

M-C News

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

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February, 2004

School Committee OKs temporary main library in old Longfellow building

The Main Library is scheduled to move several blocks up Broadway into the old Longfellow School building this summer, after the School Committee voted unanimously Feb. 2 to allow the library to set up temporary quarters in the empty school building during construction of the library expansion.

In response to petitions and requests from Mid-Cambridge residents, the committee modified the school superintendent's recommendation by adding the stipulation that space not used by the library would be made

Concerns remain over library design

70-space underground parking garage approved

As they reviewed the latest design and landscape plans for the Main Library addition, members of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission (MCNDC) reiterated various concerns about the structure and raised new ones at their Feb. 2 meeting.

The committee's most significant piece of new business was to approve a new 70-car underground parking garage, to be entered off Broadway, with the requirement that the School Committee be contacted about allowing for the use of the teachers' garage with 200 spaces on Ellery Street to handle library parking overflow and special event parking.

The commission last fall approved, with conditions, the general site plan and massing, including the space planned for below-grade, which would reduce the square footage aboveground. The board also approved the connection between the historic building and the new addition, and the location of the ramp into the underground parking garage. However, they remained con-

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available for community and School Department use. So far, no space has yet been made available.

At the same meeting, the School Committee approved a study by a "space planner" of the department's needs and ability to use the former Longfellow building and former Graham and Parks School building on Upton Street in Cambridgeport as possible locations for the department's central administration, currently housed in rented space on Thorndike Street. In response to protests by Cambridgeport residents, this motion was modified from the superintendent's mid-December recommendation that would have authorized changing the use of the Upton Street building without further evaluation.

Both actions were responses to a Dec. 2 letter from City Manager Robert Healy to School Supt. Thomas Fowler-Finn proposing a deal in which the city would get use of the Longfellow building as a temporary library in exchange for funding to relocate the School Department central administration to Upton Street.

Also in December, residents of Mid-Cambridge and Cambridgeport, who were unaware of the proposed deal, were starting a petition for community uses in both the old Longfellow and Upton Street buildings, because both neighborhoods have lost facilities that had

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MCNA neighborhood meeting tackles library, school, hospital

Find out the latest happenings with the Longfellow School building and the Main Library design and landscaping at the MCNA neighborhood meeting scheduled for Tuesday, March 9, from 7 to 9 p.m.

Attendees will also be asked to vote on the five-member subcommittee working with The Cambridge Hospital on its new expansion plan.

This meeting will be held at the Cambridge Hospital, Conference Room A and B, third floor, main building, 1493 Cambridge St.

Library design concerns: Tot lot location ...

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cerned with maintaining the southeast elevation (the rounded apse of the reading room), and requested design massing details and materials to be presented for their approval in March.

Design Concerns

MCNCDC members expressed several design concerns, including the still-challenging massing issues, and particularly the height of the addition's third story. Other issues were the tot lot placement; the loss of the diagonal path between the library and the high school; the awkward space created between the high school's Fine Arts Building and the new library wing, resulting in a closed-off amphitheater space; separation of the old and new buildings into two separate, distinct structures, one modern and one historic; the loss of open space and air on the site and, as one commissioner put it, the frustrations of working within the limitations of the site chosen by the city and the fact that the result was not the 'signature' building everyone was hoping for.

Laura Solano, representing Michael Van Volkenburgh & Associates, landscape architect for the project, presented schematic ideas for landscape design, including two proposed locations for a new tot lot: one near the new parking garage ramp off Broadway (see Plan A at right), and the other on the Ellery Street side next to the tennis courts (see Plan B, Page 3). Library Project Manager Alan Burne said that the tot lot decision has not been finalized.

The Joan Lorentz Park Working Group had made two other suggestions for placement of the tot lot: replace the tot lot in or about the current location, or move it to a location closer to Broadway but to the right of Trowbridge Street. Neither suggestion has been developed

by the landscape architect. As the tot lot is used most heavily by M-C families, it is important that M-C residents let their views be known as to where it should be located.

The schematics also showed the creation of a blocked amphitheater area (between the back of the new addition and the Fine Arts section of the high school) that results in the loss of the current pathway around the eastern side of the library.

Several committee members raised the landscaping challenges presented by this plan and questioned how the amphitheater space would be maintained and made into appealing space. High school parents, neighborhood representatives and commission members expressed concern over the creation of a blocked-off amphitheater, including the use of the space, increased opportunity for mischief the space created, and the loss of open space for the M-C neighborhood.

In response to a question from MCNA president Joan Pickett, project manager Burne said the 10,000-square-foot space could be blocked by a chain link fence and accessible for high school students only during certain times. He said that 5,000 square feet of the lost space would be replaced by removing the 1967
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The Plan A drawing of the new library/park complex shows the tot lot placed alongside the ramp to the underground parking garage, off Broadway.

...and blocked amphitheater access

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Shepley-Bullfinch addition which now houses the reference room, children's room and office, and some would be replaced by some of the present walks and roads that won't exist anymore. The space created by the removal of the 1967 addition has often been referred to as space for the high school students, and it is therefore questionable as to whether it can be really considered neighborhood space.

The exact amount of lost neighborhood space is a concern, as the recent bond authorization funding the \$31 million increase in the cost of the project removed \$1.5 million that had been set aside to purchase replacement open space for M-C residents.

MCNA Concerns About Traffic Report

Representing traffic consultants VHB/Vanasse, Hangen, Brustlin, Howard Muise presented their long-awaited traffic and transportation study. He reported that the traffic conditions and demand for parking would not change much after the addition is built. In the 4 to 6 p.m. period, he projected, there will be 26 more vehicles on Cambridge Street and 14 more on Broadway.

Library Director Susan Flannery said that 70 percent of Cambridge's 67,000 library patrons already use the main library, therefore parking and traffic

demand was not expected to grow. Burne and Assistant City Manager Richard Rossi added that traffic calming improvements were planned. Other attendees expressed concern that on-street parking could be lost due to these calming measures, and that a decision on the size of the garage should be postponed until the full plan is unveiled.

Pickett summarized an analysis of the VHB traffic and transportation study by neighborhood expert and Harvard professor Tony Gomez-Ibanez which questioned its adequacy and pointed out weaknesses in its methodology.

According to Gomez-Ibanez, competition for on-street parking by those who can't find spaces in either the present parking lot or teachers' garage is already intense, and a severe aggravation to the neighborhood; this issue was not covered in the consultants' report.

Former MCNA president John Pitkin noted that there was no provision for a drop-off area where cars could turn around.

High school parents were also concerned with how dropping off and picking up students would be handled and how that would impact traffic patterns in the neighborhood, as there is already a problem with cars making U-turns.



Plan B shows the tot lot positioned next to the tennis courts, using open space in the park. The amphitheater is wedged between the library addition and the high school Arts building.

Despite concerns expressed over the traffic and transportation study, the garage was approved with the condition that the School Committee be contacted about sharing its 200-car garage on Ellery Street. The issues of traffic calming and traffic flow will be finalized at a later date.

The MCNCDC will hold another special meeting to review the library expansion in March. Please check our Web site at www.mcna.org for meeting information.

Longfellow Neighborhood Council still searching for community program space

Neighborhood Councils were established in Cambridge about 35 years ago to provide direct services to the neighborhoods. The services provided are guided by the needs of the neighborhood and vary with the councils, but typically include the Community Schools Program, an after-school enrichment program for all children in the city, not limited to students in that school.

Until the recent school closings, there were 13 councils within the city, with the Agassiz Council operating independently, covering all the neighborhoods of Cambridge. Councils are typically based in the schools, but this is not part of the charter, and are sometimes based elsewhere.

The city now funds councils with a director position, a stipend, a computer networked with the city, and space for office and programs. They are administered through the city's Dept. of Human Services.

The Longfellow Neighborhood Council has been based in the Longfellow School building since the start of the Council program, serving the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood. Its director for the past 15 years has been Penelope Kleespies. Along with an extensive Community Schools Program--including vacation day programming, a performing arts camp, and various community events--the Longfellow Council is noted for its music program and its involvement in the public parks in Mid-Cambridge.

Neighbors save the Council

With the School Department announcement last May that the Longfellow School was closing, there was a move by the city to dissolve the Longfellow Council. But thanks to the support of hundreds of people who signed petitions and spoke at the budget hearings, funding for the Longfellow Neighborhood Council was continued. We still have our Neighborhood Council.

However, at this time, space for programming is a problem. The city has promised to help us find space, but to date, neither the city nor the Council has found suitable space to hold anything like the Community Schools program or neighborhood events. The city is providing one (small) office for the director. The music program is continuing in rented space at the Faith Lutheran Church on Broadway.

The Council has also been collaborating with the YWCA on several projects, including a series of Literacy and Nutritional Workshops. But we have no space for children (or adults) to come for non-music

classes or events. We are sorely in need of programming space.

Which brings us to the future use of the Longfellow School building. The School Committee has agreed (see story, Page 1) that school space should be made available for community use, however, they have not yet defined what community use is and how much space will be allocated for this purpose. They have taken the right step, but we need to continue to advocate that the community space in the Longfellow School be set aside for the Longfellow Neighborhood Council program.

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A note on building uses: If a building "belongs" to the School Department, it has control over how that building is utilized. If the building "belongs" to the city in general, then the City Council, through the city manager, controls its utilization. The School Department can lease, or in this case loan, its buildings for non-School Department use.

The Longfellow School is much larger than the current library building, approximately 87,000 square feet versus 30,000 square feet. The Longfellow Neighborhood Council has asked the new head of the Dept. of Human Services, Ellen Semonoff, to investigate the possibility of once again sharing space in the Longfellow School building.

This is your Neighborhood Council serving your neighborhood. How can you help? You can contact your School Committee and City Council members asking them to support including space in the school building for the Longfellow Community Schools program and other community uses..

You could also mention that you support the Cambridgeport residents and their desire to have community uses in the Graham and Parks School building, which is in a similar situation.

--By George Bossarte

Library temporarily moving to Longfellow

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long housed Community Schools serving area children and families (see story, Page 4). The Longfellow Community School is now operating in the basement of the Faith Lutheran Church, which is on Broadway across Prospect Street from Mid-Cambridge, where it is able to offer only music lessons because of space limitations.

Fowler-Finn's new budget for the next academic year reportedly includes \$900,000 for a new alternative high school for 60-100 students to be housed in the Longfellow School.

Although the superintendent introduced his initial recommendation at the last meeting of the outgoing School Committee in 2003 with a minimum of public notice, there was a strong showing of opposition from the two neighborhoods because the proposal made no allowance for community use in either building and called for no evaluation of the adequacy of the Upton Street building for the central administration.

In response to the neighbors, School Committee member Fred Fantini blocked a vote at that meeting and asked the superintendent to modify his proposal.

In January, School Department COO James Maloney held three meetings in Cambridgeport on the Upton Street building, but the department has so far ignored a request from the MCNA for a similar meeting with Mid-Cambridge residents about the old Longfellow building. Library Project Director Alan Burne could provide no information about the city's plans for housing the temporary library in the Longfellow building.

Since the building has about 87,000 square feet of floor space--almost three times the size of the existing Main Library--there should be plenty of room for both a temporary library and the Longfellow Community School, and possibly even other community activities.

However, it is not clear who will make the allocation of space, the School Department or the city manager, because the space not used by the library will be made "temporarily" available for community uses "upon conferral between the superintendent and the city manager."

The library project schedule calls for the Main Library to move to a temporary location in late summer of this year and to remain there for three years.

Call for MCNA Coordinating Committee nominations

At the annual MCNA meeting to be held May 19, the membership will elect the 2004-2005 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 MCNA members are welcome to submit nomination papers. The papers must be **signed by 10 MCNA members** and submitted to Elizabeth Gombosi no later than April 27 in order to qualify. Nomination papers are available at www.mcna.org. They can also be mailed to you by calling Elizabeth Gombosi at 617-497-6634. If required, she can verify whether someone is a MCNA member.

The bylaws and other relevant information can be viewed on our Web site if you are interested in learning more about the association and the CC.

Fundraising update: The check was in the mail

Thanks to all the MCNA members who generously contributed to our recent fundraising effort. Our treasurer, Frankie Lieberman, reports that over 130 members contributed about \$4,400, one of our more successful fundraising efforts in recent memory. This represents an average contrition of \$35.

A special thanks to those generous contributors who gave over \$50 to support the Association's ongoing needs. Although our budget is modest, we face increased costs of postage, printing, and Web site costs. In addition, we now face the new challenge of paying for meeting space since the Longfellow School has closed.

If you have not yet received it, a thank-you note is in the mail. If you have not yet contributed but would like to, please send your check to: MCNA, P.O. Box 907, Cambridge, MA 02238, and thanks!

Cambridge Hospital eyes infill expansion

The Cambridge Hospital has contacted the MCNA about plans to build a two-story building to house mammography services and on-call rooms. The structure would be located behind the Emergency Department driveway in space that is currently a vacant inner courtyard.

Based on a three-way agreement between the hospital, the MCNA, and the city executed in 1993, any expansion on the Cambridge site must undergo a process similar to the process initiated for the review of the hospital's 1993 expansion. Currently, the agreement states that no new construction is allowed.

An initial meeting to learn about the proposed project took place in late December. Subsequently, the Coordinating Committee, at its January meeting, authorized the creation of a five-member subcommittee—William Craig, Francis Fiorenza, Connie May and John Pitkin—all of whom were actively involved in negotiating the initial agreement in 1993 to represent

the MCNA in evaluating this proposed plan. MCNA President Joan Pickett, as required by the agreement, is co-chair with Dennis Keefe, CEO of Cambridge Health Alliance. At the next MCNA neighborhood meeting, the membership will be asked to formally vote on the subcommittee membership.

The 4,600-square-foot modular building would not be visible from Cambridge Street. The first floor would be used to house an expanded mammography service, and the second floor would provide on-call rooms for house officers and attending physicians; these activities are being displaced by the expansion of maternity services in the main part of the hospital. Cambridge Hospital intends to increase the number of annual births there by about 500 in the next few years.

Access to the new structure would be through the main building. The building consists of six modular sections to be constructed off-site, trucked to the site, lifted into the courtyard via crane and assembled on-site.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Tuesday, March 2, Harvard Town-Gown Meeting. Harvard's annual report on student, staff and faculty populations, parking and transportation, and current and future development plans. 7:30 p.m., Cambridge Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

Wednesday, March 3, Library Design Advisory Committee open meeting, 6 p.m. at the Morse School, 40 Granite St.

Tuesday, March 9, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association Meeting, Cambridge Hospital Conference Room A and B, third floor, main building, 1493 Cambridge Street. 7 to 9 p.m. See story on Page 1 for further info.

Tuesday, April 27, Coordinating Committee Nominations Due. See details on Page 5.

Wednesday, May 19, MCNA Annual Meeting, location TBA, election of Coordinating Committee and other business.

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P.O. Box 907
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Meeting Notice
Tuesday, March 9

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