

M-C News

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

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Neighbors seek to strengthen library construction mitigation

While the city is currently in the process of selecting a general contractor for the main library expansion project, neighbors are working on measures to mitigate the effects of the construction on the neighborhood.

Construction of the new 102,000-square-foot library could begin as early as January 2006, according to project manager Alan Burne, and it will take approximately 27 months to build the structure and its 70-car underground parking garage.

On September 15, five contractors submitted statements of qualification for consideration as the general contractor for the new library. The review is expected to be completed by mid-October and then

Longfellow School, library issues surface at busy annual meeting

The M-C Neighborhood Association's 2005 annual meeting on May 18 covered Mid-Cambridge planning, Cambridge Hospital developments, election of the Coordinating Committee for 2005-2006, reports from the president and treasurer, and resolutions concerning the Main Library expansion project and the Longfellow School.

In addition, Jeff Roberts, neighborhood planner for the city Community Development Department, presented "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. The full report is available online at http://www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/cp/neighborhood/midcamb_ns_update.pdf. Additional info is available at the neighborhood planning Web page for Mid-Cambridge, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~CDD/cp/neighborhood/area6.html>.

Linda Chin, senior vice president for planning, marketing and public affairs for the Cambridge Health Alliance, reported on the update of the Cambridge Hospital Neighborhood Agreement. The Association
(Continued on Page 4)

construction documents will be released to the selected, pre-qualified firms for a competitive bid. The bid, if there are no delays or addenda, will be awarded in December. Burne has promised a community meeting with the winning bidder.

Although an initial MCNA review of the bid documents revealed that many of the mitigation issues raised in April will be addressed, concerns remain that some issues important to the abutters and the Mid-Cambridge community-at-large might not be addressed in these documents. Construction mitigation concerns fall into two categories: Process Issues and Site-Specific Mitigation Concerns. [See complete list on Page 2.]

Some 35 concerned abutters and neighbors met in April and brainstormed on the outstanding mitigation concerns as well as ideas for how to get those concerns addressed. The meeting resulted in a three-page letter to city councilors calling for a consistent construction mitigation process to be implemented citywide and outlining six main areas for improvement.

Additionally, a letter was sent to Burne and deputy city manager Richard Rossi requesting a town hall
(Continued on Page 2)

Candidates' Night to focus on neighborhood

The MCNA will host all 18 of this year's City Council candidates at a Candidates' Forum on Tuesday, October 25 from 7 to 9 p.m., at the Senior Center at 806 Mass Ave., Central Square.

All nine current council members are running for reelection this year, and nine challengers, including Mid-Cambridge resident Sam Siedel, are hoping to unseat the incumbents.

Several issues relating to Mid-Cambridge are expected to be part of the night's discussion: Residents are faced with construction and related mitigation issues for the main library expansion; the long-term future of the Longfellow School has yet to be determined; most Mid-Cambridge multifamily homeowners were hit with very steep tax increases in 2004, and a discussion of taxes and spending is expected.

Library mitigation

(Continued from Page 1)

question-and-answer forum with the community. There was no response to either letter.

At the MCNA annual meeting in May, members passed two motions pertaining to the new library construction: The first was a written MCNA endorsement of the six process issues that had previously been sent to the city councilors [go to www.mcna.org for complete text.] The second motion involved forming a mitigation oversight committee consisting of abutters and other residents of the neighborhood to represent the Association in discussions with the library project team on construction mitigation matters.

The MCNA letter generated a meeting with Burne where he discussed mitigation concerns with the MCNA president and three other community members. Subsequently, when the construction bid documents were finalized, Burne sent a set of these documents for review by the MCNA.

Recently the MCNA Coordinating Committee

asked Cambridge for a clear summary and for a peer review of the documents for construction mitigation issues, just as Parsons Brinkerhoff did for the city and Harvard University for the new CGIS buildings. The most cost-effective way for the mitigation measures to be assured is to make certain they are clearly spelled out in the initial set of construction bid documents. Only mitigation measures fully described in the bid documents are legally binding. Additionally, MCNA is asking for a transparent communication process. [Go to www.mcna.org for a full copy of the letter to the city that contained a larger list of mitigation concerns.] Since the city has established stringent requirements for projects such as the Harvard CGIS buildings (Knafel Center), we would expect no less for this project.

Burne is expected to provide the MCNA with a written response that builds on a May letter and June discussion about construction mitigation.

Still to come sometime in January is a community meeting with the successful bidder and Burne to present the construction phasing plan, schedule and communication plan. Watch the red neighborhood sign boards for schedule updates.

Neighbors have more questions than answers about how city will deal with library construction mitigation

Some of the process issues include:

1. How often will deputy city manager Richard Rossi and library project manager Alan Burne report to the public regarding construction issues? It is our understanding that the website will be part of the main library site and will be updated monthly. We are concerned that posts of pertinent project information should be every two weeks in advance and include such things as a general phasing and construction schedule.
2. Emergency Hotline that functions also on weekends and evenings for reporting of any problems (also posted on the website).
3. Construction Signage: A sign shall be posted in a location where it is readable from the street or driveway. Information on the sign shall include: Name, address and phone number of the person responsible for the project and (if different), the name and phone number of the party to call in case of an emergency.
4. Ongoing communication and outreach to the abutters with written communications one week prior to any scheduled utility interruption with a limited and restricted time frame.

Site-specific issues include:

1. How will park use during construction be handled? Will there be a phased construction-staging plan that allows square footage to be returned to the community as soon as it becomes available?
2. How will the extra dust in the high school and in our homes be handled? Will they wash our windows as Wm. Berry has done for abutters of the CGIS project [Knafel Center]? Will there be an allowance for new/better/airtight storm windows?
3. Will historic buildings and older houses in the neighborhood be monitored for damage because of construction activities, including the possible use of vibration-measuring devices on the buildings? Will a pre-and post-construction survey of buildings be conducted, and construction-related damage to the buildings repaired as necessary?
4. How will parent drop-off and pick-up be handled during construction?
5. Will there be a crossing guard at the high school for peak hours?

How clean is your electricity?

By Keren Schlomy

Larry Childs and his wife, Alice Heller, moved to Cambridge 12 years ago, attracted by the diversity and liveability of our community. They chose to send their two sons to a Cambridge public school. And they chose to support clean energy.

Most of us don't pay attention to where our electricity comes from because we don't believe we have a choice. But whether you call it "clean," "green," or "renewable," it's possible to buy electricity that's better for the environment than what NSTAR sells us.

NSTAR gets about 36% of its electricity from natural gas-fired plants, 24 percent from nuclear power, 15 percent from coal plants, 12 percent from oil-fired plants, and 7 percent from hydro power. No power comes from solar or wind generation.

Concerned about the social and environmental impacts of conventionally fueled generation, Larry and Alice circumvented NSTAR and purchased "renewable energy credits" from wind turbines. Larry, who rides his bicycle to work, believes in teaching his sons how to be responsible energy users, such as by turning off lights and conserving water, and also teaches them issues of social justice and where their electricity comes from.

Fossil fuels = Global warming, pollution

According to the science journal *Nature*, global warming threatens to raise temperatures from 4 to 20 degrees, possibly melting most of the polar ice caps and raising sea levels by more than 20 feet (Cambridge is only 30 feet above sea level).

In addition, scientists predict declining food production, more frequent and severe droughts, widespread extinction, spread of disease and increased frequency of severe weather events.

Fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and natural gas, are the main cause of global warming through their emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas. Fossil fuels also emit other pollutants that contribute to lung diseases, acid rain and smog. Coal, although obtainable locally, is the dirtiest of the fossil fuels. For oil, natural gas and uranium, we depend largely on supplies in other, often unstable, countries, and nuclear power also leaves us with highly radioactive waste products.

Clean power: Real and available

Unlike fossil fuels, renewable energy sources such as wind, landfill gas and solar power have little or no emissions, no radioactive waste products, and use no imported fuels.

So what can we do to support renewable energy and offset the damage caused by using electricity?

"Whether you call it 'clean,' 'green,' or 'renewable,' it's possible to buy electricity that's better for the environment."

Because NSTAR does not offer an option on its electric bills to purchase renewable energy, those of us in Cambridge must look elsewhere, as Cambridge Savings Bank did. Through the Massachusetts Clean Energy Choice program one can purchase renewable energy credits (RECs) generated by wind and biogas/biomass sources. Those funds go to the power generators and help make such projects viable. Although these purchases are above and separate from what we pay NSTAR, they are considered charitable donations and are tax deductible.

Additionally, a state agency, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, will match each dollar donated with \$2: \$1 goes to the city of Cambridge to spend on renewable energy projects (such as putting solar panels on schools), and \$1 goes to projects throughout the state that benefit low-income residents. Cambridge Savings Bank purchased \$1,000 worth of RECs, yielding \$1,000 for the city.

Larry Childs knows that it's not always easy to feel a connection between throwing a light switch and the source of that power, but he believes this is an easy step to take. "It's important because if you have a lot of people thinking along those lines and making these choices, we'll gradually rely less on fossil fuels."

Editor's Note: MCNA member Keren Schlomy is an environmental attorney and is on the Advisory Board of Green Decade/Cambridge, whose website is www.greencambridge.org.

Cambridge commits to clean energy

The city of Cambridge has adopted a Climate Action Plan, with a goal of reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2010. Green Decade/Cambridge, a local citizen's group helping residents and businesses reduce their greenhouse gases, is working with the city to enable it to meet its goal.

GD/C drafted a resolution, which the City Council passed unanimously on June 6, providing that by the year 2010 the city's own facilities, including schools, will purchase 20 percent of their electricity needs from clean energy sources.

Annual meeting looks at successes, challenges

(Continued from Page 1)

recognized participants in the agreement teams for CHA: Dennis Keefe, Linda Chin, Al Vellucci, and Bill MacFarland; and for MCNA: Connie May, Francis Fiorenza, William Craig, John Pitkin, Joan Pickett, and Doane Perry.

Election of Coordinating Committee

Members elected the members of the Coordinating Committee, which plans and executes the association's activities, for a one year term: Sam Seidel, George Bossarte, Cathy Edgerly, Frankie Lieberman, Margaret McMahon, Doane Perry, Joan Pickett, John Pitkin, Kate Vrijmoet, and David Szlag.

Edgerly and Szlag are new members. Members thanked retiring Coordinating Committee members Alex Loud, Elizabeth Gombosi, and Laura Roberts for their service.

Library construction mitigation

A proposal by Joan Lorentz Park users and abutters requesting construction mitigation and communication from the Library Expansion Project was approved.

Proposal commentators Angela Wu, Cathy Edgerly, Kate Vrijmoet, and Sam Seidel proposed that the city council require the following processes: Quarterly reporting of project status, communication with residents via the city's website; an emergency hotline for reporting of problems, street signs with information on who to contact in an emergency; ongoing communication, and outreach to the abutters (see complete list at bottom of Page 2).

Also, neighbors are asking for a procedure for citizens to appeal to the city for compensation for property damage, loss or devaluation and/or injury caused by construction.

The second library-related motion called for forming a mitigation oversight committee consisting of abutters and other residents of the neighborhood to represent the Association in discussions with the library project team on construction mitigation matters.

Use of Longfellow School building

The meeting approved a set of principles for use of the Longfellow School to the school department and city council. The Association had developed the principles in October 2003.

--In recognition of the neighborhood's already tight parking situation, tie adequate parking to the use of the building and encourage non-parking-intensive use.

--Keep the building in the public domain: the building should not be sold to private developers.

--Continue and encourage city-wide community-

centered uses for the building.

--Preserve some section of the building for Mid-Cambridge community programs/space.

--Mixed use of the building would be acceptable and possibly encouraged (e.g., a community center in the west wing and affordable housing in the east).

--No reduction in open space, including the basketball court and tot lots. Additional recreational space should be considered.

--No increase in the building's volume should be considered.

Looking back, looking ahead

President Doane Perry thanked his predecessors, Joan Lorentz, John Pitkin and Joan Pickett, and reported on the Association's successes, challenges and policies.

Successes: The Association has enjoyed a successful role in city institution review. The agreement with the Cambridge Health Alliance regarding construction and use of Cambridge Hospital has created a model that caused the Mt. Auburn neighborhood association to seek MCNA's counsel regarding the expansion plans of Mt. Auburn Hospital.

Thanks to the representation of Mid-Cambridge neighbor Marc McGovern on the school committee and the guidance and advocacy of the Longfellow Neighborhood Association, the MCNA has had a role in the reuse of the Longfellow School as a temporary main library and home of the CRLS Extension School.

In the long process of siting and designing the Main Library restoration and expansion in the midst of Joan Lorentz Park, the Association has held many meetings and made suggestions with the result that the city has made many accommodations to neighborhood input.

Challenges: The Association has some challenges, including: Getting Joan Lorentz Park declared a park by the city; taking responsible advantage of the opportunity the City Council gives neighborhood associations to review requests for curb cuts; and gaining comparable review of neighborhood traffic and parking practices and changes. Other challenges are retaining so-called non-conforming neighborhood service businesses such as laundromats in the face of ongoing condo development; securing neighborhood input in the licensing process of mobile businesses such as food trucks; and making the sign ordinance initiative more specific.

Policies: Perry plans to develop programs that provide positive praise for good neighbor practices and expanded communication channels with the police, DPW, Cambridge Health Alliance, business associations and web programs for community interaction.

Happenings around the neighborhood...

MCNA leadership elected

At its June meeting, members of the MCNA Coordinating Committee elected officers for the upcoming year. They are: President, Doane Perry; Co-Recording Secretaries, Joan Pickett and Margaret [Tuny] McMahon; Membership Secretary, George Bossarte; and Treasurer, Frankie Lieberman.

As the Association bylaws call for 11 Coordinating Committee members and only 10 were elected at the annual meeting in May, the committee expects to welcome Frances Donovan, who is serving as our Website manager.

Ice Cream Social was cool

Gloomy skies couldn't stop the annual MCNA Ice Cream Social on June 29—and any thoughts of rain-drops dampening the party were swept away when the cavalry arrived in the guise of Sara Mae and Larry Berman with their huge tent! Strong arms pitched in and the protection was erected in a few minutes to everyone's relief.

Lemonade and Toscanini's wonderful ice cream donation made 80 some neighbors very happy—and the dozens of dogs and children entertained the group with their usual running and jumping, chasing and falls on the grass. Our membership secretary, George Bossarte, says we signed up on several new members.

If you were not able to attend this year's event, we hope to see you next year around the same time.

Block Parties X 2

Despite 90-degree temperatures, Mid-Cambridge residents were very busy on Saturday, June 11, attending two neighborhood Block party events.

The longstanding Antrim Street Block party, started over 20 years ago, had an estimated 142 neighbors attending at its peak.

Debuting on that same day was the First Annual Ellery Street Neighborhood Yard Sale/Block Party. At that event, MCNA coordinating committee members donated items to a charity table, with the proceeds donated to the Cambridge Action Fund, which donates to homeless service organizations. About \$84 was raised.

In the early evening, the Ellery Street block party was held near the gates to Joan Lorentz Park at the corner of Ellery and Broadway. There were about 20 attendees, including young families with children.

If your block is interested in coordinating events next spring and/or publicizing your event, please contact MCNA President Doane Perry at DoanePerry@yahoo.com.



Photo by Karen Carmean

Frankie Lieberman serves ice cream in the park.

MBTA plans for Harvard Square Conductors' Building site

The Harvard Square Business Association, the Harvard Square Defense Fund and State Rep. Alice Wolf sponsored a meeting on September 28 at the Citizens Bank in Harvard Square to initiate a discussion concerning the MBTA's plan to sell or develop the Conductors' Building and the surrounding area on Bennett Street in Harvard Square.

Presentations were made by Mark Boyle, director of real estate for the MBTA, Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, Les Barber, the city's director of land use and zoning, Jinny Nathans, president of the Harvard Square Defense Fund, and John DeGiovanni, president of the Harvard Square Business Association. A question-and-answer session followed.

The site is complicated, and although zoned as Business B, it is subject to various restrictions, including the Conductors' Building's designation as an historic structure. Another problem is the bus drive between the existing buildings, which the MBTA says must be a component of any redevelopment.

After discussion among the groups represented, it was agreed that the project should not proceed without input from community groups. Each neighborhood group will develop its questions and observations regarding the site and work together through the Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods to develop a comprehensive series of suggestions for the MBTA.

Learn more about Mid-Cambridge history

Talk and slide-show set for Oct. 19; M-C Oral History Project is underway

Charles Sullivan, director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, will present a talk and slide-show on the "History of Mid-Cambridge" on Wednesday, October 19, at 7 p.m. The event will be held at the Longfellow Neighborhood Council, upstairs from the library at 359 Broadway, the Longfellow School building.

The event is also an opportunity to learn more about the **Mid-Cambridge Oral History Project**, which the Longfellow Council launched about a year ago. Now in full swing, neighborhood volunteers have conducted over 28 interviews with people in the neighborhood, with many more to follow.

If you would like to meet the people involved and learn more about the project, you are invited to come and meet both interviewers and interviewees, and discuss the project's progress and where it's going. Your questions, suggestions, and participation are welcome.

Sarah Boyer of the Historical Commission and author of oral history books about Central Square and East Cambridge, has offered guidance to the group. Working from a list of people whose stories we want to hear, interviews are now in progress. Each interview is transcribed to provide a written version.

So what is going to be done with all of these histories? There is consensus that we should end up with something printed on paper. But we are still open on what other media might be employed—audio, video, digital, etc. The group has also decided not to define the result until we have gathered a number of stories. Already some themes are emerging that we were not aware of when we started.

When the Council is not doing oral history, it is running a music program for adults and children in piano, recorder, and voice. It also runs a yoga program, Evenings with Longfellow, and soon the Snow Park. For information, contact Penelope Kleespies at KleeFellow@Yahoo.com or call her at (617) 349-6260.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Wednesday, October 19, 7 p.m. Talk and Slide Show on the History of Mid-Cambridge by Charles Sullivan, director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, and update on the **Mid-Cambridge Oral History Project**. Held at Longfellow Neighborhood Council Office, 2nd floor, Longfellow School Building, 359 Broadway. Please enter via the library entrance. For more info, see story above.

Tuesday, October 25, 7-9 p.m., City Council Candidates' Forum: All of this year's City Council candidates will speak at the Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave., Central Square. For more info, see story on Page 1.

M-C NEWS

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Candidates' Night Tuesday, Oct. 25

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. Editor: Paula Lovejoy. Reporters: Joan Pickett, Margaret McMahan, Doane Perry, John Pitkin, George Bossarte, Kate Vrijmoet, Cathy Edgerly, David Szlag. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.