

M-C News

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

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October, 2006

License Commission relaxes liquor rules, rejects Duck tours

Two issues of importance to the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood were before the License Commission recently. In a move that opens the door to more and larger drinking establishments operating in Harvard Square, the commission approved several changes to its Cap policy which had imposed strict limits on the number of liquor licenses.

“The bottom line is, more places will have more seats serving liquor,” said Pebble Gifford, vice president of the Harvard Square Defense Fund.

The commission will now allow liquor licenses to be transferred among bars and restaurants in different sectors of the city. This gives Harvard Square, which has used up all of its quota, access to many more licenses. Currently there are 50 liquor licenses within the 10-block area of the Square, making it the “wettest” area in the state. Cambridge as a whole has twice as many licenses as Boston but only one-fifth the population.

In addition, establishments with liquor licenses will be allowed to increase their seating capacity. With more bars and restaurants serving liquor to more patrons, the net result is potentially many more people drinking in the Square.

“Problems come from too many people hanging around drinking,” said Gifford, including fights, vandalism, car accidents, and public urinating and vomiting.

For a short history of the Cap policy, check the MCNA website (www.mcna.org), and copies will be available at our Oct. 24 meeting.

Duck Boats get deep-sixed

The Commission on Nov. 20 turned down Nautical Tours’ proposal to operate its oversize amphibious tour vehicles in our neighborhood.

For the third year in a row, Nautical Tours had requested a license to run tours through Cambridge in vehicles resembling Duck Boats. Their proposed route ran directly through Mid-Cambridge, down Mass. Ave. through Central Square to Harvard Square and looping back to Kendall via Broadway and Mass. Ave.

MCNA members on the email list were alerted so that they might participate by sending the Commission an

email, writing a letter, or attending the hearings in person to air their views.

“The Commission’s decision was, in large part, due to the numerous Mid-Cambridge residents who sent e-mails and testified,” Gifford wrote to MCNA. “I think the Commissioners felt that Mass. Ave. was already a traffic nightmare without adding the Duck Boats. Please thank your members for their response.” The commission also noted that two other tour bus companies are already operating in the area.

Fall Meeting features ‘Quick Response’ to issues

The Fall Meeting of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association will take place from 7-9 p.m. on Tuesday, October 24 in the media cafeteria of Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, 459 Broadway.

The agenda for the meeting is: Quick Response to issues; Library Update; Harvard Square Liquor Cap, Duck Boats and Townhouse Ordinance. Pebble Gifford, vice president of the Harvard Square Defense Fund, will speak about the License Commission’s recent decision to not grant a license to Duck Boats, and what changes to the liquor license policy in Harvard Square might mean for Mid-Cambridge residents.

Also on the agenda are Web survey, Front Yard Parking report; and a vote on MCNA’s position on the future use of the Longfellow School (see story, Page 3). There will be several open forums.

Rapid Response

The MCNA Coordinating Committee believes that the organization needs a process for developing timely positions on issues, and rapid responses to these issues as they arise. The MCNA should not have to repeat and thus endorse the positions of other organizations nor rely on the advocacy of individual members. The Committee proposes that we discuss what we can do to be more immediately responsive to neighborhood problems, and in particular, how to obtain our members’ votes on an issue more expeditiously. Using the Internet is a seductive option, but not all members have access.

George Hinds Sr. wins first Good Neighbor award

On June 28, the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association presented our first Good Neighbor award to George L. Hinds Sr. of Fayette Street, in recognition of the vigilance and efforts that have made his block a better place for all his neighbors for many years.

The presentation was made by past president Joan Pickett and a delegation of seven members of the Coordinating Committee in a surprise ceremony in the front yard where Mr. Hinds and his neighbor Francis McLaughlin pass most evenings during the warm weather.

The Association cited Mr. Hinds for doing more than his share to keep the sidewalks and street clean and safe with his snowblower, broom, and an occasional word. Mr. Hinds, who is retired from the Cambridge Water Department, has lived on Fayette Street with his family for five decades.

The award was established by a vote of the Association's members in January of this year, and Mr. Hinds was selected by the Coordinating Committee to be the first recipient.

Earlier the same evening, about 100 residents of all ages enjoyed refreshments and had fun at the Association's annual Ice Cream Social in Joan Lorentz Park. The ice cream, donated by Toscanini's, not the usually fine weather, was the main attraction. The evening was mild and humid and followed four days of wet weather.

Neighborhood yard sales were big success\$

The MCNA neighborhood yard sale and benefit table for CHAF (Cambridge Housing Assistance Fund) originally set for June 10 was postponed because of, you guessed it—rain, to Sunday June 11. Despite this setback all participating streets reported a very successful day. The Benefit Table on Ellery Street and the generous contribution from the bake sale held by The Paine Park Block Association took in over \$240.

The neighborhood sale encompassed Antrim Street, Amory Street, St. Mary Road, and Ellery Street. Don't miss the nice write-up of the sale in the CHAF Newsletter for Summer, 2006.

Let's build on this momentum and start planning for the 2007 Neighborhood Yard Sale right away! Anyone who wants to organize his or her block, please get in touch with Tuny McMahon at tunymcm@comcast.net or 617-945-4440. We'll work with CHAF again next year to help them in their mission of providing housing for homeless and near-homeless families and individuals.



George L. Hinds Sr. of Fayette Street displays his Good Neighbor Award plaque from MCNA, flanked by neighbors Francis McLaughlin (left) and John Pitkin.

Swiss Consulate gets OK to expand on Broadway

The Swiss Consulate's request for a new special permit to expand at its present location at Broadway and Ellery was approved by the Board of Zoning Appeal at the September 28 continuation of a June 8 hearing. The expansion will utilize a new partial second floor for additional office space and a roof garden.

At the first hearing for the new expansion, some neighbors gave support for the many programs sponsored by the consulate and open to the neighborhood--16 in the first eight months of this year, according to a Swiss House official. Other neighbors criticized the current expansion of institutional use in the neighborhood, as well as the possibility for additional expansion at the site, either by the Swiss or another institution, should the Swiss sell the site.

This expansion was possible because the legal conditions limiting the number of employees and use contained in the original special permit, which allowed the consulate to operate on the site, had expired after five years.

Consul Christoph von Arb informed the board that the consulate would never need more than six full-time employees and that the current day and nighttime uses are totally adequate for the consulate's operation.

The special permit for the expansion (1) restated the condition of the original permit that evening and weekend use not exceed two evenings in one week and one weekend use a month and (2) capped the number of full-time employees at six, up from the original limit of three. Mr. von Arb said the addition will be constructed next summer.

Members to vote on Longfellow's future use

While the Longfellow School's current usage as a temporary home for the Main Library, Extension school program and the Longfellow Community School program seems set for the next several years, the MCNA membership still feels it is time to review the use principles we adopted after the school closed its doors in 2003.

Coincidentally, the future use of the closed schools was raised at a June City Council meeting by Councilor Marjorie Decker. She is outraged that no decision about the future use of the Graham and Parks School, closed and unused for the past 3 years, has occurred. The closed city schools are all under the jurisdiction of the School Department until they decide how to use them or to be surplus property. At that point, the city can direct their future use.

Councilor Decker raised the possibility of not waiting for the School Committee to determine their future use and that the city should consider taking the property from the School Department by eminent domain.

Mid-Cambridge residents, however, are ready for a conversation about future use when the issue is up for discussion. At the May 17 MCNA Annual Meeting, members discussed and made minor language change recommendations to the prior guidelines.

But the members in attendance essentially felt the guidelines still accurately reflect the neighborhood's view

of future use possibilities.

The recommended changes to the original guidelines are below. A vote on the modified principles will be held at the fall neighborhood meeting Oct. 24. All members are encouraged to review the amended principles and let the Coordinating Committee know your thoughts in anticipation of the fall meeting.

Neighborhood News briefs

Aging in Place

Three representatives of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council's Retirement Initiative will speak about the concept of "Aging in Place" at 7 p.m. on Monday, October 16 at the Longfellow Neighborhood Council office in the former school, 2nd floor, 359 Broadway. They will talk about what needs to be done, as individuals and as a community, to make it possible for people to stay in their Cambridge homes as they grow older and about the Agassiz Retirement Initiative.

For further information about this program, please contact Penelope Kleespies of the Neighborhood Council at 617-349-6260.

Yoga, music lessons, skiing & more

The Longfellow Neighborhood Council creates programs and events that respond to needs of individuals and families, and to build a sense of community in our neighborhood. This includes music lessons (piano, recorder, and voice), yoga, calligraphy, Snow Park, ski trips, programs in the parks, the Oral History Project, and Evenings with Longfellow. Contact Penelope Kleespies of the Neighborhood Council at 617-349-6260 for details.

Don't miss our email notices!

Would you like to receive email notices of events, issues, and meetings affecting Mid-Cambridge? If you have not received the recent notices on the Duck Tour hearing and the liquor license cap challenge in Harvard Square, you are not on our list. To receive these notices, contact Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association membership coordinator George Bossarte at [gbeng@world.std.com](mailto:g beng@world.std.com). Of course, you may opt out at any time.

Electronic version of this newsletter

Would you like to receive this newsletter electronically? Supply your email address to the membership coordinator George Bossarte at [gbeng@world.std.com](mailto:g beng@world.std.com) and we will email you a .pdf version. Save paper and receive timely delivery.

Longfellow Principles

The MCNA proposes that the school department and city council observe the following principles:

- 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 citywide community-centered uses for the building.
- Preserve some section of the building for Mid-Cambridge community programs/space such as the Longfellow Neighborhood Council.
- 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 and possible artists' studios).
- No reduction in open space for community uses, including the basketball court and tot lots. Additional recreational space should be considered.
- No increase in the building's volume should be considered.

Budget constraints force library design changes

The first bidding process for the main library expansion project resulted in an over-budget construction price tag. Project architects and engineers have revised the construction documents and the M-C Neighborhood Conservation District Commission approved them during the summer.

Most of the changes do not affect what is seen but rather concentrate in the garage, basements, walls, materials etc. Those changes that do significantly alter the visual impact of the building are:

- Landscaping changes, which include replacing the majority of brick paving with asphalt walks, replacing the granite main walk to the building with brick, significant alterations to the CRLS entry plazas, and substantial changes to the pedestrian walk between the tennis courts and the addition.
- The elimination of the Clerestory (Bar 3);
- Postponing of all work on CRLS amphitheater

(to be reconsidered after library work is completed);

- Eliminating North terrace paving, fencing doors, etc. (the historic stairs will be kept);
- Deleting the North courtyard between the old and new libraries;
- Removing about 2000 square feet from the east side of the addition.

Also, the building will no longer qualify as a "green" building. During the summer school vacation, the city's Public Works and the Water Departments prepared the site by making important utility connections into Broadway. Their combined efforts were designed to mitigate construction impacts upon the CRLS population and the Broadway neighborhood, as well as reduce costs.

Filed sub-bids were taken Oct. 5 and general bids will be received on Oct. 26. The intention is to award a contract by Nov. 17. If that happens, mobilization and fence erection is expected to begin after Thanksgiving.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

MCNA Fall Meeting, Tuesday, October 24, 7-9 p.m., at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School media cafeteria, 459 Broadway. For complete agenda, see Page 1 of this newsletter.

Aging in Place: A Discussion, October 16, 7 p.m. A discussion of services available to people who wish to remain in their homes but require assistance. Held at the Longfellow Council music room, upstairs from the library in the Longfellow School building, 359 Broadway. For more info call 617-349-6260.

Orienteering, Monday, November 13, 7 p.m., A talk by orienteering enthusiasts Larry and Sara Mae Berman of Fayette Street held at the Longfellow Council office, second floor, 359 Broadway above the library.

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

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Fall Meeting October 24