

# M-C News

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

Vol. 11, No. 1

January, 2002

## Association to Meet Jan. 23 on Tunnel, Harvard Expansion

The MCNA will hold a neighborhood meeting  
**Wednesday, January 23**  
**7 to 9 P.M.**

**CRLS High School Media Cafeteria**  
**(main entrance, 459 Broadway)**

### Agenda:

#### 1. Cambridge Street tunnel easement

The City Council is expected to vote on Harvard's request for permission to build a tunnel below Cambridge Street. See story below for more information.

- Presentations pro and con
- Discussion
- Vote on a position for, against, or for modifications.

#### 2. A Plan of Action for Protecting Neighborhood Interests Against Harvard Expansion

Harvard expansion in Mid-Cambridge will be on the new City Council's agenda when it takes up Harvard's application for the Cambridge Street tunnel easement, and there has been no progress on winning planning commitments from the university in the last two years. (For more information on the Association's proposed guidelines, see the May 2000 M-C News available at [www.MCNA.org](http://www.MCNA.org).)

- The need to act now
- Defining neighborhood interests
- Vote on creating a task force to negotiate with the university and lobby City Councilors.

This will be a public meeting. All neighborhood residents are welcome to join and participate. Please see our website, [www.MCNA.org](http://www.MCNA.org), and red yard notice boards for updates on the agenda.

## Public Forums on Cambridge Street Tunnel: Residents See Costs, No Benefits in Proposal

At two recent public forums, neighborhood residents voiced vigorous, specific objections to Harvard University's request for an easement to build a tunnel on city land under Cambridge Street between Sumner Road and Prescott Street. Their objections centered on the impact of construction, risks to city utilities, and the project the tunnel would serve: the university's proposed Center for Government and International Studies (CGIS), formerly known as the Knafel Center.

The first forum was a "community meeting" held by City Manager Robert Healy in City Hall Dec. 8, and the second was a Jan. 8 public hearing of the Cambridge Planning Board. Both meetings are part of the city's established process for considering sale of public land. This process will also require a hearing and a vote by the City Council.

### Harvard's Proposal

At both meetings, Harvard Director of Community Relations Mary Power led the university's presentation in favor of the tunnel. She emphasized the number of modifications made to the project's design in response to both the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation

District Commission and residents, the length of the five-year process, and her view that the project was improved by this process.

Her main arguments were: the pedestrian and service tunnel would make it possible for more of both CGIS buildings to be placed underground; it would reduce the number of pedestrian crossings of Cambridge Street between the two buildings; increase safety; and eliminate the need for a loading dock in the south building, which would be serviced instead by a consolidated loading dock in the north building.

Engineering details of the tunnel were also presented at both meetings. The 66-foot long by 30-foot wide passage would be constructed some 3 feet below the street surface in an open trench during a projected 20 months. Two lanes of traffic, but no parking, would be maintained on Cambridge Street through installation of a 4-foot-high steel bridge. The construction would require an intricate reconfiguration of all underground utilities, including relocation of a main sanitary sewer up Sumner Road to Kirkland Street.

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# Residents Assess Impact of Harvard Tunnel

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William Craig, a Greenough Avenue resident, MCNA member, and retired civil engineer, presented his analysis of the proposed easement to both the city manager and the Planning Board. Among the impacts he identified were loss of use of Cambridge Street for future underground utilities, resulting added cost of these utilities, "severe construction impacts over a two-year period," added traffic congestion at a major intersection, added construction traffic, and potential interruption of utility services.

These concerns were strongly supported by several abutters at both meetings, among them, Laura Roberts, Betty Collins, Rick Childs, and Sanford Lieberman, all Cambridge Street residents. Helen Weeks, of Prescott Street, although not opposed to the new buildings, said she was "horrified" at the thought that the best efforts to mitigate the effects of tunnel construction would fail.

Mr. Craig also suggested that if an easement is approved, it should be much deeper and constructed by a tunneling method, which would avoid almost all of the negative impacts.

## City Manager's Meeting

Of 40 residents who attended the December meeting, 11 spoke in opposition to the proposal and two in favor.

MCNA president John Pitkin argued that planning and impact issues need satisfactory answers before the question of payment should be considered, and said "The future of our city must not be put up for sale." He also pressed the MCNA's 1999 request to Harvard for a mutually acceptable plan for the project area before construction, and asked for a public hearing on the proposed two-year closing of Prescott Street to provide a construction staging area.

Harvard Professor Theda Skocpol's support of the project on the grounds that it would provide more office space for her secretary was sharply rebutted by Nancy Young, an Antrim Street resident. Roy Bercaw said there were no public benefits to the tunnel or project. Peter Voorlas of Cambridge Street criticized the Conservation District Commission's process for reviewing the project as deeply flawed and biased in favor of the project and against residents.

The city manager asked no questions. He submitted a 200-word report on the meeting to the City Council the following Monday.

## Planning Board Hearing

The Planning Board gave the issues a much fuller airing than the city manager. The seven board members

listened attentively to the entire two-hour proceeding and questioned the university's representatives, architects, and consultants on their presentations.

Harvard's engineering consultant revealed that they were considering possible alternatives to the temporary steel bridges over the tunnel excavation, because of concerns that vehicles passing over the bridges would generate a drum-like noise. The alternative would be steel plate covers.

Three Harvard affiliates spoke in favor, two more than in December. Susan Pharr, a Farrar Street resident and professor of government, expects to have an office in the south building and saw a greater opportunity for community with her colleagues if she can go more easily between the buildings. Alex Loud of Antrim Street pointed out that provision of easy contact among professors is not a public purpose.

Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Historical Commission, made a statement on behalf of the M-C Conservation District, which has approved plans for the new buildings. He said that the tunnel facilitated the goal of "reducing the overall size and mass of the project" by allowing a single larger building to be split in two on opposite sides of the street.

Another benefits cited by Mr. Sullivan was concentration of service activities on the north side of Cambridge Street. Residents said that they already live with the current loading dock located on the south side of Cambridge Street, serving the existing building, and that this benefit would be at most minor.

In closing the hearing, board chair Tom Anninger set a date of Feb. 5 for the board to make a recommendation, and noted that this date would allow time for the board to hear back from the MCNA meeting of Jan. 23.

## City Council Opposition

At the final meeting of the last City Council, six Councilors, Kathy Born, Henrietta Davis, Marjorie Decker, Kenneth Reeves, Michael Sullivan, and Timothy Toomey, expressed opposition to Harvard's request.

Councilor Sullivan proposed turning down the request right away, but the council decided to follow the prescribed procedure of public hearings for considering disposition of public property, which the easement would be.

Five of the councilors who spoke against the tunnel are on the new City Council, including Councilor Sullivan, who was elected Mayor. In his inaugural address, he focused on town-gown planning issues and announced formation of a new committee to deal with them. Approval of a tunnel easement would require the support of six of the nine councilors.

# Zippering Around Mid-Cambridge

*By Ted Carpenter*

Zipcars are available in and around Mid-Cambridge. They are a shared fleet of cars parked at convenient locations in our neighborhood, and many other locations in Cambridge and Boston. For those who do not have or do not want to keep a car in the city, they are an economical and convenient way to have a car available when and where it is needed—with a simple hourly fee charged to a credit card. Many members also use them to supplement the family car in busy households.

Zipcars are available at hourly rates of \$5 to \$8, and a charge of 40 cents a mile. There is a \$75 annual membership fee, and a \$300 refundable deposit. Cars can be reserved for a day at rates comparable to rental cars, but are at their most economical when used for short, periodic trips around town. There is a monthly fee for those who just want to try it out before committing to full membership fees.

The Zipcar organization, which is based in Central Square, takes care of arranging for reserved parking spaces (some even provided by the City of Cambridge to help reduce traffic congestion), all maintenance, cleaning, insurance, even gas. Each car is equipped with an electronic locking system and wireless record-keeping, so members just reserve their car on the Zipcar Web site, go to the parking place at the designated hour, swipe their access card to unlock it and drive off. Usage and mileage is recorded automatically upon return. If you buy gas, you are reimbursed.

A recent Boston Globe article states that 47 percent of Zipcar users report that they delayed or avoided buying a car because of the service, while 11 percent sold their cars altogether.

Our neighborhood has a VW Golf parked at Harvard Street and Ellery, a lime green VW Beetle with a flower in its vase at Inman Square, and several choices at Central and Harvard Squares.

Mid-Cambridge is a community that is rich in public transportation and conveniently located squares that put abundant resources a short walk away from most homes. This makes our neighborhood a great spot for the ease, convenience and environment-friendly Zipcar approach. For more information, as well as details on car locations, rates and membership responsibilities, call 866-4ZIPCAR, or check out their Web site at <http://www.zipcar.com>.

*(Editor's Note: Ted Carpenter of Hancock Street is a frequent Zipcar user.)*

## Holiday Hit: The MCNA Party

Maybe it was the spirit of community sparked by the Sept. 11 attacks, or maybe it was just a desire to have some old-fashioned holiday fun. Whatever the reason, a record number of people attended the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association's annual holiday party Dec. 14.

Some 75 neighbors got together to share delicious food and drink, meet new neighbors and re-connect with old friends. Many thanks to our hosts, Sara Mae and Larry Berman, of 23 Fayette St., for sharing their beautiful home.

### Get Involved in the MCNA!

Elections for members of the MCNA Coordinating Committee will be held at our annual meeting in May. As our neighborhood faces major changes in the next few years (Knafel/CGIS and the Main Library expansion to name two), the work of the MCNA becomes more and more important to all of us. The committee meets monthly, and is an active working group. If you are concerned about neighborhood issues and especially if you have sat on subcommittees, please consider running for the Coordinating Committee.

In addition, volunteers are needed for a variety of tasks, from neighborhood news writing to working on our Web site. For more information, e-mail or call any of the current members, or contact John Pitkin by e-mail at [jpitkin@world.com](mailto:jpitkin@world.com), or phone 617-492-4035.

## New Contacts with Harvard

A small group of Harvard campus abutters and MCNA president John Pitkin have recently started to meet informally with Harvard officials to discuss the full range of neighborhood-university planning issues.

The purpose of the talks are to explore possible agreements on important neighborhood concerns about future university expansion. With the upcoming City Council vote on the Cambridge Street tunnel and creation of a new City Council committee on town-gown planning, progress on these long-standing issues may now be possible.

If you have a specific suggestion for an issue that you feel needs to be addressed, please contact John Pitkin by email ([jpitkin@world.com](mailto:jpitkin@world.com)) or phone (617-492-4035).

## Recent M-C Conservation District Commission Cases

Wonder what's going on at the boarded-up **City Hall Annex** at the corner of Broadway and 57 Inman Street? The total renovation of the Annex is among several projects under way in Mid-Cambridge, after their review by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission (MCNCDC).

In addition to the remediation of hazardous waste material, the Annex project focuses on window replacement, a new entrance with a canopy on Broadway, and the re-creation of parapets on the Inman Street facade which were part of the original 1899 plan.

In another project at **69-71 Inman Street**, the owner requested that the commission's previous vote on removal of vinyl siding from the 1840's home be

revoked. After lengthy discussion, commission members unanimously agreed to allow the owner to keep vinyl siding along the side walls of the house, but to restore the wood clapboards, trim and detail to the front facade.

In another case, the commission voted to allow the **Castle School** (at the corner of Harvard and Lee Streets) to construct a handicapped accessible bathroom and outdoor lift for wheelchair accommodation.

### Watch the MCNCDC at Work!

Want to see the workings of the MCNCDC? The public is always invited to attend its meetings, held on the first Monday of the month, at 6:00 p.m. on the first floor of the Citywide Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave.

### NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

**Wednesday, Jan. 23, 7 to 9 PM** Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association meeting, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School media cafeteria, 459 Broadway.

**Tuesday, Feb. 5, 7:30 PM** The Planning Board will deliberate on recommendations for Harvard's request for an easement to construct a tunnel on city land below Cambridge Street.

**Winter term Longfellow Community School classes.** Classes have begun for the second term at the Longfellow Community School. There are still some openings in some of the classes. For further information, please call Penny Kleespies at 617-349-6260.

**M-C NEWS**  
**P.O. Box 907**  
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**NOTICE OF MEETING**  
**Wednesday, Jan. 23**