



May 1989

The Newsletter of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council

Neighborhood Council Notes.....

State Senator Barrett discussed the Massachusetts state budget. Human services spending is up in some areas including funding for AIDS and homeless issues, and day care support.

What we have lost is funding for equal education opportunities for children of poverty, and there will be cuts in elder home care (which will ultimately lead to higher institutionalization of elders).

Tax increases are necessary to maintain many services, but the problem with a tax increase is credibility. Barrett feels that people would generally favor increased taxes if they were sure their money would go for the right programs. (Barrett said that taxes are actually lower here than in Kansas if you consider taxes paid per dollars earned.)

The question was asked: should Proposition 2 1/2 be repealed? Should it be increased to Prop 3 1/2? Barrett said that we should not raise property taxes too much, since this often burdens the elderly and that would not be fair. The constitution requires a tax that falls equally on all tax payers.

General Business included a discussion on billboards at Porter Square. Currently, anywhere in Cambridge, there must be a license issued by the city. The city is considering a new policy on licensing, and a committee has been established to look into the matter. (Joel Bard will be representing the neighborhood council on that committee.) The car garage on Eustis St. applied for a license to sell used cars. Several neighbors, with help from City Councillor Bill Walsh, petitioned the city for more information on specific uses of the property. It is currently used for car storage, which was a grandfathered use, and a variance will be necessary to make a change through the Board of Zoning Appeals. Three Aces Pizza has a loud generator that has disturbed residents. The License Commission regulates noise levels, and can be contacted to file a complaint.

next council meeting...

May Council Meeting

Wednesday May 10th at 7:30 p.m.

Agassiz Neighborhood Council Meeting

20 Sacramento St. (call 498-9056 for information)

Agenda:

- 7:30 p.m. General business

- 8:00 p.m. Representatives will speak from

Committee to Defeat Proposition 1-2-3

Jeff May Home Inspector, presented a slide show on destructive forces to buildings: What can bring your house down? Water, water, water. He discussed damage to foundations caused by neglect of gutters. Sand washes away and causes walls to cave in. Downspouts need elbow ends and splash plates to take water away from foundation.

Another cause of trouble is carpenter ants and termites. They are attracted to end grain - wood in contact with the soil and dampness. Check cellars for sawdust hanging on rotted wood. This is usually caused by carpenter ants that push the wood away to make nests. Termites actually eat the wood. They build tubes of sand to get to the wood.

Rust is another symptom. Metal inside concrete begins to rust and expands which forces cracks in concrete.

Jeff also handed out a summary of indoor air pollutants and a list of useful phone numbers and organizations that can help with these problems. For a copy call the council office at 498-9056.

Other Neighborhood Updates.....

Prop 1-2-3:

A Speculation Scheme To Undo Cambridge

Since the Cambridge City Council put the rent control law into effect in 1970, Cambridge's system of rent control has been subject to constant attack by the local real estate industry. At first these attacks took the form of legislative proposals to decontrol many, if not all, rent-controlled properties. Once the city passed the Removal Ordinance to slow the conversion of apartments to condominiums in 1979, real estate industry campaigns have been devoted largely to repealing the Removal Ordinance or otherwise minimizing tenants protection that limit widespread condo conversion. All the while apartments throughout the city have been decontrolled or converted to condos; the best estimate is that the number of rent-controlled units in Cambridge declined from 22,000 in 1970 to somewhere between 12,000 and 14,000 in 1989. Many times the conversion of these apartments circumvented existing laws designed to protect tenants; sometimes the law was evaded completely. This year's proposal by the real estate industry to undermine rent control is called Proposition 1-2-3. While the language of the proposal was drafted by local realtor Fred Meyer, it embodies the spirit of a plan to speed up condo conversion proposed by a group of large landlords led by Alex Steinbergh in the spring of 1987. After Meyer's proposal failed to garner enough signatures to go on the ballot as a binding referendum in November 1987, Steinbergh and other large landlords, realtors, and developers took up the



challenge through CHOA, the "Cambridge Home Ownership Association", in order to put the financial muscle of the real estate industry behind Meyer's proposal. In 1988 CHOA raised nearly \$60,000 from a veritable "who's who" of the Cambridge real estate industry. CHOA hired temporary workers who were paid to get signatures for putting Prop 1-2-3 on the November 1989 ballot. The signature gathering campaign was aggressive and often deceptive: those who were encouraged to sign -- or did sign -- were told, they report, that this was a proposal for "affordable housing".

Proposition 1-2-3 is anything but a proposal for affordable housing. If approved Prop 1-2-3 would set off a speculative binge across the city and destroy much of what remains of the city's diminishing stock of affordable housing.

Prop 1-2-3 would undo the tenant protection of the Removal Ordinance by opening up most rent-controlled housing to rapid condo conversion. It would permit landlords to sell rent-controlled apartments to any tenant who has occupied his/her apartment for two years. The proposed law places no limit on what price landlords might sell apartments for as condominiums.

The speculative inducement for the landlord is clear enough: Prop 1-2-3 will enable him/her to reap a windfall profit by selling rent-controlled apartments at their condo conversion values. Typically, rent-controlled apartments are valued at about \$30,000. Meanwhile, the median selling price of a condo in Cambridge has exceeded \$150,000 in the last three years. Even if landlords settled for only 50% of the windfall -- what CHOA spokesman Charles Laverty referred to as "50 cents on the dollar" -- sales in the range of \$100,000/unit would produce a handsome profit for landlords.

There appears to be a hitch, though. Whether the offering price is \$150,000 or \$100,000, what tenant could afford to buy? Virtually none. According to the 1987 Abt study of housing in Cambridge, the average annual income of rent-controlled tenant households was less than \$23,000.

For the landlords there are two ways to overcome this barrier to cashing in. First, upon turnover or whenever an apartment is vacated, they can and will rent to wealthy individuals who can afford to buy. This means that all but upper-income households will henceforth be excluded from finding homes in what has heretofore been affordable housing in Cambridge. These new upper-income owners may purchase their units at the outset, but agree to rent at first to meet the latter, though not the spirit, of Prop 1-2-3's occupancy requirement.

Second, pressures will be brought to bear on current tenants to buy or move out. The precedents in Cambridge do not bode well the July 1981 rush to convert apartments to condos, just before a loophole in the Removal Ordinance was about to be closed, left a legacy of fear, harassment, coercion, and anger for tenants who resisted buying their apartments. Now, as Meyer has already suggested, landlords will make deals in order to remove

apartments from rent control. Landlords will offer to finance the sale, so that instead of rental payments the tenants will be making monthly payments to their landlords-turned bankers, but these payments will far exceed the current rents. This will put more pressure on the tenants/owners to turn around and sell their units at an even higher price than they initially contracted for. Once more, the speculative impulse will make these units affordable to the wealthy -- and no one else.

The real estate industry's pitch this year will be rich with buzz words, but the language is Orwellian. Don't be fooled

Mike Turk

Committee to Defeat Proposition 1-2-3

[Come to the Agassiz Neighborhood Council meeting on May 10th at 8 p.m. and hear a presentation from members of the Committee to Defeat Prop 1-2-3]

Rep Alvin Thompson - Office Hours for Agassiz

On Wednesday May 24th between 6-7 p.m., State Representative Alvin Thompson (who defeated Sandra Graham in the last election) will hold office hours at the Agassiz Community Center, 20 Sacramento St. Please stop by the community center and introduce yourself. Bring your concerns and questions for Representative Thompson.

Voter Registration to be held at Agassiz School

On Thursday May 25 between 5:30-8:30 p.m., the Ward 7 Democratic Committee will hold a voter registration night at the Agassiz School. If you are not a registered voter, please stop by the school, located on the corner of Sacramento and Oxford Sts. and *register to vote*.

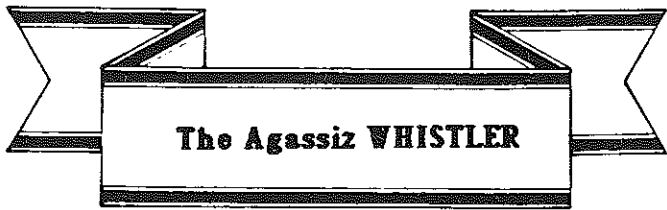
Nominating Committee

The committee to nominate a new board for the Agassiz Neighborhood Council will be meeting in May, and a slate of officers will be announced in the June *Whistler*. To nominate yourself or another community member, please call Carol Hantman, Committee member at 354-5118 or the neighborhood council office at 498-9056.

OUTBACK SUMMER CAMP BROCHURES AVAILABLE

Outback Summer Camp is now accepting registrations for this summer. The camp runs between 8:30 and 2:30 from July 3rd-August 25th for children entering 1st-6th grades. The cost is \$75 per week, \$100 per week for extended day (until 5:30). Children may be registered for any number of weeks.

Spaces are limited, so call 498-9056 for more information and a registration form now. Youth entering 7-9th grades can call the same number for information on the Counselor in Training program, which is a two week supervised working experience at the summer camp.



Special Cultural Programs

Family Folk Dancing at Agassiz

The next session of Family Folk dance with Jill Gleim and live music will be held on Friday 5/19 from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. in Baldwin Hall (the Agassiz Gym). The cost is \$2. per person. Everyone, adults and children, are welcome. Call the office at 498-9056 for more information.

Oral History Project

The neighborhood council is currently planning an Oral History Project, one of a series of community activities that was designed as a vehicle for residents to learn the history of the Agassiz neighborhood and to celebrate its cultural diversity. As part of the planning process, representatives from the neighborhood and the city of Cambridge attended a workshop conducted by Cindy Cohen of Cambridge's Oral History Center.

Over the next several months, current and former elderly residents of the Agassiz neighborhood will share their stories of yesterday with interviewers. These interviews will be taped and transcribed and, in some cases, video taped, so that they can be shared with the larger community during a public screening and exhibition.

The council is looking for volunteers who would like to be interviewees, interviewers, videographers, and transcribers. We are also seeking photographs from the 1950's and earlier. (We were just lent photos of the first and second grade from 1897 and 1898--those from the *old* Agassiz School building.) The Cambridge Historical Commission has offered to make negatives and reprints of old photos free of charge for us if they are of interest to the commission, and if they are permitted to retain a copy for their files. Arrangements for pick up and return of the photos can also be made. Of very special interest to us are any photographs of Maria Baldwin, the first black headmistress in Cambridge who devoted 40 years of service to the Agassiz School.

To volunteer or provide photographs for this project, please call Terry DeLancey at 498-9056.

Sacramento St. Garden Gears Up

A spring mailing was recently sent to all gardeners who currently have a plot in the Sacramento St. Garden. Garden fees are due by 5/15. There will be a pot luck dinner and garden tour for members on 6/11 at 4 p.m. Bring a dish and/or drink, swap plants and have a chance to visit with other gardeners.

Call Lynn Gay 491-4263 if you have not received your mailing or you need further information. To obtain a garden plot, please call Cambridge Conservation Commission at 498-9048.

Whistler deadline for June May 21st. Please call or send us any newsworthy information.

CRIMEWATCH

This is a list of crime in the Agassiz Neighborhood
.....March 21 through April 20th 1989

- Carver St.....Bicycle theft (4/9).
- Eustis St.....Attempted car theft (3/23), theft from unlocked car (3/23).
- Forest St.....Break and entry (4/5); Attempted break and entry (4/5).
- Frost St.....Bicycle theft (3/25).
- Francis Av.....Bicycle theft (4/13); Malicious destruction property (3/29); Theft from locked car (3/29).
- Garfield St.....Attempted car theft (4/2).
- Irving St.....Malicious destruction property (4/16).
- Mass. Ave.....Theft from unlocked car (4/6, 4/12, 4/17); Disorderly person (4/15).
- Mellen St.....Theft from unlocked car (4/16).
- Museum St.....Bicycle theft (4/16).
- Oxford St.....Attempted car theft (4/12); Hit and run property (4/12); malicious destruction property (4/1).
- Prentiss St.....Bicycle theft (4/10).
- Sacramento St.....Attempted street robbery (4/19).
- Wendell St.....Malicious destruction property (4/5).

ADS* HELP AVAILABLE* HELP WANTED

House Sitter Available-

Location: Needs to be reasonable close to Lesley College
Personal Qualifications: Ehud Katz, from Kibbutz Dalia in Israel, is an experienced social worker, a father of five, and extremely responsible. He will be here unaccompanied for three weeks to complete a master's degree program at Lesley, and seeks housing in exchange for looking after a house or apartment. He will do routine yard work as well as maintaining household security and keeping things in order. If you are interested, or want more information, call: Dr. Marion Sanders 964-6072.

Dog Walker Wanted-Near Agassiz School. For one half-hour each afternoon. Must be very responsible. Good dog, good pay. Please call Dr. Cohen 492-2239.

HELP US CLEAN UP THE TOT LOT

The new Tot Lot looks good, but it won't for long if we don't all help keep it clean. Rich Curran has agreed to organize a clean up sometime in May. If you would like to help out, please call Rich at 868-0685.

May 1989	
5/1 Monday.....	Community May Day Celebration 7:30 Sacramento Field
5/9 Tuesday.....	School closes, afterschool opens 12:45 p.m.
5/10 Wednesday.....	Agassiz Neighborhood Council Meeting 7:30 p.m. Agassiz School (See page one for agenda)
5/17 Wednesday.....	Agassiz School Improvement Committee 3 p.m. Agassiz School - Resource Room
5/19 Friday	Family Folk Dancing 7:30 p.m. Agassiz School Baldwin Hall \$2 admission-Children welcome
5/24 Wednesday.....	Alvin Thompson State Representative will hold office hours 6-7 p.m. at the Agassiz Community Center 20 Sacramento St.
5/25 Thursday.....	Voter Registration Agassiz School 5:30-8:30 p.m.
5/29 Monday.....	Memorial Day Holiday: No School

The yoga Experience

First Church of Cambridge Congregational, 11 Garden Street, Cambridge, next to the Sheraton Commander.

A 12 week class in Kripalu Yoga, taught by certified teacher Danielle Lévi Alvarès.

For every age and condition.

For more information and fees call 354-2113.

Tuesday

12:30-1:30 P.M.

Wednesday

5:15-6:15 P.M.

Thursday

6:45-7:45 P.M.

I am Zach Johnson age 9, almost 10.

I am looking for jobs like washing cars, entertaining children while there parents are home, feeding cats or dogs when people are on vacation or delivering something or getting something for someone.

I can be reached at 73 PRENTISS ST. Phone# 492-6644

Repeat Performance, a childrens' clothing shop located at the corner of Oxford and Beacon Sts., is looking for a responsible person to work Mon-Fri (no weekends) between 12:30-4:30 p.m. Call Barbara at 864-5144.

Cambridge has instituted 498-9359 as a DRUG TIP LINE. This line is a tape machine of the Cambridge Police. Call if you have any information for police regarding illegal drugs. Tips can be anonymous.

May 1989

**Agassiz Neighborhood Council
20 Sacramento Street
Cambridge, MA 02138 498-9056**

THE WHISTLER