coated with dangerous ice. In part, many of us live here because Cambridge is a "walking city," but snow and ice make walking difficult and sometimes dangerous for children walking to school, anyone walking to the T, mail carriers, elders and others.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) annually publishes a mini brochure, originally produced in collaboration with the Cambridge Pedestrian Committee, setting forth information about property owner's obligations regarding snow and ice. Under the city's sidewalk clearance ordinances, a property owner is required to remove all snow from sidewalks next to the owner's property or business within 12 hours after snow stops falling in the daytime, and before 1 p.m. when snow has fallen during the night, and to clear ice off sidewalks or treat it with an ice-melting substance within 6 hours of the time it forms.

The DPW recommends a calcium chloride (CaCl₂) melter as being better for the environment than rock salt (NaCl or sodium chloride), but notes that potassium chloride (KCl) is OK, too. The DPW asks that if your home is on a corner, please shovel an opening from the sidewalk to the street. Low income, elderly or disabled homeowners may qualify for the city's Snow Exemption Program, under which the DPW will shovel your sidewalk.

For those who do not qualify, there are lists of students who want to earn money by shoveling; you can negotiate a price. Information about the Snow Exemption Program and the student list is available from the Cambridge Council on Aging, at 349-6220.

The DPW has a Sidewalk Hotline, which anyone can call to report a problem area: 349-4903. A DPW inspector will confirm if a violation is present. If there is, he or she will issue a warning. If there are subsequent violations, the DPW may issue a fine for \$25 per day of violation.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Monday, Dec. 10, 6 PM Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission reviews construction mitigation plan for Harvard's Knafel Center project. Gund Hall, Cambridge and Quincy Streets.

Tuesday, Dec. 11, 6 PM Public hearing on Harvard's request for an easement to construct a tunnel on city land below Cambridge Street. Sullivan Chamber, Second Floor, City Hall, Mass. Ave.

Friday, Dec. 14, 7:30-9:30 PM MCNA Annual Holiday Party at the home of Sara Mae and Larry Berman, 23 Fayette St.

Tuesday, Dec. 18, 6 PM Neighborhood Sing/Xmas Caroling Event. Gather at the Longfellow School Cafeteria, end at George Bossarte's house for a holiday party.

Winter term Longfellow Community School classes. Classes begin the week of Jan. 2, 2002. Some limited slots for piano lessons are also available. Please call Penelope Kleespies at 617-349-6260 for more information.

M-C NEWS
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HOLIDAY PARTY
Friday, Dec. 14