

M-C News

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

Vol. 11, No. 6

December, 2002

Committee selects site layout for library expansion

Residents got their first look at a revised layout of meeting of the Library Design Advisory Committee. The committee approved the plan, which is a variation on Scheme 4, the design chosen by the city for the Broadway library/school/park site, with the new building located on the east (Ellery Street) side of the current library building.

The only dissent came from representatives of the School Committee and CRLS High School, who withheld their approval until they could consider how the layout would affect the school. Alan Burne, Library Expansion Project Director, has scheduled a Dec. 20 meeting with the School Committee allowing for their first formal review and comment opportunity on the preferred scheme (shown on Page 2).

On Jan. 6, the Library Design Team will present the plan before the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission. The commission has binding authority over the shape and design of all public construction projects in the district. The project must gain the commission's approval before construction can begin.

The MCNA expects to schedule a neighborhood meeting in mid-January for residents to adopt a response to the preferred plan and decide how to advocate for the association in the upcoming phases of the design process. The meeting will present an update on the massing decision, including a report from the School Committee meeting.

Revised Plan Reflects MCNA Concerns

The major changes to the original Scheme 4 reflect concerns expressed in the discussion and votes by the MCNA at its Oct. 8 neighborhood meeting, attended by both Alan Burne and Rich Rossi, deputy city manager. Key changes are in the placement of the underground parking ramp and resulting flow of traffic around the site; design modifications at the rear of the library addition that lessen the "canyon effect;" and removal of the school's underground parking garage and one ramp

from Ellery Street, allowing for lowering of the three tennis courts to ground level. For further information about the plans, please go to www.mcna.org for an easy link to the library Web site.

The MCNA votes from the Oct. 8 meeting expressed concern about the original massing schemes on the change in quality and size of Joan Lorentz Park that would result from the placement of the parking ramp and circulation of traffic around the site. In the original Scheme 4, the parking ramp was on the far eastern side of the new addition, with vehicular traffic flow in front of the new addition and along the outer edge of the existing open park space east of the Trowbridge extension. Placement of parking under that open space would require venting and emergency exits that could disrupt the current park space.

In the new scheme, the underground parking ramp (about 30-40 feet long) is now located directly off Broadway to the left of the existing library. The
(Continued on Page 2)

Money woes could force sale of Swedenborg Chapel

The historic Swedenborg Chapel, at the corner of Quincy and Kirkland Streets, is in danger of being forcibly sold, with Harvard University having the right of first refusal if the chapel's congregation cannot afford to buy the property.

The current owners are the Swedenborgian Seminary, which has moved to California and wishes to sell the chapel, worth \$4.7 million at market rates. The Seminary has offered to sell the chapel to the Swedenborg congregation for \$2.2 million.

The 35-person group has until March 31, 2003 to raise the funds, with about \$273,000 raised to date. The congregation is actively pursuing the support of major foundations, but again needs to appeal to the surrounding community for help.

In March 1999, with the help of neighbors in Cambridge, the congregation secured historic landmark status for the exterior of the chapel building, preventing
(Continued on Page 2)

Revised library layout scheme faces next hurdle

(Continued from Page 1)

existing Trowbridge Street entrance into the library's surface parking lot would be removed. This will allow the park to expand across the existing access road and create uninterrupted park vistas along the full length of Broadway.

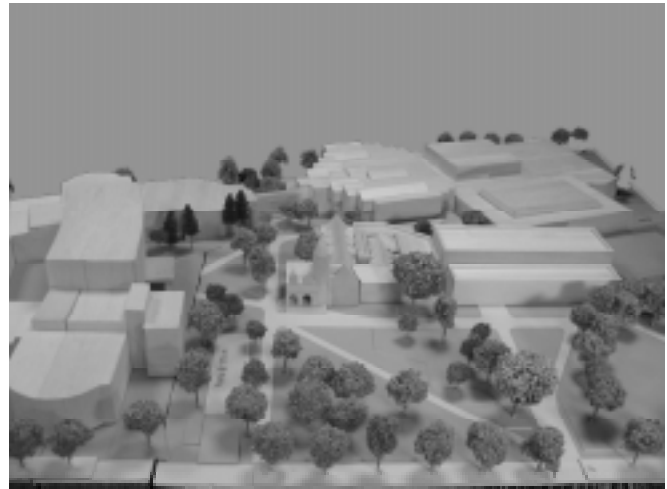
The new underground parking and potential drop-off area leave the main open space of Joan Lorentz Park intact. The ramp, however, is now placed closer to the CRLS entrance. The architect's assessment of the existing student flow around the campus is that access to the main entrance is not impeded and that safety requirements can be met. The School Committee is expected to carefully review this aspect of the revision at their upcoming meeting. Although the School Committee does not have direct authority over the project, planners are likely to respect any specific objections about the plan's impacts on the high school and its students.

Reduced Traffic on Ellery Street May Result

Other significant elements of the revised design relate to the contour of the massing scheme at the far east edge of the addition in order to reduce the "canyon effect" that many residents felt was created in the original Scheme 4. The area between the rear of the library addition and the War Memorial was viewed as potentially problematic from both a student and neighborhood safety perspective. By changing the massing contour, the canyon effect appears to have been reduced.

The original Scheme 4 resulted in the move of one tennis court to the side closer to Ellery Street. Since the new version removes the parking beneath the existing tennis courts and places it on the Broadway side, the tennis courts can be rebuilt on ground level in the same location as they are currently.

Removal of the parking garage under the tennis



Model shows proposed library site, as seen from Broadway. The high school is at left.

courts on the Ellery Street side lessens the traffic flow on this residential street and improves what some believe to be an architectural eyesore.

Swedenborg Chapel

(Continued from Page 1)

a developer from purchasing the chapel and turning it into the lobby of a condo complex.

The congregation's new pastor, Rev. Sarah Buteux, began in July, and attendance at services is up by 30% already. The congregation is moving forward with initiatives that will continue to help support neighbors, with an after-school program for high-school students and a mediation center that will offer services to the community as well as train local students to be peer mediators.

On average, 250 to 300 people from the surrounding community use the chapel each week. It also hosts two other congregations, Peace Corps events, AA groups, nonviolent communication training programs, public lectures, the Orianna Consort, restorative justice programs, yoga classes, concerts (including the Music at Noon series that is free to the public and offers great exposure to upcoming artists), discussion groups, and tri-annual Mystical Art Shows.

The chapel wedding ministry provides a sacred space and pastoral support for couples of other traditions who would like to be married in the chapel. The chapel has hosted members of the Tibetan community for over a decade. Every Sunday Tibetan language, dance, and culture classes are offered to Tibetan children.

For more information, please visit the Chapel Web site at www.swedenborgchapel.org. Services are held at 11 a.m. on Sundays. Visitors are welcome.

Ho ho holiday cheer!

About 60 MCNA members shared holiday cheer at the annual MCNA Holiday Party held on Sunday, Dec. 8 at the home of Sara Mae and Larry Berman.

Their generous hospitality, along with baked goods donated from Carberry's and many wonderful goodies brought by MCNA members and Roy Bercaw's videos, made for a festive holiday event.

If anyone is missing a black scarf or a basket, please contact Sara Mae Berman.

As we end the year 2002, the MCNA Coordinating Committee wishes everyone a safe and happy holiday season!

Five neighborhoods meet, discuss university expansion

For the first time in 12 years, residents of Mid-Cambridge and four other neighborhoods met in a public forum at the King School Nov. 14 to discuss common issues arising from university expansion. The event started with presentations from neighborhood representatives on their different efforts to protect residential areas from the problems of university expansion. This was followed by an open discussion of specific ideas for city-wide initiatives to help neighborhoods cope with the boom in development by Harvard University, as well as M.I.T. and Lesley University.

In addition to the MCNA, the other groups that helped to organize the meeting were the Agassiz Committee on the Impacts of Development, Cambridgeport Neighborhood Initiative, Harvard Square Defense Fund, and Riverside Neighborhood Association. The last time neighborhoods came together to discuss university expansion was 1990, when Harvard was buying commercial properties in Harvard Square.

The main concern in these neighborhoods is now large-scale development on land already owned by Harvard. Although Harvard's long-term plans focus on major development across the Charles in Allston, the scale of projects proposed in Cambridge in the near term promises to reshape our city, according to former MCNA president John Pitkin, who introduced the forum.

In the Agassiz area alone, in the "North Yard," the university plans to add 15 buildings with about a million square feet of floor area to create a new "science city" in the next 15 years. Several large residential or dorm buildings are envisioned for Riverside on the Mahoney's site and near Banks Street.

The neighborhoods have used different strategies for self-preservation. Phyllis Baumann reported that Riverside has a building moratorium in place, has completed a neighborhood planning study, and has a downzoning (Carlson) petition now before the City Council. Agassiz is seeking full information about Harvard's plans and is pursuing a strategy of direct negotiation, according to Willie Bloomstein. MCNA Coordinating Committee member Laura Roberts reported on Mid-Cambridge's unsuccessful effort to negotiate changes to the government center project, now under construction, in exchange for a tunnel easement under Cambridge Street. Jinny Nathans reported on the Harvard Square Defense Fund's on-going campaign for a better design and public street-front use in a new building at 90 Mount Auburn St. in the heart of Harvard Square.

None of the 80 people in attendance disagreed with the need for joint action on common issues affecting all the neighborhoods as well as others across the city. Of

the many specific actions suggested, protecting the character of the Charles River open space and reform of the Planning Board received particularly warm applause. There was also agreement on the need for better neighborhood plans and full disclosure by the Harvard of its plans.

The organizing group was scheduled to meet again Dec. 16 to develop a common action agenda based on the proposals from the forum.

The Longfellow School: Holding firm or moving?

If you've ever been by the Longfellow School (corner of Broadway and Fayette) and wondered about the kind of educational experience that students are getting inside such an austere, institutional-looking building, think again. Inside, under the loving guidance and leadership of Principal Margarita Otero Alvarez, students are thriving.

Even though the Longfellow has the smallest physical size of any of the public schools, it boasts many special, vibrant programs and draws almost 400 students, more than half of whom are bussed from throughout the city.

But, with a deadline fast approaching to close two elementary school buildings in order to cut costs and weed out under-achieving programs, is the Longfellow slated to remain intact or is it in imminent danger? Recent news suggests that despite three versions of plans to close and consolidate schools, a decision by the School Committee might be put off for a year to allow for more community input.

While the fate of the Longfellow School remains unclear, the school has much to be proud of. With several fabled alumni to call its own (comics Jimmy Tingle and Lenny Clark; School Committeeman Fred Fantini; Cambridge political analyst Glenn Koocher), the Longfellow currently has students who speak 20 different languages and who hail from 50 different countries. The school is proud of its many programs in special ed and preschool, Spanish, and its special connections with local institutions.

Despite programmatic richness, however, there are no guarantees that the school will remain as currently configured. In fact, several plans on the table call for the Longfellow to merge with another school or give up some of its varied programs to other schools. According to one Longfellow parent, the school is vulnerable once again, having survived other merger plans in the past. For the time being, it is business as usual.

The Longfellow is always looking for adult volunteers, as well as for neighborhood parking spaces for its teachers. Should you wish to offer assistance in either regard, contact the school's main number at (617) 349-6875.

Police, neighbors meet to discuss crime trend

A rash of car thefts on the eastern edge of the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood has both neighbors and police watching the streets more closely. Since May, tires have been slashed on a dozen cars on Antrim Street, two cars have been stolen, and numerous others have been vandalized or broken into on Antrim and Fayette Streets alone. In one particularly brazen incident, a vehicle on Fayette was jacked up and two wheels removed.

In response to this trend, several neighbors persuaded the Cambridge Police Department to host a community meeting on Dec. 16 at the Longfellow School. At this meeting, members of the Police Department were scheduled to speak about the pattern of these incidents, what the police are doing about it and, perhaps most importantly, what neighbors can do themselves.

Organizer Madge Kaplan was pleased that the

police seemed to be taking the community meeting seriously. "At a minimum," she said, "I think they'll have more information for neighbors." She also voiced a hope that the meeting might lead to increased police patrols and perhaps even persuade the city to improve the lighting on the streets in mid-Cambridge.

Additionally, both Ms. Kaplan and fellow-organizer Amy Meltzer alluded to the possibility of creating a Neighborhood Crime Watch and expressed hope that the police might have some suggestions for how best to organize such a group.

Unfortunately, this newsletter had to go to print before the meeting on the 16th. The MCNA will do its best, however, to keep neighbors up-to-date on this issue at our Web site, www.mcna.org.

For more information or to get involved, call or e-mail Patsy Baudoin 617-354-7409 patsyb@shore.net, or Amy Melzer 617-492-7545 ameltzerma@attbi.com.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Monday, Jan. 6, 6 p.m., Mid-Cambridge Conservation District Commission Meeting.

Presentation of the Library Massing Scheme (size and location of the building on the site) for the redesigned main library complex. The board has binding review of the project. Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

Sign up for e-mail alerts! The MCNA will keep you up-to-date with e-mails on events that affect our neighborhood and its residents. Many events are not listed in this newsletter due to time constraints. To join our e-mail list, please go to <http://www.mcna.org/feedback.htm> and let us know what your e-mail address is.

M-C NEWS
P.O. Box 907
Cambridge, MA 02238
www.mcna.org