

M-C News

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

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Library construction mitigation stirs residents' concerns

What effect will the massive reconstruction of the Main Library and Joan Lorentz Park have on Mid-Cambridge residents? With the project due to begin this summer and continue until 2007, a group of park users and abutters met April 20 to discuss their concerns.

The group, led by Kate Vrijmoet, was concerned that the city has not responded to residents' requests for information about construction mitigation plans--a normal part of any large project such as this, which involves a new 64,000-square-foot library addition and parking garage. Currently Expansion Project officials are not required to communicate with the neighborhood.

The group agreed to urge project officials to provide residents with a comprehensive view of the construction plan and schedule, to include construction mitigation more strongly in an upcoming bid going out to contrac-

tors in mid-July, and to find a comparable project such as the Baldwin School with a successful mitigation.

In February, the Mid-Cambridge Conservation District Commission (MCNDC) approved the mitigation plan. It is an outline of factors for bidders to consider, including dust and rodent control, washing the wheels of trucks departing the site, limits and restrictions on parking and encouraging use of public transit.

MCNA asked the MCNDC to require that the expansion project make several changes to the park design and put in place strong construction mitigation procedures. Expansion project director Alan Burne responded that the project could not make the park design changes.

Burne described the latest park design at the December MCNA neighborhood meeting. Neighbors described what they supported and suggested for the park design. The neighborhood's park advisors, Francis Spinks, Elena Saporta and David Szlag, reviewed the plans. The MCNA Coordinating Committee has formed three neighborhood groups--on park design, on construction mitigation and on the tot lot--to work with the Expansion Project.

Neighborhood planning, elections top agenda for Annual Meeting May 18

Please plan to attend the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association's annual meeting, to be held in the media cafeteria of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School on 459 Broadway from 7 to 9 p.m. on Wednesday, May 18.

Jeff Roberts, neighborhood planner for the city's Community Development Department, will present "Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Study Update," a report that describes planning issues of concern to neighborhood residents and outlines actions the city is taking to address them. Jeff will have copies of the update available. The full report is available online at http://www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/cp/neighbor/midcamb_ns_update.pdf. Additional info is

available at the neighborhood planning Web page for Mid-Cambridge, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/cp/neighbor/area6.html>.

There will also be discussions of the Main Library Expansion project and the long-term plans for the Longfellow School building.

Members will elect for a one-year term the members of the Coordinating Committee, which plans and executes the association's activities. The following members have submitted nomination papers: George Bossarte, Cathy Edgerly, Frankie Lieberman, Margaret McMahon, Doane Perry, Joan Pickett, John Pitkin, Kate Vrijmoet, and David Szlag. All except Edgerly and Szlag are incumbents currently serving on the committee.

Neighbors find few problems with High School Extension

MCNA members attending the Dec. 11 neighborhood meeting discussed a wide range of concerns about the new High School Extension program, located in the former Longfellow School building on Broadway, with School Committeeman Marc McGovern. Issues included questions about the day-to-day operations of the program, the role of the consultant hired to help on the project, future uses of the building, and how the program can be improved.

The High School Extension opened for the fall semester 2004, offering students who are struggling in the larger classrooms of Cambridge Rindge & Latin a place where they can get more personalized attention from faculty. Smaller class sizes are the key to this approach, and the Extension has maintained an average class size of 12 students, compared with Rindge & Latin's average class size of 25 students.

While it is too early to tell whether the program is a success, some early indications have been positive:

- Attendance at the High School Extension was 87 percent, on par with the 91 percent attendance rate at Rindge & Latin, and a vast improvement over what Extension students were exhibiting before.
- The school maintains a similar demographic balance with regard to race and gender as Rindge & Latin, protecting it from becoming a "dumping ground" for students who are not succeeding on the main campus.
- There have been no serious complaints about students by Mid-Cambridge neighbors (with the exception of an incident where students were smoking on someone's outside steps, that was apparently dealt with).

Tax abatements granted

Our very limited follow-up of last November's survey of Mid-Cambridge homeowners who applied for abatements of their property taxes found that five have received abatements, all of more than 10 percent of the value. None reported being denied.

In view of the interest expressed at our December neighborhood meeting, we are seeking more comprehensive information on the results of the abatements from the City Assessor's office and will report them at a future meeting.

A hint: If you think your assessment may be too high, one thing to check is the square footage the Assessors' records say you have. (It's on the tax bill.) Two respondents to our small survey reported that erroneously high square footages had significantly inflated their taxes. For more info, contact John Pitkin at john_pitkin@earthlink.net.

The new program relies on the help of a private consultant, Richard Milburn Academy, to help Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) run and manage the Extension. The consultant is on a two-year contract with an option for a third year. The ultimate goal is to have the program run entirely by CPS.

Metrics are used to measure the success or failure of Milburn Academy's efforts, including examining classroom attendance, students' MCAS scores and others. Milburn can see its paycheck reduced if outcomes are not being met, and in the case of severe non-performance, CPS has the right to cancel the contract in 30 days. McGovern stressed that, given Cambridge's history with programs like this, expectations were set very low regarding the Extension. However, he sees no reason why this project cannot succeed, provided the focus remains on students who are motivated but having difficulty. He noted that students must apply to this program, be interviewed and accepted. They cannot be referred by a teacher or administrator.

Once accepted, the student should experience an environment that is supportive and challenging. McGovern said that until the creation of the Extension, the city had no program to address these students' needs.

The school currently has 50 students, but intends to expand to 100 students at full capacity. For more information, check the Extension's Web site at <http://www.cpsd.us/HSEP/>.

MCNA to bestow Good Neighbor Awards

The Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Association is establishing the "Good Neighbor Awards" program to recognize organizations, institutions and individuals that have contributed to the welfare and general improvement of the Mid-Cambridge area. Any member of MCNA can make nominations for the award.

The MCNA Coordinating Committee will choose the recipient and present the award at our annual meeting in May.

The award will be a certificate, plaque or emblem. We welcome design suggestions from members. The purpose of the award is to encourage activities that realize MCNA's goals for improving the quality of life and the environment in the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood.

Summer events: Parties, yard sales & ice cream

Ice Cream Social

Please mark your calendars and don't miss MCNA's annual Ice Cream Social party, held in Joan Lorentz Park at the corner of Ellery and Broadway from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on Wednesday, June 29. The rain date is Thursday, June 30 at the same time. MCNA will serve free donated Toscanini ice cream and lemonade. This is a great occasion to meet your neighbors.



Plant Swap

It's that time of year again. The spring 2005 Mid-Cambridge Plant Swap will take place Saturday, May 7, from noon to 2 p.m. at Fayette Park (across from the Longfellow School, off Broadway). Rain date—in case of downpour only—is Sunday, May 8, same time.

Bring anything that's growing in too much abundance in your garden. Elegant packaging is not required, but it helps to write down the names of plants. We expect to have perennials, biannual seedlings, seeds, potted plants, catalogs, pots, and lots of "whatever."

If you, or a friend, would like to work in lovely area gardens for decent pay a day or a few days per week, contact Jane at Jane_katz@post.harvard.edu.

If you know someone who wants to garden but has no space, the Cambridge Friends Meeting has spaces they'd like cared for and will mentor a new gardener. For additional info, please email Helen Snively at HMSnively@aol.com.

Neighborhood-wide yard sales

Get rid of your worthless junk--and maybe buy some priceless antiques--at the first annual neighborhood yard sale event! MCNA will help promote Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood yard sales on June 11.

Antrim Street does a yard sale and block party yearly. Ellery Street will be joining in this year. Please let MCNA know if you would like to organize a block-wide yard sale for your neighborhood.

Watch for notices about multiple block-wide yard sales going on in various Mid-Cambridge neighborhoods on June 11. Check our Web site (www.mcna.org) for more detailed information as we get closer to the event date, and watch for postings on the red neighborhood bulletin boards.

Block parties on Ellery & Antrim Streets

Building on the precedent set by the established Antrim Street block party and street-wide yard sale, Ellery Street will be joining in the fun this year, on June 11.

Longfellow Summer Program: Music, dance, yoga & more

The Longfellow Neighborhood Council is preparing for its summer program of music, dance, and yoga classes, and the "Park Days" activities in the parks. To get the schedule of events, email Penelope Kleespies at Kleefellow@aol.com, or call her at 617-349-6260.

The Longfellow Council offers a variety of programs and events focused on the neighborhood and operates out of the former Longfellow School building on Broadway. The council is guided by a group of Longfellow area residents who care about their neighborhood and who meet regularly to discuss the issues.

A new project the council has taken up is an **Oral History** of the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood. If you know of anyone who should be included, please contact Penelope. Also, if there is any particular class or activity that you would like to see offered, please let her know.

Get on our email list!

If you have not been receiving MCNA notifications by email and think you should, please resend your email address to Elizabeth Gombosi, at elizabeth_gombosi@harvard.edu. About 70 people have been dropped from the email list because their messages have been returned as not deliverable. Some of these recipients have probably changed email addresses. If you are on the notifications list, don't assume you will also receive the newsletter that way, as there is a separate list for newsletters. If you prefer to receive this newsletter by email, please send Elizabeth a message to that effect.

Holiday fete a success

Many thanks to Kate Vrijmoet, a member of the MCNA Coordinating Committee, her husband John and their daughters for opening their newly renovated home on Ellery Street for the annual MCNA Holiday gala on Dec. 4.

About 100 members and families crowded the house, enjoying an array of delicious dishes brought by neighbors and homemade treats prepared by Kate.

The wine and soft drink bar plus the door "offerings" enhanced the coffers of the organization by \$215. Everyone at the holiday event had a glorious time catching up with neighbors.

Health Alliance to provide emergency snow parking

The Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA), which operates Cambridge Hospital, will offer residents on Leonard Street, Line Street and a portion of Cambridge Street free parking in the hospital garage during declared city snow emergencies next winter.

The hospital will notify residents how to use the offer in the fall.

The emergency parking offer is part of an agreement between MCNA and CHA made at the time CHA was seeking approval for its new mammography unit, located in the courtyard on the east end of the main building. In July the crane beside the hospital on Cambridge Street will lift the prefabricated modular unit into place on footings installed during the spring.

The project should be completed during the summer. The temporary construction trailer on the Cambridge Street side will be removed.

Also, CHA has moved a rehabilitation program off-

site to Assembly Square Mall and completed a new maternity program.

MCNA reviews curb cut requests

The MCNA Coordinating Committee (CC) is pleased that the City Council requires that neighborhood associations have the opportunity to review requests for approval of curb cuts before the council decides to approve or reject the request.

In February the CC approved a request by the Main Library Expansion Project for a curb cut at 448 Broadway for the access ramp to the planned underground parking garage in front of the main library, while noting neighbors' stated concerns about lack of traffic calming and construction mitigation planning (Story, Page 1). In April the CC approved a request by Oaktree Development to move an existing curb cut at 48 Inman St.

Wouldn't it be useful if Cambridge Traffic and Parking was required to ask the neighborhood associations about changes to parking spaces and meters and restrictions?

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Wednesday, May 18, 7-9 p.m. MCNA Annual Meeting, media cafeteria, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 359 Broadway. See story on Page 1 for agenda and details.

Wednesday, June 29, Annual Ice Cream Social, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Joan Lorentz Park, corner of Ellery and Broadway. Rain date is Thursday, June 30 at the same time.

Longfellow Summer Program: Individual and group classes in music, dance, yoga and more, for adults and children. For info, contact Penelope Kleespies at kleefellow@aol.com or call her at 617-349-6260.

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editor:* Paula Lovejoy. *Reporters:* Sam Seidel, Doane Perry, John Pitkin, Kate Vrijmoet, Margaret Tuny McMahon, George Bossarte, Paula Lovejoy. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

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Meeting Notice

Wednesday, May 18