

# THE AGASSIZ WHISTLER

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HARVARD, THE AGASSIZ COMMUNITY and NORTON'S WOODS:

The Topic of a Vital Community Forum

(The Agassiz Community Schools Council will sponsor a community forum Wednesday, December 20 at 8 p.m. in the Agassiz School library on the crucial community issues involved in Harvard's general relationship to our community and the specific impact of Harvard's plans to build in Norton's Woods in our community. The resolution of these issues will undoubtedly have an effect on the present and future integrity of our neighborhood. All interested people are invited to attend the meeting in the School, corner of Oxford and Sacramento Sts. The article below is designed only to provide some background for the forum, and present some of the issues involved. Letters concerning this subject may be addressed to the Whistler at 28 Sacramento St. and will be considered for publication if you wish. - Ed.)

Harvard University is once again proposing to build on the Norton's Woods site (an area also known as the Sachs' Estate or Shady Hill). This historically open and once-beautifully landscaped area lies in the Agassiz community off Beacon Street on the Cambridge-Somerville line. Consisting of roughly five and a half acres of woods, it is one of the last large open spaces in our city; it is now owned, fenced-in and theoretically maintained by Harvard. For years Harvard has unsuccessfully attempted to re-zone and build housing projects in Norton's Woods. Their last effort, three years ago, was defeated primarily because of organized community opposition.

Supported by a well-publicized campaign by its Office of Government and Community Affairs (see note below), Harvard is now proposing to build a housing project for its faculty in the Woods, consisting of one 18-story high-rise tower totalling more than 200 units, nine condominiums, and a 300

plus-car parking garage, leaving one and three-quarters acres as open space. It is said by Harvard that these units will relieve the Cambridge housing market of Harvard faculty demands. Rents will range from \$240 per month for efficiency units to \$400 per month for 3-bedroom units, plus a \$30 parking fee per month. The present plan is a modified version of the somewhat more expansive plan proposed (and rejected by the City Council) three years ago. While it is projected that this project will provide \$200,000 to the City annually in tax revenue, no estimate has been provided of the cost to the City of municipal services, particularly the potential cost of totally new sewage facilities, and the impact on the community of increased traffic and overflow parking.

To build this project, Harvard must, and will soon, formally petition the City for a zoning (p.2)

According to community people who have read it, the Office's October 1972 Report to the Cambridge Community is very definite and specific about Harvard's immediate new building plans (such as the Norton's Woods plan), but indefinite and generally non-committal about Harvard's future expansion plans and positive contributions to the City, e.g. taxes, health plan, low and moderate income housing, use of facilities, tenant purchases of homes, and community involvement in decisions.

change. The zoning change would convert Norton's Woods from an A-2 district (permitting primarily single-family or low-rise structures compatible with the rest of the Agassiz community as it now exists) to a C-3 district permitting high-rise towers. The absolute burden of justifying such a change in the City zoning plan and overcoming any objections is on the developer, in this case Harvard. In the past, both the community and the City uniformly have rejected similar efforts by Harvard and others to rezone the Agassiz community.

To obtain a zoning change for Norton's Woods, Harvard must present its plans to the City Planning Board and the City Council at public hearings. At a minimum, Harvard needs six favorable City Council votes. All of the

Councillors are aware of, and have heard, Harvard's plans in some detail. They have not yet heard from us. Whether, as a community, or as individuals, we support, oppose, or are neutral about Harvard's plans will be important to them. The forum on December 20 provides one opportunity for everyone to be heard.

There are too many issues involved in this matter to be fairly enumerated in this article. And, surely, others will become apparent in the course of community and individual discussion. There is, however, one overriding issue which affects us all and of which Norton's Woods is just one aspect, albeit the most important one now. It involves Harvard's relationship to our community.

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Will this community have in the future the chance to play a meaningful role in Harvard's development plans which affect our neighborhood or only the opportunity to react to Harvard's decisions after the fact? The Norton's Woods plan poses this question for us in a classical form.

The Agassiz Community Schools Council believes all the issues and positions should be aired and discussed. The Community Forum, moderated by Millard Long, Council Chairman, is a vital meeting. Representatives from Harvard will attend. Everyone will be able to speak on, or ask questions about, all related matters. Whatever ultimately happens, it will have a major impact on us as a community and as individuals living here.

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Remember: Wednesday, DECEMBER 20, 8:00 P.M., AGASSIZ SCHOOL LIBRARY.