

# M-C News

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

Vol. 9, No. 4

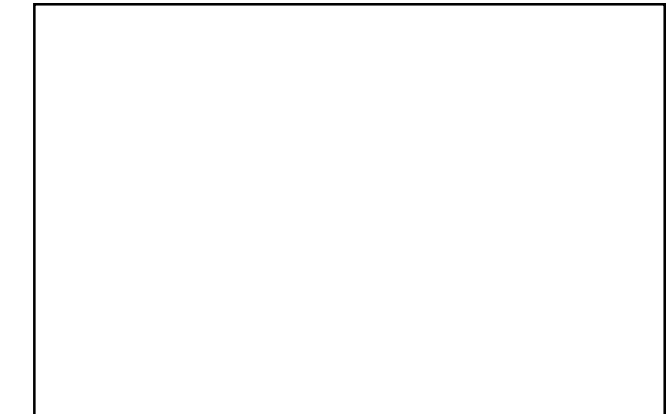
October, 2000

## Commission Approves Revised Knafel Project

In a split vote on September 18, the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission granted a "certificate of appropriateness" to Harvard University for the construction of the new Knafel Center for Government and International Studies complex on both sides of Cambridge Street at Prescott Street.

The certificate filed October 6 states that the construction is "not incongruous to the historic aspects or architectural character of the building or district" (see picture at right). The decision includes a long list of 'binding' conditions on design, construction mitigation, access, parking and operation of the facility.

Four members of the Commission (Steven Cohen, *(Continued on Page 2)*)



**Rendering of the two redesigned Knafel Center buildings, viewed north from Prescott Street. The top two floors of each building are round and clad in glass.**

(By Pei Cobb Freed & Partners. Reproduced from photocopy.)

## The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association Is 25! Come help celebrate 25 years of service to the neighborhood

Sunday, October 22 6-9 pm  
Cambridge Rindge and Latin School  
459 Broadway - Main Cafeteria

Guest Speaker: Comedian Jimmy Tingle  
Awards: For Service to the Neighborhood  
Food: Appetizers and Desserts from local restaurants and markets  
Music: Jacques Chenier Duo  
Good Company: Friends and Neighbors

\$15/person at the door: Tickets can be reserved by calling 492-4035 or e-mail [mosler@world.std.com](mailto:mosler@world.std.com).

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Longfellow Neighborhood Council

# University's Knafel Project Approved

(Continued from Page 1)

Nancy Goodwin, Tony Hsiao and chair John Moos) were won over by the new design, which was first presented by architect Harry Cobb in May, half-way through the review process. Martha Osler, the only Commission member who lives in the area, cast the one dissenting vote.

Mr. Cobb proposed the redesign in response to the Commission's expressed dissatisfaction with an earlier design that was "neither traditional nor modern."

The project consists of a matched pair of four-story buildings to replace Coolidge Hall (1737 Cambridge Street), University Information Services (1730 Cambridge Street) and 96 Prescott Street. The May redesign makes a complete break with traditional building forms and materials.

While the first two floors of each building are still rectangular and covered with terra cotta tiles, the top two floors are now circular and have a glass outer skin with windows in a secondary inner glass wall. This innovative and energy-conserving type of wall has been used in Europe, but not in North America.

The new design keeps the same amount of office, classroom and library space as in the March proposal, but reduces hallways and other common spaces.

Harvard also still plans an underground loading dock on the Sumner Road-Gund Hall block, a tunnel under Cambridge Street to connect the two buildings, and a massive amount of underground construction. (More information on the project is available on the university's web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~planning/cgis/>.)

## Neighborhood Objections

Despite the slight reduction in the buildings' mass, 5 feet greater setbacks on Cambridge Street and increased open space in the area between Bromley Court and Foxcroft Manor apartment buildings (84 Prescott Street and 1716 Cambridge Street), the revised proposal failed to win over the neighbors in attendance at the MCNCDC public hearings.

Many neighbors opposed the classroom use in the proposed buildings, which abut or face four residential buildings, including three apartment buildings, and expressed concerns about the effects of greatly increased foot traffic and vehicular traffic. Area residents voiced nearly unanimous opposition to the revised design.

The MCNA had objected to the massing and access, exterior treatment and impacts of access of the March design. The May redesign made some improve-

ments in the massing and access, by lowering the buildings, pulling them back from rear property lines, and moving one entrance, but made no definitive improvement in the exterior treatment or traffic and parking impacts. The university has also not addressed our Association's outstanding request for a long-term plan for the area before the Knafel project goes ahead.

## Nine Public Hearings

The Commission's hearings were thorough to a fault. They lasted over 35 hours in nine sessions spread over almost six months, and included numerous detailed and lengthy presentations by Mr. Cobb and other Harvard representatives.

The tightly controlled process covered pertinent aspects of the March and May plans in great detail, sometimes more than once. Each phase of the proceedings included a presentation by Harvard, questions of fact from the Commission and members of the public, and public comments on one specific aspect of the project. As a result, people who wanted to address a particular aspect of the project were required to sit through multiple four-hour sessions before having a chance to speak.

Public attendance started at over fifty at the first hearings in March and April, and dwindled by half at the final hearings in September.

## Conditions of Knafel Approval

The MCNCDC's approval for the Knafel Center includes nine "binding conditions which are necessary to fulfill the objectives of the District."

- One requires that "further development" and "additional details" of the facade, terra cotta and glass siding, windows and ground-floor treatment "be submitted for Commission approval."
- Another requires a plan for construction impact mitigation and communication with neighbors to be submitted "for Commission approval."
- Another requires Harvard to "report back" with a plan for additional use of the Broadway Garage by neighborhood residents.

Since the Commission has already issued the project a Certificate of Appropriateness, its ability to require possible changes in response to these later submissions is unclear at best.

More information on the Commission's findings and conditions can be found on its web site at <http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~historic>.

# New Ambulatory Care Center Opens at Hospital

The new Cambridge Hospital Ambulatory Care Center and the completely renovated Emergency Department opened for business on August 14.

The 50,000-square-foot, three-story wing attached to the hospital's main building on Cambridge Street will accommodate over 8,500 patient visits per year, with more than 100 new examination and treatment rooms, plus physician offices. The Ambulatory Care Center includes several specialty departments within the hospital, including Cambridge Pediatrics, Orthopedics, Primary Care Center, Medical Specialities, Women's Health and Surgical Specialities.

The improvements to the Emergency Department are very significant for the community. It has doubled its size, with 9,000 square feet of space and 15 private rooms. It features a separate pediatric treatment section with its own waiting area, a state-of-the-art nursing station with central monitoring, a dedicated Express Care space and a private family room.

The new facilities are the cornerstone of ongoing hospital improvements under the REACH Project

(Renewal and Expansion As a Center for Community Health), a major initiative by the Cambridge Health Alliance to expand, upgrade and modernize facilities at The Cambridge Hospital campus. Planning for the project began in the early 1990s and construction began in late 1996.

Other key components of the project include a new 4-level underground parking garage with capacity for over 200 cars, renovation of over 100,000 square feet of the existing hospital, a completely redesigned maternity suite, the new Cambridge Birth Center and a new Psychiatric Emergency Department.

This fall, the surgical suite will be completely renovated. New units will provide pleasant surroundings for patients and their families during pre- and post-operative care. Three new larger operating rooms will be built to accommodate the most advanced new technologies. The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) will also be completely renovated and will feature six fully equipped, single-bed patient rooms with added privacy and comfort for seriously ill patients and their families.

## Annual Meeting Sets Action Agenda

About forty neighbors and several city councillors attended our annual meeting on May 17th at the Longfellow School. President John Pitkin presented a Report of the Officers:

This is the MCNA's 25th anniversary year. Current membership is 610 as of April, 2000, relatively stable for the past couple of years. Our fundraising effort raised \$5,260 as of the end of April.

**Our To Do List** for this year includes: Setting up and maintaining our new website (<http://www.mcna.org>); making 6 more signboards for posting notices and maintaining all of them; holding our 25th anniversary celebration; organizing more social events; and working on specific issues of concern to the membership. Volunteers are always welcome.

Ten candidates were unanimously elected to the Coordinating Committee: Bill Craig, Elizabeth Gombosi (new), Frankie Lieberman, Paula Lovejoy, Martha Osler, Joan Pickett (new), John Pitkin, Keren Schlomy, Rachael Solem and Susan Twarog.

Keren Schlomy presented a new version of the **Principles and Guidelines for Development of the Mid-Cambridge Harvard Edge**, which had been approved by the Coordinating Committee after some revision by the Neighborhood Stewardship Task Force. *The Principles*

*and Guidelines were adopted by the MCNA membership unanimously by 32 votes.*

Frank Kramer, owner of the Harvard Bookstore, then reported on the status of the plan to make **Harvard Square an Historic District**. The stated goal of the plan is to "guide change and encourage diversity." A motion was made and seconded to write a letter of support to the Council. *The motion carried, 37 in favor, none opposed.*

Bill Schreiber of Ellery Square gave an update on the case of the **Swiss House** on Broadway at Ellery Street. This conference facility is being built by the Swiss government on the site of the former Sage's Market.

The Ellery Square neighbors asked the MCNA for support in their request to the Ethics Commission for a review of the case, and further to work to close the zoning loophole that allowed the consular office to replace neighborhood businesses. *The membership voted support unanimously.*

### Ice Cream Social

Over 100 neighbors enjoyed the Mid-Cambridge Ice Cream Social in Joan Lorentz Park on June 28, thanks to Toscanini's (for the donation of ice cream), the volunteers (who scooped it), and the weather (which didn't melt it too fast).

# Sculpted Lee Street Elm Is a Gift to the Street

A stately old elm tree, ravaged by Dutch Elm disease last year, was given a new life this summer by local sculptor Mitch Ryerson.

Ryerson worked his magic as he sawed and carved away the dead stumps of the huge elm on Lee Street, plus a smaller maple across the street. The result is two handsome throne-like chairs that grace the perimeter of the newly remade playground at the corner of West Street.

Ryerson, a furniture maker by profession, has been carving tree stumps in Cambridge for several years. His first project was on Oxford Street across from the Oxford Spa. Since then, an elm at Fresh Pond, a silver maple on Hurlbut Street and a maple on Clay Street have all inspired his carving skills.

Keeping in contact with city arborist Larry Acosta, Ryerson searches for significant and appropriate possibilities around town. Tree stumps suitable for sculpting must be in good condition (i.e., not rotted), and in an appropriate location. After finding a good pros-

pect, Ryerson talks to neighbors, presents his plan and listens to their concerns. He then applies to the Cambridge Arts Council to fund the project. Often he draws assistance from the high school or the Area 4 Youth Center, involving kids who help strip the bark, sand, and oil-finish the tree stumps.

Although he enjoys his custom furniture business, he truly loves to create public art. He created the Big Wheel seen at the River Festival and again at First Night. Working with Acosta, Ryerson milled into lumber and will make into benches three huge oak trees that had to be destroyed in the construction process at Fresh Pond. With colleague John Tagiuri, he sculpted another big chair on a playing field in Newton.

Cambridge, he notes, is full of good artistic talent. Mural artists are given wonderful opportunities around town. Tree carving is a medium like the covering of otherwise unattractive building walls, which gives to the public a bright corner, something of meaning, possibly of beauty and even of use.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

### October 30 Meeting on Library Site

The **Cambridge City Council** has scheduled a special meeting to discuss the choice between two alternative sites for an expanded main Public Library, and a decision is reported to be imminent. Both sites under consideration are in Mid-Cambridge, one the current site on Broadway, the other at the corner of Prospect Street and Bishop Allen Drive.

If the Broadway site is selected, the Central Square site could be used for the new Police Station.

**These decisions will have a big impact on our neighborhood. The meeting is at 5:30 PM in City Hall on Monday, October 30.**

***Come to the MCNA's 25th Anniversary party, Sunday, October 22!***  
(See Page 1 for details)

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The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editors:* Paula Lovejoy, John Pitkin. *Reporters:* Rachael Solem, Bill Craig, John Pitkin.

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P.O. Box 907  
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25th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION  
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22