

# M-C News

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

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July, 2003

## Longfellow Community School Saved; Future of Building Still Uncertain

Yielding to three weeks of intense lobbying by neighborhood residents that won the support of all nine city councilors, City Manager Robert Healy on June 5 decided to restore funds for the Longfellow Community School program director in the budget for next fiscal year. When program director Penelope Kleespies received news of the decision, she was also told that the city manager was committed to finding public space for the Community School programs.

The Community School, which offers educational, cultural, and recreational services for all ages, had

## Joan Lorentz Park slated for redesign

The redesign of Joan Lorentz Park was the focus of recent meetings on the Main Library renovation and expansion project. The design team of William Rawn Associates Architects, Ann Beha Architects and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, landscape architects, and Library Design Advisory Committee (DAC) began its first public discussions on the implications of the library expansion project on the Joan Lorentz Park.

The Joan Lorentz Park, Mid-Cambridge's sole park space, is bounded by Broadway on the south and Cambridge Street on the north between Ellery Street on the east and the Cambridge Ridge and Latin School on the west, including the tennis courts.

At the June 10 Library Design Advisory Committee meeting, Michael Van Valkenburgh and Laura Solano of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates led a discussion about the existing conditions, site design opportunities, and challenges presented by the library project. Although one of the questions posed by the landscape architects was 'What additional uses could be accommodated with the new site condition?' resulting from the project, Rich Rossi, Deputy City Manager, made it clear that the city was not wavering from its commitment to keep the park a passive park and that no new uses were to be planned. *(Continued on Page 4)*

initially appeared to be doomed after the Longfellow School closing was announced April 8.

During the summer months, the Community School program will be one of two activities to use the Longfellow School building. Where it will be located in the fall is still undecided. There is no decision yet on the long-term use of the building, either. The Longfellow School program has already moved, and the building remains under the jurisdiction of the School Department. According to School Committee member Alan Price, the disposition of the building is not on the committee's agenda and will have to be initiated by newly hired Superintendent Thomas Fowler-Finn.

Residents' concerns about and ideas for the future of the building will be agenda item at the Coordinating Committee's public meeting on Tuesday, July 22 (see Calendar on Page 4 for details).

Although the original decision to eliminate the Longfellow Community School programs and Longfellow Neighborhood Council from the city's budget was made April 9, it was not until a May 12 meeting of residents in the Longfellow Neighborhood Council came up with the plan of circulating a petition. Within a week, they had gathered about 250 signatures *(Continued on Page 2)*

### Two important surveys in this newsletter

It's unusual to have one survey included in the M-C News, let alone two surveys. But your input is needed on two important neighborhood issues: the Longfellow Community School curriculum and the Joan Lorentz Park design process.

Both issues are pressing ahead over the summer. Please take the time to review and return the surveys as indicated. We thank you in advance for your input.

# Neighbors campaign to save Community School

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that they presented to the City Council at a hearing on the budget.

At the same time, many residents also called, wrote, or emailed city councillors and the city manager in support of the Longfellow program. Six residents spoke at the May 20 City Council budget hearing and were the only organized group of residents at the meeting. Another group of Mid-Cambridge residents attended and spoke at the May 28 meeting of the City Council's Committee on Civic Unity. These speakers included George Bossarte, Charles Rogers, Victoria Harris, Paul Levine, Bob Richards, John Pitkin, Amy Meltzer, Robert Winters, and Ruth Walsh.

## Funding Restored

By June 2, Councilor Marjorie Decker submitted a City Council order that was sponsored by all nine councilors asking the city manager to restore funding to all the Community Schools that had been cut. The city manager's decision on June 5 restored funding only to the Longfellow program.

Thanks to this decision, the one remaining municipal program that serves children and families in Mid-Cambridge has been saved, and program director Penelope Kleespies can continue to work in the neighborhood she knows so well.

Much credit and thanks are due to our city councilors, especially Marjorie Decker, Denise Simmons, and Mayor Michael Sullivan. Above all, credit must go to

the organized efforts of many residents that were led by the Longfellow Neighborhood Council and supported by the MCNA. The council held a well-earned "victory celebration" at the school on June 24.

## Questions Remain

Yet many issues still need to be resolved. Where will the Community School program be based in the fall? Can it continue to use space in the Longfellow building? What will be the long-term use of the building? (There are reports of official plans for temporary use by the Main Public Library and the School Department administration, and suggestions by residents for affordable housing, artists' spaces, and a community center. A group of MCNA members is working on a petition.)

Can we keep the heavily used courtyard playground and side-yard tot lots? What arrangements are being made for security?

There will be updates and open discussion on all of these questions at the public MCNA coordinating committee meeting on July 22. All MCNA members are welcome to attend.

For over three decades, the Longfellow Community School has served neighborhood residents with a variety of programs, including afterschool for children and a broad range of classes. All residents are encouraged to complete the survey enclosed with this newsletter to guide the program director in developing next year's curriculum.

## Ice Cream Social Was A Cool Treat

The first heat wave of summer made its appearance just in time for our MCNA Annual Neighborhood Ice Cream Social on June 25. Approximately 90 MCNA members attended the outdoor event, held at the Joan Lorentz Park on Broadway. The ice cream, in several flavors, was generously donated by Toscanini's Ice Cream, and Acme Dry Ice Co. provided the ice. Many thanks to both donors.



Coordinating Committee members and other volunteers dish out goodies and gossip at the Ice Cream Social. (Photo by Abe Rosner)

## Annual Meeting yields revised bylaws

Revised MCNA bylaws, calling for expanding the number of neighborhood meetings and open Coordinating Committee meetings, were adopted at the MCNA Annual Meeting held May 21 at CRLS.

The meeting was a chance to both socialize and attend to important MCNA business. Preceding the business portion of the meeting was a brown-bag dinner/social event that allowed members to catch up on neighborhood happenings.

The main business items were: election of the 2003- 2004 Coordinating Committee (CC) from the slate of eleven nominated members (see box at right for details) and a vote on proposed revisions to the MCNA bylaws that had been in place since the Association's start in 1975.

The revised bylaws are now posted on the Web at [www.mcna.org](http://www.mcna.org) or a copy can be mailed to you by contacting Joan Pickett at 617-497-8816.

The revisions to the bylaws, a process started about 18 months ago by former Coordinating Committee members Keren Schlomy and Rachael Solem, is an attempt to make certain the bylaws were relevant to the way the MCNA has actually been operating over the past several years.

There was significant debate among the approximately 40 members who attended the business section of the meeting on some of the proposed key changes, including the number of meetings to be held annually and the nature of the Coordinating Committee meetings.

The number of neighborhood meetings to be held annually, capped at four in the original by laws, was felt to be an important operating principle worth preserving. However, it was recognized that circumstances could change rapidly and that more flexibility

### An 'angel' for Swedenborg?

A reliable source has reported that the Swedenborg Church congregation has found a benefactor to sponsor the purchase of the historic Swedenborg Chapel at the corner of Quincy and Kirkland Streets. The M-C News is seeking to confirm this report and to learn details.

The congregation has been attempting to raise \$2.2 million to buy the chapel building from the Swedenborgian Seminary, and rumor has it that Harvard would be interested in purchasing the building if the current congregation is unable to raise the funds.

should be given to the Coordinating Committee.

By a two-thirds majority vote of the membership, the bylaw language was changed to state that at least one, but ordinarily not more than four, neighborhood meetings should be held each year, unless there is urgent or unforeseen business that would require the attention of the membership.

The other key discussion point was on the nature of Coordinating Committee meetings, which in practice have been open but typically not held in public venues in recent years. Over time, the membership's interest in attending appears to have waned, and therefore the change in wording was proposed to substitute the word "public" with the word "open." After much discussion, the membership voted by a two-thirds majority to accept the wording change from public to open.

However, given the considerable conversation on this point, the CC has committed to having periodic public meetings, including the next CC meeting, set for July 22 at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School media cafeteria. Persons interested in attending the July 22 meeting should consult the MCNA web site for further details. If you do not have web access, please contact Joan Pickett at 617-497-8816.

### Three New Faces on MCNA Coordinating Committee

Serving their first term as Coordinating Committee members are George Bossarte, David Davidson, and Margaret McMahon, who were elected to the 2003-2004 MCNA coordinating committee at the annual meeting along with 8 veterans. The remaining members of the 11-person committee are: Ted Carpenter, Elizabeth Gombosi, Frankie Lieberman, Alex Loud, Doane Perry, John Pitkin, Joan Pickett, and Laura Roberts.

Officers of the Coordinating Committee elected at the May 24 meeting of that group were:

President – Joan Pickett

Treasurer - Frankie Lieberman

Membership Secretary – Elizabeth Gombosi

Recording Secretary(s) – Doane Perry, Laura

Roberts

The Coordinating Committee wishes to thank Martha Osler, Keren Schlomy and Rachael Solem for their past years of dedicated service on the committee.

## Rossi: No new uses planned for Joan Lorentz park

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The implications of the project on the park has been a major focal point for the neighborhood. At the MCNA Annual Meeting, the membership approved the appointment of Elena Saporta and Francis Spinks to a Landscape Architects' Working Group to meet frequently with Alan Burne, project director. As landscape architects and Mid-Cambridge residents, both Elena and Francis are uniquely qualified to represent the neighborhood: Francis was also involved in the initial planning and design of the park over 25 years ago. Their role will be to provide input proactively to the landscape design process reflecting the neighborhood's interest in the park. To help guide that process, the MCNA wants to provide specific input and has designed a survey to capture Mid-Cambridge residents' perspective on the current park design. A survey is included in this newsletter. We encourage you to complete and return it so we can accurately relay your desires to our representatives and to the project design team.

At the next DAC public meeting set for Tuesday, July 29, 6-9 PM in the Morse School, the landscape architects are expected to present a summary of the prior DAC discussion and some preliminary conceptual designs for consideration.

### MCNDC Library Meeting

As the design team and DAC move ahead with design process, review and approval of components of the conceptual design is simultaneously occurring at the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission (MCNDC) in a phased manner: The MCNDC devoted its June 23 special meeting to approve two key aspects of the project: placement of the parking ramp for the new underground garage and connection of the historic and new buildings. Despite strong objections from the commission and several members of the public to piecemeal consideration of project details without an overall plan, the design team, with strong backing from Rossi, insisted on this approach. The meeting lasted four hours.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

**Tuesday, July 22, Public MCNA Coordinating Committee meeting, 7-9 p.m.,** Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School media cafeteria, 459 Broadway. This meeting will be open to the public. Please check [www.mcna.org](http://www.mcna.org) or contact Joan Pickett at 617-497-8816 for agenda details.

**Tuesday, July 29, Library Design Advisory Committee Meeting, from 6-9 p.m.** at the Morse School, 140 Granite St.

**Wednesday, September 10, Library Design Advisory Committee Meeting, 6-9 p.m.,** Media Cafeteria, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway.

### M-C NEWS

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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, Paula Lovejoy. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.