

M-C News

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

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Neighbors Await New Harvard Plan For Knafel Project

Harvard University is planning to unveil a revamped plan for its Knafel Center project on Cambridge Street later this fall. The university decided to go back to the drawing boards after a June meeting where neighbors objected to the project's size, design, and potential impact on the neighborhood.

The plan called for construction of two large academic buildings (80,000 to 90,000 square feet) on each side of Cambridge Street, connected by a pedestrian tunnel beneath the street. The buildings would replace 1737 and 1730 Cambridge St. (Coolidge Hall and University Information Services), 96 Prescott St., and a parking area on Prescott St.

Neighbors were concerned about potential traffic congestion from pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles coming to the center, which would include classrooms, lecture halls, conference rooms, a library, and faculty and academic offices. Other concerns included building aesthetics, parking, and extending the reach of the campus further into the neighborhood.

Approximately a week after the revised plans are unveiled, the MCNA plans to hold a neighborhood meeting where neighbors can discuss their reactions. Members will be notified of the time and place via mail.

At our annual meeting in May, our Association adopted a series of principles for development along the Mid-Cambridge/Harvard boundary. They include:

- New developments should match the scale and character of adjacent residential areas;
- "Transition zones" should exist between institutions and residential areas;
- Existing wood frame and historic structures should be preserved;
- The uses of new buildings should be compatible with the character of the neighborhood;
- New construction should not negatively affect traffic congestion.
- New construction should be consistent with

building materials and design in the immediate neighborhood;

- Institutions should produce a master plan for the neighborhood.

Harvard plans to describe the project and provide information about the plan presented in June at a joint meeting of the Cambridge Historical Commission and the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission in October. No date for unveiling the revamped plan has yet been set.

For more information, contact Mary Sullivan of 85 Prescott St. or Alec Loud of 1716 Cambridge St.

Come to the... Mid-Cambridge Forum For City Council Candidates

Find out where the candidates stand on the issues affecting our neighborhood:

- Location of the main library;
- Harvard University expansion (Knafel Center and Prescott St. area);
- Enforcement of existing zoning regulations (e.g. Swiss House at Broadway and Ellery, Antrim St. project);
- Need for a community room for Mid Cambridge;
- Regulating trucks to limit tree damage;
- Citywide and local street truck bans.

Show the candidates you care! Compare the candidates in person, so you have the information you need to rank them when you cast your vote on November 2.

**Thursday, October 14
7 - 9 p.m. (doors open 6:30)**

**Longfellow School on Broadway at Fayette St.,
cafeteria entrance from courtyard.**

The forum is sponsored by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association. For more information contact Keren Schlomy at 499-0070 or keren@green-mail.org, or John Pitkin at 492-4035 or jpitkin@world.std.com.

Developments Pinch Neighborhood in Four Spots

Four projects involving construction and changes of use in different locations in Mid-Cambridge have recently led to disputes between objecting residents and those proposing the projects.

The largest of these projects is an apartment building proposed to replace the Cambridge YWCA's swimming pool building on Temple Street. The others are a residential rehab and new house on Antrim Street, conversion of the Prospect Nursing Home to rental apartments on Prospect Street and the conversion of the former Sage's Market and laundromat on Broadway at Ellery to a Swiss House/consulate.

YWCA Apartments

At the September 21 meeting of the Planning Board, the YWCA agreed to redesign its proposed rental apartment tower to lower the seven-story height, reduce the footprint and number of units and preserve the rear lawn rather than have the Board turn down the required special permit.

The proposal had been through a two-level review by the Board and the Central Square Advisory Committee. On a split vote, the Advisory Committee recommended that the project not be approved and listed its objections, the foremost being excessive density and height. This recommendation reflected the objections of many residents of Austin Park and other nearby streets who spoke at the several hearings of the two boards.

In a July 12 presentation to the Planning Board, the Y and its partners proposed a eight-story plan with 72 units (64 market rate/8 affordable) and 56 parking spaces. By August this was downsized to 7 stories with 63 units (56 market/7 affordable).

The Y has an arrangement with Schochet Associates to build, own and operate the apartments in exchange for a 99-year land lease providing for guaranteed annual rent payments that the Y feels it needs to fund its other activities. The swimming pool has been closed since the late 1980s.

Prospect Nursing Home

In August the Planning Board voted to approve a multi-family special permit and reduction of parking spaces for 20 rental apartments (including 3 affordable) in the defunct nursing home.

Before the permit could actually be issued, though, the project was downsized to 17 units (2 affordable) to comply with a new lot size requirement which the Board and Community Development Department staff had previously overlooked. This oversight was noticed by Rick Colbath-Hess, a neighbor who opposed the lack of required parking and size of the project.

The City Council had increased the lot requirement in C-1 districts to 1,500 square feet per unit as part of the backyard zoning changes it approved in late July.

The project is proposed by the building's owner, David Pallotta, and still requires a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal because of inadequate open space. As of September 27, the amended special permit had not been issued.

At the Planning Board hearing, about a dozen residents of Amory and Prospect Streets and St. Mary Road had opposed the 20-unit project. Their concerns were based on the fact that the parking lot can accommodate only 14 parking spaces, including two in the required front yard on Prospect Street, and because of a wish for more affordable units. Zoning requires a minimum of one parking space per unit.

These neighbors have been meeting since the hearing but have not yet taken a position on the downsized project. Parking is very tight in the area (*Continued on next page*)

Kevin Hodes Memorial Bench Celebrates Neighborhood Spirit

At a dedication ceremony September 19 in the freshly renovated front yard of the Longfellow School, Mayor Francis Duehay unveiled a bench dedicated by the City in memory of Kevin T. Hodes, who had lived across from the school and passed away suddenly at the age of 28 in May 1998.

Kevin attended the Longfellow School and loved the theater. After he graduated from high school, he came back to the Longfellow to direct sixth graders in a theater production of the kind he had participated in ten years before.

He regularly attended the annual Longfellow Community School ski trips, even returning for them from Connecticut when he was in college. According to Kevin's mother, Nancy Hodes, "he remained fiercely loyal to his old neighborhood and the people in it."

The bronze plaque on the bench reads:

1970 Kevin T. Hodes 1998
Longfellow School Student
lifelong neighborhood spirit

In addition to Mayor Duehay and Kevin's mother, James Hutchison, Kevin's teacher, Maia Kennedy, a classmate, and Jane Richards, a neighbor spoke at the ceremony.

Four Hot Spots In Neighborhood

(Continued from previous page)

because there is no parking on Prospect Street, and many houses on Amory and St. Mary Road lack off-street parking.

Swiss House Consulate

In the early hours of July 16, the Board of Zoning Appeal voted to grant a special permit to allow the Government of Switzerland to establish a consulate called "Swiss House for Advanced Research and Education" (SHARE), a scientific research and conference center in the former Sage's market and laundrette on Broadway. In September a group of neighbors appealed the decision of the Board in Superior Court on the ground that it ignores important provisions of Cambridge's institutional use regulations.

The project came to residents' attention this spring, when Sage's Market closed on little notice. Swiss officials informed this Association of its plans and sought and obtained the approval of the Mid-Cambridge Conservation District Board for the proposed changes to the building.

At the Association's May meeting, our membership voted to oppose the institutional use on the grounds that it would not serve residents in any way.

At the BZA hearing the project was supported by several abutters, including several abutters living in Ellery Square, who favored a quieter use, and Faith Whittlesey, the former U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland, who recently moved across Broadway from the project site.

Other neighbors, including abutters living on Ellery Street, opposed the new use in favor of one that would serve residents in some way or, if that were not possible, a residential use. The area is zoned residence C-1 and the commercial use was a pre-existing nonconforming use.

Cambridge's institutional use regulations, which were enacted in 1981 and which required a special enabling act of the Legislature, are supposed to restrict new institutional uses, such as the Swiss House, in low-density residential zones. The residents who filed the appeal include Charles Girdosky, Joan Pickett, Stavros Macrakis, Joan Pickett and William Schreiber.

75-81 Antrim Street

On September 15, Craig Whitaker, George Metzger and other residents of Antrim Street asked Building Commissioner Robert Bersani to prevent builder John

Kennedy from continuing work on this project, which includes complete renovation/conversion of a 2-family house and construction of a new single-family house.

There is opposition to a basement with ceilings one inch below the building code minimum of 7 feet — and therefore not counted as living space in square footage for zoning purposes — yet being finished and marketed as living space. The petition to Commissioner Bersani states that this represents "flagrant manipulation of the building code and zoning ordinance" to create substantial usable floor area "beyond that requested and approved by variance." This area is important because the issue of total floor area was fundamental to the appeal for a zoning variance which was already issued and which many of the same residents had supported.

The objectors are asking Bersani to withhold an occupancy permit for the nearly complete 2-family and to stop construction on the partially built one-family.

Vacancies Filled On MCN Conservation District Commission

After many months of gathering and screening letters of interest and resumes, City Manager Robert Healy appointed three new alternate members to the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission. New members include Mary Berg, Nassir Ghaemi, and Nancy Goodwin.

Berg, a homeowner and resident of the area since 1987, has served on the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Study committee with the Community Development Department, and is an instructor in Spanish literature and culture. She also has a background in oral history and open space management. Ghaemi, a physician, is familiar with historic district administration through family ownership of designated property in Washington, DC. He is a recent owner, but also spent some student days in Cambridge. Goodwin, an architect, is a principal in Finegold, Alexander & Associates, a firm specializing in historic preservation and adaptive reuse. She has lived in the area for 31 years.

Former alternates Steve Cohen and Martha Osler have now become full commission members. Chair John Moos says he is excited to have an almost complete commission; one additional vacancy needs to be filled, by a resident of Mid Cambridge who is a tenant. Interested individuals should contact Sally Zimmerman at the Cambridge Historical Commission for further details.

New in the Neighborhood: Harvard Place

The house at 273 Harvard Street has undergone a transformation in the past year. Long neglected after the nursing home in it had shut down, it was claimed by the city for back taxes and has now been sold to CASCAP for use as 21 affordable housing units for elderly residents needing some assistance in their daily routines.

However, as Becky Worrall, the coordinator of elderly congregate housing, states, this is not a licensed assisted living facility. CASCAP plans to make the best use of the resources already available in the community to serve the residents there. While each of the units is wheelchair accessible, home health aides, meals, and nursing services will be provided as needed for each tenant through other programs in Cambridge and Somerville.

With the assistance of the city's Affordable Housing Trust, CASCAP purchased the property on Harvard Street in May of 1998. While the exterior of the front has been faithfully restored to recall its 1860s Victorian styling, the additions to the rear and the

entire interior have been rebuilt to provide all the modern conveniences of a well-run apartment house. Each of the 21 rental units has a kitchen/living room and a good-sized bedroom and bath.

Ms. Worrall is happy to spend time answering questions from neighbors, and especially happy to consider offers of volunteer assistance. Harvard Place has come to its present state through many cooperative efforts, including city, state, and federally funded programs, and individual donations of time, money, energy and goods.

Ms. Worrall has a growing list of ideas for activities at Harvard Place, such as gardening, art or crafts projects, sing-alongs, games, exercise classes, and cooking classes. During the early part of the summer, CASCAP sent out an announcement of the opening of Harvard Place and in it asked for donations of everything from plants to stereos, from couches to books.

The Cambridge Plant and Garden Club has offered assistance with landscaping the property. The need is still there. Many of the residents have their own furniture and furnishings, but some do not. Games, puzzles, tapes, CDs, would all be welcome, as would curious, friendly neighbors.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

The Longfellow Community School is sponsoring music, sports, arts and crafts classes for children and adults Sep. 21-Dec. 23 afternoons and evenings at the School. For registration and info, please call 349-6260.

Mondays 5:30 PM The intergenerational Family Folk Chorale welcomes all to its rehearsals at the School (courtyard door). There will be a performance Sat. Nov. 13. For information call 876-4778 / eastburn@javanet.com.

Mon. Oct. 18 7 PM Longfellow Neighborhood Council meets in the School cafeteria on programs and recreational activities for children and adults.

Sun. Oct. 31 1-3 PM. Hancock Halloween Park Party in the Hancock St. tot lot. Wear costumes.

Nov.-Dec. date to be announced Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Meeting on revised Knafel Center proposal and guidelines for Prescott St. area.

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

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NOTICE OF MEETING