

# M-C News

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

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## MCNA Opposes Tunnel; Proposes 'Rules for Living With Harvard Expansion'

The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association voted on January 23 to oppose Harvard University's request to the City of Cambridge for an easement to build a tunnel under Cambridge Street to link two proposed new buildings at 1737 and 1730 Cambridge into a single academic complex.

The proposed tunnel will be the subject of a hearing of the full City Council at a special meeting on Wednesday, April 3 (see meeting notice at right).

Following a presentation by association president John Pitkin on how the five-year process led to the current impasse over the tunnel for the CGIS, also known as the Knafel Center, the association also endorsed the goal of clearer and more enforceable guidelines for future Harvard projects in the neighborhood. Mr. Pitkin argued that Harvard expansion will

## M-C Committee Identifies Library Design Issues

The Open Space and Design Committee has been hard at work focusing on design issues for the main library addition on Broadway, while the city has reportedly hired an architect for the project.

The MCNA formed the committee a year ago, with a mandate to develop a "neighborhood voice" detailing our concerns and interests regarding the design and construction of the main library. The project calls for expanding the library by some 90,000 square feet, and redesigning the adjacent Joan Lorentz Park and high school complex.

After several meetings to define the issues, the Open Space and Design Committee is preparing a position paper to present to the Coordinating Committee, which in turn will prepare the final version to be presented to the membership of the MCNA.

The report will consider four major categories of concern:

**1) Open Space:** In this category are the protection  
(Continued on Page 2)

continue for the foreseeable future, and that we therefore need better and clearer rules for living with this expansion.

### Tunnel Pros and Cons

Discussion of the tunnel started with presentations in favor, given by John Moos, chair of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission. The dissenting argument was presented by Alex Loud, who attended all of the public hearings on the project.

(Continued on Page 2)

## City Council To Vote on Tunnel Project April 3

Harvard University's request for a tunnel easement under Cambridge Street to connect the two buildings of its proposed Knafel Center for Government and International Studies will be the subject of a hearing before the Cambridge City Council.

**Wednesday, April 3, 2002,  
at 6 p.m. in City Hall**

The tunnel easement marks both the final important legal hurdle for the project and the City Council's first opportunity to assert itself in the long debate about university expansion in neighborhoods since 1981, when it regulated institutional uses in low-density residential districts. How the council deals with this application will do more than set an important precedent, it may set a new direction for Cambridge's and Mid-Cambridge's relations with the university.

According to State Rep. and former Mayor Alice Wolf, we are now at "a serious turning point in relations between the university and the city." Harvard has a new, active president. The City Council has just formed a new Committee on University Relations.

*The hearing is your chance to hear the issues and let the council know how you feel. So save the date and come on April 3!*

## Residents Assess Impact of Harvard Tunnel

(Continued from Page 1)

Mr. Moos said that the tunnel would lead to a better design by providing a separate channel of movement for users of the buildings and the general public. It would also allow both buildings to be served by a single Neighborhood Conservation District and its current use is predominantly residential.

This "transitional-institutional" district includes over 200 units of housing and the Broadway Marketplace, as well as a Harvard parking garage, office building and dormitory. It is comprised of all of the Prescott-Cambridge Street/Felton/Broadway and Prescott/Broadway/Ware/Harvard Street blocks, and parts of the Quincy/Kirkland/Sumner/Cambridge Street and Remington/Mass. Ave./Harvard Street blocks.

Because it lies just a short block from Harvard Yard, the core of the campus, there will be pressure to extend more intensive campus uses, such as classrooms, dorms and meeting facilities, into this area and displace much-needed stable housing. Mr. Pitkin said that this pressure should be resisted.

A second problem with existing regulations, according to Mr. Pitkin, is that the bulk of Harvard's large

garage on Felton Street is not counted toward zoning limits. The effect of this exclusion is to greatly undercut the Conservation District Commission's authority to control the bulk of any further Harvard construction on the block, including that of the Knafel Center.

### Future Harvard Expansion

Finally, Mr. Pitkin noted that residents' concerns about future university acquisition of residences in Mid-Cambridge had been heightened by the recent news that Harvard is purchasing 120 units of new housing on the Polaroid site on Pleasant Street. Also, he said, Harvard's 1972 "red line" commitment not to expand into residential areas has apparently lapsed.

By a vote of 36 in favor and 0 against, the meeting approved the formation of a task force to propose specific measures to address these shortcomings in the current rules for Harvard expansion. The task force was requested to report their proposals to association members at our May 15 Annual Meeting.

The text of the resolution and a map of the transitional-institutional area can be found on the MCNA Web site, [www.MCNA.org](http://www.MCNA.org). Click on News, and March 2002.

## Library Renovation Project Moves Forward

(Continued from Page 1)

of trees; tot lot and overall park design; garage area (particularly bike/pedestrian access and parking); school use; light, air and shade factors; the diagonal walk from Broadway to Cambridge; and life after construction.

**2) Architecture:** Since there is yet no design, we cannot be specific about our concerns, but we will make a strong statement that our neighborhood has a major and legitimate interest in the appearance of the addition, including its height, size, materials used, etc.

**3) Building use:** Our particular interest here is the opportunity to use the building for community meetings and events. In addition, we should consider the impact on pedestrian traffic of the high school's expanded use of the library.

**4) Construction Impact:** Included in this category will be a definitive timetable of construction; its impact on the design of parking facilities and traffic flow; transportation for the temporary library facility; noise and safety during construction; and again, life after construction.

In a report to the City Council on February 26, City

Manager Robert W. Healy reported that "An architect has been selected, and a contract is being negotiated for the design of the main library restoration and expansion."

### Rising Costs?

Unofficial sources at City Hall report that the contract is largely completed and may be ready for signing the week of March 25. A Request for Proposal notice published in the *Cambridge Chronicle* on March 20 for a construction management contract sets estimated costs for the library expansion project at \$36 million. This is approximately \$4 million more than the \$31.8 million bond authorization passed by the City Council in 2000.

The architects for the project are William Rawn Associates in association with Ann Beha Architects.

The city manager also expects to appoint a design advisory committee made up of city staff and residents. Several Mid-Cambridge neighborhood residents have applied for committee membership.

# Neighborhood Notices

## Newsletter Funding Is Up to You!

All the costs of printing and postage for this newsletter and the other expenses of running the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association, including yard signs, Web site, and social events, are paid with contributions. The Association charges **no dues**. It receives **no government funds**.

Earlier this month you should have received an appeal for contributions to the association. By press time, over 80 members had sent in donations. *If you are one of them, thank you! If you aren't, there's still time to pay your share. All you need to do is mail your check to the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association, P.O. Box 907, Cambridge, MA 02238.* Thank you!

## MCNA Opportunities to Participate

Member participation is the life blood of our Neighborhood Association. There are lots of opportunities to help—writing for this newsletter, maintaining our yard signs and Web site, working on an issues on a committee, or running the organization on the Coordinating Committee.

If you or someone you know would like to get more involved, please contact John Pitkin at 617-492-4035 or [jpitkin@world.com](mailto:jpitkin@world.com).

If you would like to be a candidate for the Coordinating Committee, nomination papers for the May elections are due April 24. Please contact Martha Osler, membership secretary, at 617-864-2668 or [mosler@earthlink.net](mailto:mosler@earthlink.net) for more information.

## Cambridge Health Alliance Board Vacancy

There is a vacancy on the board of trustees of the Cambridge Health Alliance to be filled by a Mid-Cambridge resident nominated by the Neighborhood Association.

The CHA is a major regional health care provider, owning three hospitals and 20 health care centers. It operates Network Health, which is similar to an HMO. As the owner of The Cambridge Hospital, the CHA is also a major institution in Mid-Cambridge.

The board seat was previously held by Bill Craig, a resident of Greenough Ave., who resigned in February as part of a reorganization of the board. Mr. Craig had served the CHA and the association since the seat was first created by a 1993 agreement between the associa-

tion and the CHA.

In addition to the regular duties of CHA board membership, responsibilities include oversight of the association-CHA agreement and serving as liaison between the CHA and the association. Initial appointment is for a two-year term.

Applications are due April 30. Please contact John Pitkin at 617-492-4035 if you are interested. The Coordinating Committee will review applications and make a recommendation for approval by the membership at the annual meeting, May 15. Appointment will be made by the city manager.

## Swap Plants With Neighbors May 4

The Mid-Cambridge neighborhood annual plant swap will be held Saturday, May 4, from 10 to 12 in the morning in Fayette Park, across Fayette Street from the Longfellow School, 359 Broadway. In case of serious downpour, the rain date is May 5. For more information, e-mail [HMSnively@aol.com](mailto:HMSnively@aol.com).

## New Fund to Protect Inman Square Tulip Tree

Neighbors have recently raised funds to help the owner of 1436 Cambridge Street pay to protect the large tulip tree on his property from being cut down by the owner of an abutting property. A proposal to protect the tree by designating it as a historic landmark has been stalled in the City Council for over a year. The effort is headed by former City Councilor Jim Braude, Rachel Faith, and John Pitkin. For information on how you can help, please call 617-576-4648 or email [rfwomon@mindspring.com](mailto:rfwomon@mindspring.com).

## New Tea Service Proposed for Neighborhood

Four partners seeking to open a small, 19-seat, Asian tea shop at 955 Massachusetts Ave. discussed their plan with the MCNA Coordinating Committee at its March 7 meeting.

The shop, to be called Dado Tea, would serve tea in the classical Asian tradition as well as a selection of baked goods and other food. In order to do this, it will require a zoning variance, because the location is in a residential zone.

The association will post notice of the Board of Zoning Appeals hearing on [our Web site](http://ourWebSite), [www.MCNA.org](http://www.MCNA.org), and if the case is still pending, will invite the partners to our annual meeting on May 15.

## Phase 2 renovations to begin at City Hall Annex

Closed since early 2000, the City Hall Annex at 57 Inman Street is undergoing major renovation. Phase 1 of the project has recently been completed. If you look closely, you'll notice that the interior has been totally gutted, due to the removal of asbestos and mold contamination.

The renovations were triggered by environmental tests that found high levels of mold in the building's heating ducts. Some sources blamed an oversized boiler that pumped too much heat through the ducts of the old building, with moisture accumulating inside the walls. The result was an elevated level of mold, which the city had to totally eradicate before the site could be renovated and reoccupied. According to the deputy city manager's office, this phase has cost the city approximately \$740,000. While some abutters have expressed concern about the contaminant removal process, most have been pleased with the way the work has progressed.

The next phase—reconfiguring the interior and modifying the exterior—includes new windows, the original decorative roof parapet overlooking Inman

Street, and a canopied entrance and lobby on the Broadway side. According to the city's public information officer, Phase 2 of the project, the reconditioning and construction, is estimated to begin in about two months at an approximate cost of \$5.2 million. Phase 3, the final phase of the project, involves the interior furnishings and has not yet gone out to bid.

The history of the building has certainly been an interesting one. Originally built as the Harvard School in 1871, the site sustained a fire in 1899 that ruined its original mansard roof. Rebuilt with a new third floor, it remained a public school until around 1931 when the Longfellow School was constructed across Broadway.

Since that time the building has been used as municipal offices. When the project is completed, the departments of Traffic, Parking and Transportation, as well as Community Development, the Animal Commission, and the Arts Council, will return to the building. The Annex will become one of the city's first "green" buildings, relying on construction strategies that reduce negative environmental impacts.

### NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

**Wednesday, April 3, 6 PM** City Council hearing on Harvard's request for an easement to build a tunnel under Cambridge Street to link two new academic buildings. City Hall, Mass. Ave.

**Friday, May 3, 4 PM** "Vivace," the 13th annual Longfellow Community School music recital. To be held in the school cafeteria, 359 Broadway.

**Saturday, May 4, 10 AM-Noon** Mid-Cambridge neighborhood plant swap, Fayette Park, across Fayette Street from the Longfellow School.

**Wednesday, May 15, 7 PM.** MCNA Annual Neighborhood Meeting. Location to be announced.

**June 24-August 2, 10 AM to Noon** weekdays (tentative schedule--exact schedule to be posted at park at start of program). "Park Days," the annual summer program at the Hancock Street Park. Potluck desserts on 7/11, 7/18, 7/25, and 8/1. Sponsored by Longfellow Council and City of Cambridge. For info on all Longfellow events and schedules, contact Penelope Kleespies at (617) 349-6260.

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