

M-C News

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AND THE LONGFELLOW NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

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Harvard Presents Revised Plans for Knafel Center Complex

Last month Harvard University publicly presented the latest design for its proposed Knafel Center government and international studies complex on Cambridge Street (see illustration below). Architect Harry Cobb described the complex as “a city-shaping project, not just a campus-shaping project.”

Over fifty residents as well as many university officials attended the December 16 presentation by Mr. Cobb and landscape designer Laurie Olin in the Sackler Museum. Mr. Cobb described the project and design in substantial detail, including several small changes made since an earlier version of the design shown last June.

The complex would consist of a pair of buildings of similar size and appearance, clad in pinkish-brown terra-cotta tile and linked by a tunnel beneath Cambridge Street. A dominant feature of the overall design is a pair of facing 18-foot square windows which provide views of the inside activities to the street and light to the tunnel below. Both buildings are five stories high and are stepped down toward Cambridge Street.

Almost thirty percent of the complex’s space is below grade, including a data library, teleconference room and cafe in the north building, and a lecture hall and class space in the south building. Also below grade, beneath the Gund Hall block green, is a loading dock that would serve the entire complex as well as Gund

Hall. Most of the above-ground space houses offices, carrels and seminar rooms.

The north building would replace Coolidge Hall, and the south building would replace the steel and glass Information Services building and a gray frame house at 96 Prescott Street. The house would to be moved to another lot, the two other existing buildings would be demolished. There would be 181,000 square feet of floor area in the complex, up from the existing 124,000
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Neighborhood Meeting

Wednesday, January 19, 2000, 7:00 p.m.
Sakey Room, Main Public Library on Broadway

Agenda Items

- Knafel Center: How should we respond to Harvard’s design presented in December?
- Committee recommendation for planning guidelines for the M-C/Harvard boundary.
- Swiss Consulate and institutional encroachment in residential areas.
- Residents’ petition to support the zoning dispute on Antrim Street: Is the City’s enforcement up to snuff and, if not, what can we do about it?

The Neighborhood Meeting is the voice of our neighborhood. All residents are welcome to participate. If you live in Mid-Cambridge, your voice counts, too! For more information, call 492-4035.

Picture 5 x 2 1/4

WHAT WOULD THE KNAFEL CENTER LOOK LIKE?

Architect’s rendering shows the Knafel Center design as it would look from the corner of Cambridge Street and Felton Street. The south building is at left and the north building is on the right. A tunnel would connect the two buildings.

--Illustration Courtesy of Pei Cobb Freed and Partners, Architects LLP

Antrim Street Neighbors in Development Dispute

The dispute between residents of Antrim Street and builder John Kennedy over renovation/conversion of a 2-family house and construction of a new single-family house at **75-81 Antrim Street** is now further from resolution than when we first reported it in the October 1999 M-C News.

Residents gained support from the Inspectional Services Department when the Department agreed that the buildings' floor area ratio was too high, by 200 square feet. In order to reduce the size and comply with zoning, the project's architect submitted new drawings that proposed to eliminate parts of the plan, including a bath and a 7 by 11-foot kitchen area. Although this plan was submitted on December 10, work continued on the kitchen area until December 30, when it was halted by Inspectional Services.

However, the dispute is far from resolved. Two appeals of code enforcement matters, one by residents and another by the architect, will be before the Board of

Knafel Center

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square feet on the two sites.

A 12-foot wide paved way would provide access to the rear of the Bromley Court apartment building.

After the presentation, people in attendance had a brief opportunity to ask questions about the project and design. In response to questions from residents about the probable volume of foot traffic that would access the south building from the main entrance on Prescott Street, Mr. Cobb acknowledged there would be an increase and stated that "the right place" for the entrance is on the Prescott Street side. However, he said, it could be relocated on Cambridge Street if there is a strong feeling that it should be there.

Residents also expressed concerns about the choice of exterior materials, the decision to locate class space in the south building, and the loss of light and air to the rear of the Foxcroft Manor and side of the Bromley Court apartment buildings, which adjoin the south building. Most of the mass of the south building would be located back from Cambridge Street in what is now an open parking lot.

Construction on the project cannot begin until it receives several permits required by the city.

The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association invites residents to discuss their reactions to the design more fully and develop a joint response at a Neighborhood Meeting on Wednesday, January 19 at 7 PM in the Main Library.

Zoning Appeal February 10, and residents plan another appeal to the BZA on other enforcement matters. The residents have also appealed the original variance in Superior Court and in addition have asked the BZA to reconsider that variance.

In response to a request by resident Craig Whitaker, this matter will be before our MCNA January 19 Neighborhood Meeting to discuss how the broader community can express support for the neighbors' efforts to ensure that the project complies with Cambridge Zoning. They would also like to discuss ways in which we can advocate for stricter enforcement by Inspectional Services.

A Tree Grows on Lee Street

A rare European beech tree has been planted on Lee Street to replace one of the city's largest and oldest trees which was killed by Dutch elm disease last spring.

Instead of attempting to put a tree in the exact spot where the majestic, centuries-old American elm stood, the new tree was planted nearby in a small park off West Street.

The new tree is 6-10 years old, and has the potential to live as long as the elm, which was at least 150 years old, and possibly as old as 200, when it succumbed to Dutch elm disease last year. The new location — several yards away from the old sidewalk elm — will protect the new tree from damage from vehicles and road salt, and make it easier to irrigate.

"The European beech is more insect and disease tolerant," said city arborist Larry Acosta, "and they grow every bit as large and as beautiful" as the landmark elms. This variety of beech is "rare in the sense that there aren't a lot of places in the city large enough to accommodate its full size," Acosta said, adding that a few specimens can be found in Mt. Auburn Cemetery.

The huge, unique stump of the old elm will be made into a sculpture later this year by Mitch Ryerson, who has sculpted a number of tree stumps around the city. Acosta said he is considering sculpting the stump into a three-seated bench. It will remain in its familiar spot by the sidewalk on Lee Street.

Swiss House Decision: Institutions 1, Residents 0

Ruling is setback for curbing institutional expansion in neighborhood

Residents of Mid-Cambridge received coal in their holiday stockings Dec. 27 when Middlesex Superior Court Judge Margot Botsford upheld a Board of Zoning Appeals decision to grant the Swiss government a special permit to open an office at 420 Broadway.

A group of neighbors had appealed the BZA decision, which allows a change of use from commercial to institutional use. The building, at the corner of Broadway and Ellery Streets, is the former Sage's Market and laundromat.

The plaintiffs objected to the Swiss plans because the change to institutional use will permanently foreclose the possibility of reopening a convenience store—or any other neighborhood amenity—at this site.

The only rationale for permitting non-residential activities in residential areas is to serve neighborhood needs. Clearly, the Swiss plans do not fit that definition. If the Swiss government obtains the necessary permits, it will establish an office and meeting/conference facility for a scholar-exchange program for biological, high-tech and other scientific research, called SHARE (Swiss House for Advanced Research and Education).

The neighbors' lawsuit challenged the BZA ruling on the grounds that it failed to implement important provisions of the zoning ordinance that control institutional expansion, specifically the Cambridge Institutional Growth Management Plan. The judge's decision raises serious concerns over how the BZA will regard this plan in future, similar cases.

Effectively, Judge Botsford considered the Growth Management Plan as a series of planning documents in which "it is difficult to isolate from the plan a discrete set of objectives" and the standard by which a project substantially contravenes them. She concluded that the Plan provides qualitative guidelines rather than firm direction in making a decision.

While she did agree that the Swiss application was incomplete (it did not include a statement of how the anticipated attributes of the use will be similar to or different from the Cambridge Institutional growth Management Plan), she felt that the failure to provide this information was form over substance. The neighbors contended that if this information had been provided, the project would have failed to obtain approval.

Clearly, this decision puts into question the validity of the Cambridge Institutional Growth Plan as a protec-

tion to neighbors concerned about the continued encroachment of institutions into residential neighborhoods. While the Swiss House case is the only legal test to date, if the plan is to be a useful and meaningful part of the communities' arsenal in protecting the residential character of Mid-Cambridge, it may need serious re-examination and fine-tuning.

In support of the Swiss application, a petition signed by 60 Cambridge residents was presented to the Board of Zoning Appeal. However, after closer examination by plaintiff Bill Schreiber, it turned out that of the 60 signers, only one lived closer to Sage's and most lived far away from 420 Broadway, in locations such as south of Mass Ave or east of Prospect Street.

The plaintiffs successfully obtained over 60 signatures from immediate neighbors (within a one-block radius of 420 Broadway) who are: (1) concerned about institutional encroachment in our city, (2) prefer that the site continue to be available for commercial operations that benefit the neighborhood and provide amenities, and (3) are worried about the impact of this program on an already difficult parking situation in the area.

To date, contributions for legal expenses have come from the plaintiffs and other concerned neighbors. But additional support is needed. For further information or if you are interested in contributing, please contact Joan Pickett, 59 Ellery Street, Cambridge 02138.

The plaintiffs have 30 days to decide whether to appeal this decision.

Ho-ho Holiday Party

An estimated 70 neighbors celebrated the millennium holiday season at our annual MCNA holiday party December 5.

Many thanks to our hosts, Susan and Stan Twarog and family, who opened their Dana Street home for the event, and to all those who brought cookies and other holiday goodies.

This year's festivities were held on a Sunday afternoon instead of the usual Friday night party. The consensus was that the new time slot was so popular, it will likely be repeated again next year.

Pianist Anne Silverman played new and old favorites, accompanied at one point by guests performing a spirited, impromptu sing-along--a festive ending to an annual neighborhood tradition.

New Projects Reviewed by M-C Conservation District

Several new projects are underway in Mid-Cambridge that have been recently reviewed by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission.

One proposed project is at **330-332-334 Broadway**, where the owner plans to restore and redevelop two architecturally significant buildings and add a third building to complete the triad. The use would become residential rather than commercial, as it currently is. Owner Stephen Najarian has come before the Commission twice for an informational presentation, and will be returning for a formal review within the next month or so.

Another significant project is **69-71-73 Inman Street**, where the owner plans to construct a new building on what is now an open lot, and rehab one of the existing two dwellings on the site. About 20 neighbors attended the hearing to express their concerns

about size and massing, parking, and rain run-off issues, to name but a few. The Commission voted to continue the case until its February meeting and urged the owner and architect to re-think some of their plans, given the concerns of commission members and neighbors.

At its January 3 meeting, the Commission approved a non-binding certificate for a house at **34-36 Fayette Street**, where the owner plans to remove vinyl siding, restore a front porch, and add some decks to the rear.

Always delighted to encourage owners to remove vinyl siding and restore a home to its original wood clapboards or shingles, the Commission has seen more and more cases where houses are being brought back to their original glory — a welcome improvement to the streetscape in our Mid-Cambridge neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Sign Up Now for Longfellow Community School's Winter Term!

Starting Jan. 24 Music, sports, arts and crafts classes for children and adults, afternoons and evenings at the school through April 14.

Starting Jan. 10 Private music lessons in piano, recorder and guitar. 14 half-hour lessons.

Starting Jan. 24 The Monday Mini Class: 2 to 3 hour sessions starting at 2:45 at nearby sites: the Broadway Bicycle Schools ("Bicycle Safety and Simple Repair"), Cambridge Animal Commission ("Pets and Pet Care"), Cambridge Arts Council ("Where in the World Is Art?"), Cambridge Historical Commission ("History All Around You"). For registration and info, call Penelope Kleespies, 349-6260.

Wed., Jan. 19, 7 PM Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Meeting, Sakey Room, Main Public Library on Broadway. See Page 1 for agenda.

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editors:* Paula Lovejoy, John Pitkin. *Reporters:* Joan Pickett, Keren Schlomy, Martha Osler.

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NOTICE OF MEETING JAN. 19