

M-C News

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

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Responding to the climate emergency: What should Mid-Cambridge do?

City's Climate Congress seeks neighborhood input on climate action

The main item on the agenda at a neighborhood meeting to be held on Thursday, January 21, will be a discussion about how Mid-Cambridge, the neighborhood and the association, should respond to the climate change emergency. Two days after the MCNA meeting, delegates from Mid-Cambridge will report this discussion and any recommendations that emerge from it to the city's first Climate Congress on January 23.

Initiated by citizens, the Climate Congress was convened by Mayor E. Denise Simmons to make recommendations to the City Council and the entire Cambridge community about what we should do in 2010 and beyond to help stabilize the climate and protect the future of our city and human civilization. The Congress was supported by the City Council, the staff of the Mayor's office and other city staff, and has also been endorsed by seven former Cambridge mayors.

Cambridge's emissions of carbon dioxide, the prime cause of climate change, have risen substantially.

On December 12, 99 Cambridge residents, selected by the mayor from almost 150 nominees to reflect the diversity of the city and to represent its many organizations, convened in the first session of the Climate Congress. Among them were two members of the MCNA coordinating committee, Debby Knight and John Pitkin, as well as several other residents of the neighborhood.

This session consisted of short informational presentations about the science and policy responses, and small group discussions about the local response and brainstorming for new ideas of action. A summary and notes of these discussions can be found on the city's Web site, http://www.cambridgema.gov/deptann.cfm?story_id=2457.

In Mayor Simmons's speech opening the first session of the Congress, she reported that Cambridge's

emissions of carbon dioxide, the prime cause of climate change, have not declined, as called for by the city's 2002 Climate Protection Plan, but have instead risen substantially. At the same time, she said, "Scientists have found that the climate is changing and warming more rapidly than earlier projected, and their warnings of the possibility of disastrous changes have become more urgent."

Noting that the City Council unanimously voted on May 12, 2009, to recognize that there is a climate
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Jan. 21: MCNA's first meeting at the new main library

When: 7-9 p.m., Thursday, January 21

Where: Cambridge Public Library, 449 Broadway, in the Community Room, on Level L2 (second floor underground) of the new addition.

Agenda:

- ◆ Discussion of the climate emergency and what M-C can do to support the efforts to reduce carbon emissions;
- ◆ Inform neighborhood residents about what they can do about climate change; and
- ◆ Make recommendations to the Climate Congress.
- ◆ Other neighborhood updates, including the high-rise development proposed for 1075 Mass Ave. (site of the former Bowl and Board), an update on the Jackson Gardens redevelopment project, and other late-breaking M-C news!

Contributions for the Margaret Fuller House food pantry will be collected at this meeting from those who wish to donate non-perishable foods.

From Yard Sale to yule party, MCNA has busy fall

The MCNA had a very busy fall calendar, starting with another successful Yard Sale on September 13, and ending with a wonderful Holiday Party on December 6, 2009.

The Yard Sale, held in the Harvard Street yard of Judy and Bill Bibbins, raised \$530 for Food for Free, which works to supply fresh produce and other goods to numerous local food pantries. The donation, made on behalf of the MCNA, was much appreciated by Executive Director David Leslie, particularly given the difficult economic times. A special thanks to the Bibbins's and to Tuny McMahon for organizing the event.

We will also continue to collect contributions for the Margaret Fuller House food pantry at many MCNA events, including the upcoming January meeting.

On October 19, the MCNA hosted almost all of the 21 candidates vying for 11 city council seats at Cambridge College, using an innovative round-robin or "speed dating" methodology.

The 60 MCNA members attending the event got to choose the topics that most interested them, as well as which candidates they wanted to hear from. Feedback from members and candidates was extremely positive, and we look forward to using this approach again for

the next city election in two years. The event was emceed by David Szlag.

MCNA's annual holiday party, hosted by Steve Cohen and Mary Akerson of Fayette Street, was a wonderful way to catch up with neighbors and celebrate the holiday season. About 50 MCNA members shared hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, dips, cheeses, and a great selection of homemade sweets.

Thanks to Steve and Mary, and Frankie Lieberman and Tuny McMahon, who coordinated the event.

Climate Congress

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emergency, she continued, "The question before us is whether we can do more to respond more effectively, by working, not just separately as individuals, businesses, institutions and a city government, but by working together as a community, now that we know that the need for action is so urgent that we must consider it an emergency. How do we respond to what science is telling us?"

Topics for discussion at the Neighborhood Meeting on the 21st include:

- ◆ Recommendations for city action;
- ◆ Raising Mid-Cambridge residents' awareness about the climate emergency;
- ◆ Informing residents of what they can do about climate change.

Neighborhood Happenings

Music and yoga classes at Longfellow Community School

Neighborhood residents are invited to join in the classes at the Longfellow Neighborhood Council and Community School, as the winter semester begins. Offerings include private music lessons for adults and children in piano, voice, flute, recorder, and recorder ensembles.

Classes run from Monday through Friday. The fee is \$255 for 14 private 30-minute lessons. Please call Penelope Kleespies, community school director, to arrange a time.

A yoga class for adults is being held from 4 to 5 p.m. on Wednesdays with instructor Melinda Bruno. Fee is \$140 for the semester.

The term ends on April 16. Scholarship assistance is available to eligible families. Registration is ongoing. All classes are held at the Longfellow Community School offices at 359 Broadway.

For further information, please contact Penelope

Kleespies at 617-349-6260 or 617-388-3890.

Learn about planning for aging, alternative energy

The Longfellow Community Council Evening with Longfellow series is sponsoring a program on "Community Planning for an Aging Population" on Monday, February 8, at 7 p.m. at the Longfellow Community School office at 359 Broadway. The office is downstairs in the Antrim Street wing of the school; ring the bell by the door on the inside courtyard.

On Monday, March 8, at 7, Sue Butler of Clinton Street will speak on "Green Changes on Clinton Street." The former president of Green Decade Cambridge, Sue will discuss various alternative technologies she has experimented with for energy production, including geothermal heating systems, wind turbines, and photovoltaic solar panels.

These programs are free and open to the public. For more information, please contact Penelope Kleespies at 617-349-6260 or 617-388-3890.

CRLS renovation on schedule for Fall 2011

With the recent opening of the Main Library this fall and the completion of the War Memorial earlier in 2009, only the renovation of the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School remains of the projects underway in the Joan Lorentz Park area.

The renovation began immediately after the end of the spring 2009 school year. The project is on schedule for completion by the opening of the fall 2011 school year. The renovation is being conducted in three phases: the first phase consists of complete interior work on the Arts building and school library, with limestone repairs, new roofing and rooftop equipment installations. In addition, a portion of the Rindge building will also be worked on. This phase will extend another seven months until August 2010, when the second phase is scheduled to begin.

Phase 2 will finish work on the Rindge building, with partial renovation to the cafeteria and installation of new windows, as well as concrete and limestone

repairs, new roofing, and rooftop equipment installations. At this point, staging will migrate from Felton Street to wrap the remainder of the Rindge building. This staging will remain within the curb line. Traffic calming will begin on Broadway near Felton in the spring of 2011, to be finished by the fall of 2011.

Next summer there will be a modification of the fencing around the Arts building to allow student access to the areas currently under construction. The contractor plans to retain most of the existing cordoned-off areas for the remainder of the project.

The final phase will consist of landscaping to the campus. Upon completion of the project, there will be no longer any need to locate ninth graders at the former Longfellow School on Broadway, where they are currently attending classes.

Michael Black is the city construction manager for the project; he can be reached at: 617-349-2051 with any questions.

Going too FAR? Loophole in zoning ordinance lets developers count basement space as living space

Local residents are crying "foul" over developers' latest tactic for evading the city's Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limits on neighborhood density. A building's allowable living space is limited by zoning ordinances to a percentage of the size of the lot. The Massachusetts Building Code classifies space with a ceiling height of 6'8" or higher as "habitable," but the Cambridge zoning ordinances count space with a ceiling height of 7 feet or higher in the FAR calculation--a four-inch difference.

Developers are routinely exploiting this loophole by constructing high-windowed "sub-level" spaces with ceiling heights just under seven feet (measured from the cement floor to the underside of the ceiling beams), and listing that space as "storage" in their application for a Certificate of Occupancy. Such properties are therefore in compliance with the FAR limits when the Certificate of Occupancy is issued.

But the sub-level "storage" space is then upgraded with hardwood floors, finished ceilings and walls, and the property is priced and advertised as having thousands of square feet in excess of the FAR limits. In some cases the sub-level space is even marketed as "ideal for a separate apartment," which can be a violation of the zoning ordinances' occupancy rules.

Neighbors who spent months or years negotiating

in good faith to ensure compliance with the square footage limits and resulting neighborhood density feel betrayed. Currently neighborhood groups, including MCNA, are discussing remedies with Cambridge officials. Sub-level space whose added ceilings and floors reduced ceiling height below 6'8" is no longer "habitable" and can be enforced immediately as storage-only space by Inspectional Services.

But the basic remedy is to bring the Cambridge zoning ordinances into agreement with the State Building Code. That requires Cambridge Ordinance Committee approval of an amendment to include all space with ceiling height 6'8" or higher (all "habitable" space) in the FAR calculation.

The Ordinance Committee is made up of members of the City Council, and is currently in the process of post-election reorganization. However, concerned neighbors throughout the city are working to make this much-needed amendment a top priority as soon as the committee resumes its regular sessions.

What is FAR?

According to the City of Cambridge Web site, FAR regulates what size building can be built on a given piece of land. "Floor area ratio (FAR) limits how intensively a lot may be built upon. Indirectly it controls building volume. FAR is the gross floor area of the building divided by the area of the lot," it said.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

MCNA neighborhood meeting on the neighborhood's response to climate change, Thursday, January 21, 7 to 9 p.m. at the Main Public Library, 449 Broadway. The meeting will take place in the Community Room on Level L2, downstairs in the new addition. See Page 1 for meeting agenda and details.

The M-C News is published by the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association and the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. *Editor:* Paula Lovejoy. *Reporters:* Joan Pickett, John Pitkin, Fritz Donovan, Chris Robinson, Debby Knight. The MCNA does not discriminate on the basis of disability.

M-C NEWS
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Neighborhood Meeting!
Jan. 21, 7 p.m.
Cambridge Public Library

Fund-raising request inside: Please continue to support the MCNA!