

M-C News

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

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Library plan moves forward, with reservations

The library expansion plan called Revised Scheme 4 has gained conceptual approval for the footprint and overall shape of the proposed library design from the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission (MCNDCD). The project will now move ahead to the next phase of design.

At its Jan. 6 meeting, the commission approved placement of the 60,000-square-foot library addition, and key related elements such as the parking ramp. However, it cited several conditions to be further addressed at future MCNDCD meetings. They include:

- Exploring options to reduce the above-ground mass of the addition (looking at ways to put some of the program underground);
- Completing a traffic study that examines the safety of the proposed placement of the parking ramp, drop-off area, and adequacy of parking, and
- Development of details on how the new addition will be attached to the existing historic building.

The new addition will more than double the size of the current library, with a two-story section along the park side rising to three stories along the high school/War Memorial side.

MCNDCD approval is critical for the project, as it has binding authority over any alteration or construction of publicly owned buildings and structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its authority includes the ability to alter the size of a project by as much as 33%, to alter the building shape and materials (including windows) used on the exterior, and approval of the site plan, including landscaping.

At the commission's Jan. 6 meeting, project director Alan Burne and members of the Design Team gave a presentation on the revised Scheme 4, the favored layout for the park/library/high school complex. Library Design Advisory Committee members and Mid-Cambridge residents also offered comments.

While much positive progress has been made and many of the MCNA's concerns have been addressed through the continued refinements made to Scheme 4, (see December's Newsletter at www.mcna.org), there are additional issues the association should now consider at our Jan. 29 meeting: the mass and scale of the addition, parking ramp placement, and the redesign of adjacent Joan Lorentz Park.

The current proposed placement of the underground parking ramp and resulting change in the traffic flow around the site is one of the more significant and positive changes to Scheme 4. The parking and potential drop-off area in the revised Scheme 4 is now in the area immediately to the west of the main open space of Joan Lorentz Park. This proposed placement of the underground parking ramp and resulting flow of traffic preserves the open space west of the current Trowbridge entrance and has the added benefits of allowing the park to expand across the existing Trowbridge access road, and creating uninterrupted park vistas along the full length of Broadway.

Without this change in parking ramp placement, it is unlikely that revised Scheme 4 would be viewed favorably by the MCNA. Therefore, it would be *(Continued on Page 4)*

Library, crime are topics of Jan. 29 neighborhood meeting

Come to the MCNA Neighborhood Meeting on Wednesday, January 29, at the Longfellow School Cafeteria, 359 Broadway.

Time: 7-9 p.m., starting promptly

Agenda:

(1) Update on Library Massing Scheme 4, with a presentation of models focusing on library mass, placement of the parking ramp and M-C representation for the redesign of Joan Lorentz Park.

(2) Update on neighborhood car thefts/crime.

(3) Update on Broadway Market closing.

Library/park project: It's deja vu all over again

Try taking this Mid-Cambridge history test:

Background: The city decides to update and expand an important facility located in Mid-Cambridge that serves all of Cambridge. The city considers new construction at another site, but in the end decides to renovate an historic old building and build a new addition, encroaching on our neighborhood's one signature park, over strong objections by some neighbors. Because other neighbors support the project, the Neighborhood Association decides to go along with it and work with the city to make the reconfigured park as much of an asset to the neighborhood as the old one.

The Question: What is the name of the city facility?

Answer: If you answered the Main Public Library, this is correct, and if you answered the Rindge and Latin High School, that is also correct.

Just months after the MCNA formally organized in 1975, it took up its first big issue, the location of a new high school to replace the separate and racially polarized Rindge Technical and Cambridge High and Latin Schools. The former building, now renovated, is part of the renovated complex; the latter, now demolished, lay along Ellery Street. Following a heated debate in a November 1975 meeting, 83 members voted against supporting a suit of ten taxpayers against the project and to save the old park on Cambridge Street.

By a 3-1 margin, the members then voted to support the project, with two conditions that proved to be very important.

First, they called for a satisfactory budget "for park development and tot-lot replacement," and neighborhood involvement in its planning. The Association's second condition was that the new park be jointly controlled by the City Council and School Committee, and therefore not be used as a playing field.

Over the next two to three years several member of the MCNA, all residents, put in countless hours to make sure these conditions were fulfilled. They started by proposing a budget for the new park (\$950,000) and creating a committee to work on the design of the park and high school. For over a year, they lobbied the City Council and manager, first to authorize the expenditure and then to issue the bonds needed to raise the funds.

In the meantime, the Association's committee worked closely with the project landscape architect, Carole Johnson, to conduct a city-wide survey of residents' preferences for the new park and then to develop the design.

Once the funding was secured and the design approved, the two MCNA committee members served on the official project committee to make sure that they were

properly implemented. For example, Francis Spinks, a resident, intervened to get the construction fencing moved when the root systems of the heritage copper beech trees in front of the library were not protected from construction activity.

Once Mid-Cambridge City Park was opened, its maintenance and operation were overseen by a committee of residents and representatives of the high school, library, and other city departments. This committee still exists and functions. In October 1998, following the death of Joan Lorentz, the first president of the MCNA, the park was renamed in her honor.

Who made this happen? Joan Lorentz would say, "neighbors like YOU."

In this case, Jane and Bob Richards, Eleanor Brimley, and Francis Spinks, who served on the MCNA committee. All still live in the neighborhood.

A Lesson for the Future?

Active advocacy supported by our members was needed to secure the beautiful park we enjoy today. What will it take to achieve an equally satisfactory outcome for the city's new project in our park?

This article is based on the minutes and newsletters of the MCNA for the years 1975 to 1978.

MCNA accessibility policy

At the Jan. 15 meeting of the coordinating committee, the following policy statement was unanimously adopted:

The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association is committed to making its neighborhood meetings and publications accessible to all residents of Mid-Cambridge. To this end, the Association will strive to:

- Hold public meetings in locations which are near public transportation and fully accessible, with designated handicapped parking nearby, and which have good acoustics and sightlines;

- Provide handouts, newsletters and other printed materials in large type upon request;

- Follow generally-accepted guidelines for accessible design of the Association's Web site;

- Include contact information for making requests for adaptive services on all Association printed and electronic notices, including newsletter, signboards, emails and website

Members who have questions about our accessibility policy, can help us improve our accessibility, or are requesting adaptive services are encouraged to contact Laura Roberts at 617-492-5048 or LRoberts@belove.com.

Police offer ways to cope with neighborhood crime

Concerned about recent increases in car-related crimes in Mid-Cambridge, over 30 neighborhood residents discussed topics from foiling criminals to establishing a neighborhood Crime Watch at a Dec. 16 meeting with city officials at the Longfellow School.

Sgt. Joseph Wilson from police community relations attended along with Lt. John Kenney and Paula Snow, who supervises 911 dispatchers. George Fernandez of the city's Electrical Department also attended. Topics include:

Recent crimes: Recent crimes in the eastern edge of the M-C neighborhood include two car thefts, about a dozen car break-ins, and numerous incidents of vandalism in the past six months. There was also a report of persistent noise at the skateboarding area at the high school, and recent car tire slashings on Fayette Street.

Crime patterns: Police presented a compilation of crimes in Cambridge covering the past three months.

Street lights: Poor lighting in some areas might be a contributing factor to crime. Fernandez said he can improve lighting at the south end of Antrim Street by adding a street light. He said that many of the street light bulbs are dimming as they age, but NStar Electric has been slow to replace them. If you notice lights that are dim or periodically going out, you can call George at the Electrical Dept. (617-349-4925). Give the address and, if possible, the pole number.

Reporting crime: How should residents notify the police about crime? People should not confront someone committing a crime. If a crime is reported to 911 as being in progress, the caller should stay on the phone and give as much detail as possible while cruisers get to the scene. The police should get as much information as possible in order to identify the owner of the vehicle, if it is a car theft. After a crime has occurred, the police can accept a report only from the car owner. It is important to report even minor instances of vandalism, as this may give police information for identifying crime patterns and perpetrators.

Police patrols: Three patrol cars are covering the neighborhood at a given time. Cruiser and bike patrols around Antrim and Fayette Streets will be increased on weekend nights through February. Patrols over the Christmas/New Year's holidays were also increased.

Detering crime: How can residents make it harder to break into and steal cars? Clubs are useful, it was explained, although the steering wheel itself is easy to break into. A longer club-like contraption is sold that locks the brake pedal, making the car even more difficult to steal. Lo-Jack is helpful in recovering cars. We also discussed the deterrent value of etching VIN numbers on all the car windows.

Neighborhood Watch: Sgt. Wilson is available (e-

mail jwilson@cambridgepolice.org) to help community residents set up a Neighborhood Crime Watch. People who attended the Dec. 16 meeting will be contacted via e-mail when info is available about a crime watch in the Antrim/Fayette area. If you have questions or ideas, contact Patsy Baudoin at 354-7409 patsyb@shore.net or Amy Meltzer at 492-7545 ameltzerma@attbi.com.

Broadway Market promises to reopen after renovation

The Broadway Market closed suddenly on the morning of New Year's Eve, when a large section of the ceiling fell. Fortunately for the employees and customers who were in the store at the time, no one was injured in the collapse. There is no definitive word yet on the cause.

Although the operators of the market, which is a joint venture of New England Meats, Ring Brothers Produce, and Broadway Liquors, have announced, in big letters over the entrance, a future "Grand Opening" after "renovation," the length of the needed repairs will surely depend heavily on the contractors who make them.

If, as appears likely, the closing lasts for several months, it will be a difficult time for the vendors and their employees, especially the part-timers who are not eligible for unemployment insurance. This closing is also inconvenient for the many residents and workers in the area left without a nearby source of fresh food of all kinds.

For those who lived in Mid-Cambridge 10 years ago, the closing is sadly reminiscent of the years between 1990 and 1994, after the old Broadway Supermarket went out of business and before the new market opened.

At that time, residents, many without cars, needed a place to buy food. So they worked through the MCNA to do a market study and got the city to support a prospectus for an innovative joint venture of established food specialty retailers. Thanks to the efforts of realtor Brendan Noonan and the Lichter family, who own the property, a group of developers led by Charles McLaughlin and Thomas Mullen eventually made the idea a reality. This group pulled together the joint venture that opened for business in the new Broadway Market in early 1994.

The subsequent success of this operation as much as the sign above the door gives neighbors reason to hope that the road to reopening will be much shorter this time than it was in 1990. In the meantime, the shleps to other squares for food shopping will remind many residents of how vital a service the Broadway Market has provided. All of the owners deserve our thanks for their service to the neighborhood and our wishes for a speedy reopening.

Library concerns

(Continued from Page 1)

important for the Association to affirm the importance of not changing the current ramp placement to the MCNCDC, since this point is still not completely resolved from their perspective.

The MCNA has not had an opportunity to explore the implications of other elements of the massing scheme that relate to the mass itself--the height and width of the addition--as both will influence the quality and character of the open space, which is one of the Association's primary concerns. The mass of the new addition and how the addition relates and affects the character of the existing historic library has also not been explored by the Association. Developing a perspective on this aspect of the project will be an important ongoing consideration of the MCNCDC. Pushing the Design Team to fully explore options that will result in the appropriate size and scale of the addition (such as underground placement of certain elements of the program) would be important for two of the MCNA's

core issues--showcasing the historic library as well as preserving the quality of the open space.

As the design process moves from concept to more details, the specifics that are advanced will have a profound influence on the character of the park and the ultimate landscape design. The MCNA should consider the most appropriate way to ensure integrated planning for the entire site and that the resulting landscape design has the benefit of direct input from Mid-Cambridge residents. Given the magnitude of the potential change to the park, the Association should consider the role it wants to play in advocating for its design.

Be a good neighbor--Shovel that snow!

With our unusually-severe winter weather this year, it's appropriate to remind MC residents of the city's ordinance requiring property owners to clear sidewalks within 12 hours after snow stops falling in the daytime and before 1p.m. when snow falls during the night. Ice must be cleared or treated within 6 hours of the time it forms. Please be a good neighbor and clear your sidewalks. In case of a problem, the DPW has a Sidewalk Hotline which can be used to report problem areas: 617-349-4903.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Wednesday, Jan. 29, 7-9 p.m., MCNA Neighborhood Meeting. See Page 1 for agenda.

Longfellow School cafeteria, 359 Broadway.

Sunday, March 9, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cabin Fever Reliever Pot Luck Brunch, Longfellow School cafeteria.

Winter Term classes at Longfellow Community School have begun and continue through April 17. There are still openings for Recorder and Piano lessons. For info, call Penny Kleespies at 617-349-6260.

Tuesday, March 4, 6-9 p.m., Parent Information Night on summer camps, CRLS media cafeteria. Call Roslyn Shoy at 617-349-6227 for details.

Members 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 scheduling constraints. To join our e-mail list, go to <http://www.mcna.org/feedback.htm>. Be sure to type in your e-mail address.

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

M-C NEWS

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 29