

the Whistler

Newsletter of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council

March 2019

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ANC

NOTES FROM THE FEB 7 SPECIAL MEETING

Update On Andover Hall Renewal Project

On February 7th, Agassiz Neighborhood Council met for a third time to discuss the Andover Hall renovation and its impact on the area, specifically the red oak tree that Harvard plans to cut down to make room for a new addition. Since Harvard was last present for an ANC meeting, it hired tree analysts to determine the health of the tree and recommend options to save it, if any.

“We’re proud of our engagement with the Agassiz neighborhood,” said Thomas Lucey, Harvard’s Director of Communications to open the meeting. “We value our open space . . . and, of course, we value trees. We work very hard to be good stewards of these living beings.”

In his initial remarks, Mr. Lucey noted that Harvard has 5,000 trees on campus, “all at different points in their life cycles.”

“As part of the due diligence to understand all the possibilities about the [red oak tree], we

commissioned a certified arborist to undertake an extensive examination of the tree to fully understand its structure, health, and vitality,” he continued.



This examination came from Bartlett Tree Experts, a privately-owned company that aims to provide “scientifically-based tree care information,” according to its board-certified master arborist, Andrew Balon.

“Our mission is to do anything we can to keep trees up,” Mr. Balon said.

Mr. Balon presented the assessment of the tree, which was conducted by tree analyst Tim Armstrong with a “resistograph,” a device that tests the level of sound wood within a tree by measuring the force required to push a rotating needle into its trunk. Ultimately, Mr. Balon explained, they found the tree to be “high risk,” based on its likelihood of falling and the impact that would have on the surrounding area. Their recommendation was to “remove the tree as soon as feasible.”

NEXT ANC MONTHLY MEETING



March 12, 7:30 PM
Maud Morgan Arts,
20A Sacramento Street

Agenda:

- Community discussion of development in the neighborhood

Part of their recommendation came from the decay Mr. Armstrong found in the tree's lower half, which Mr. Balon called "significant" in that it shows the stress endured by the tree. They also observed steady decline in refoliation, measuring only two inches of growth per year for a tree they said could produce 6-12 inches.

Mr. Balon reassured that Bartlett's intent is to offer "unbiased opinions," and that it's not in the business of tree removal. If anything, he said, the company works to find any possible mediation or preservation tactics.

"When it comes to a tree being unsafe, we have some scientifically-driven ironclad data," he continued. "I find it personally very frightening. Just imagine what that would be like, if a tree were to come down on somebody here. That would be awful for all of us."

"What's troubling for me is that Harvard was ready to have this tree cut down and make room for the renovation with no regard for finding out about its health or longevity," said one community member. "I feel like with a tree this old, special and big, hiring a company like [Bartlett] for a first or second opinion should be part of the protocol. I'm not happy with the outcome, but I think this was the right direction to go in."

Many were curious about what caused the tree to enter such a rapid state of decline, given that it's been alive for over a century. While Bartlett couldn't pinpoint a cause in its examination, Mr. Balon said pruning cuts and storm damage are often to blame for decay.

"It doesn't happen fast," he added. "What we know is what we found out. We know it's decay, and that it's only going to get worse. It's not going to get better."

"Part of the heartbreak for me is that it's a very important tree," Shane Brodie, Divinity School graduate student and tree advocate, said. "It's a witness that has listened to our conversations

for the last 100 years. We have classes [at the Divinity School] that talk about extending ourselves beyond the human world in our compassion. I worry that all of that is locked up in books and theories and not in practice."

Mr. Brodie also expressed that he was disheartened by the process through which Harvard has engaged with the surrounding community on the issue.

"This school should be doing extraordinary things and, frankly, it has the money for it," he said.

"It's obviously not good news for the tree, and I understand why there might be some skepticism, so we shared these findings with the Department of Public Works," Mr. Lucey said.

Owen O'Riordan, DPW Commissioner, shared that the city arborist and urban forestry superintendent agreed with Bartlett's findings that it is a high risk tree and needs to come down. Mr. Brodie questioned why, when he had independently approached the city arborist, the arborist said he couldn't get involved.

"I can't tell you as to why he said that," Mr. O'Riordan replied. "I just know that we were requested to come out and assess the tree."

Susan Ringler, an advocate for a moratorium on tree cutting in Cambridge, was especially worried for the loss of canopy and leaf surface area.

"Somebody needs to speak for the tree," she said. "You can replace the trunk, but you cannot replace leaf surface area. There are very few trees like this left in Cambridge. We are on the edge of climate change, and we cannot wait 20-30 years [for newly planted trees to mature]."

"We're committed to replacing both canopy cover and caliber by planting a different variety of trees of different species and sizes," Mr. Lucey said. "We are constantly renewing, because these trees are in different parts of their life cycles."

Steve Simpson, Harvard's landscape architect, said the new trees would eventually "create an arboretum quality," and they're committed to making the canopy and caliber "at least equal or more" on day one.

While much of the two hour meeting was spent discussing the red oak tree, attendees did want Harvard to respond to other concerns around the upcoming construction.

"I live across the block and have three small children," one neighbor said. "I come mostly out of concern for the micro-community that lives on Francis Avenue. Are you going to talk about the project and how it will impact the micro-community, and how you will mitigate that impact for your neighbors?"

"We've implemented a construction mitigation program where we employ people to work with the construction company [on items] such as adjusting truck routes and construction hours," Mr. Lucey said. "I can't promise you're never going to hear construction activity, but we have means and methods to mitigate the impact."

Another resident was concerned about how the renovation project would affect local street parking. Mr. Lucey reassured that parking shouldn't change, and anyone using street parking should have permits, which would be enforced by the city.

To close the meeting, Tanya Iatridis, the Senior Director of University Planning, reiterated the objectives behind the Andover Hall renovation, which include adding a multi-faith space, increasing accessibility, and creating more common



spaces, such as a café.

"We believe that this project will have a lot of positive outcomes," Ms. Iatridis said.

For more information, contact Mr. Lucey at thomas_lucey@harvard.edu.

Q&A

Q: "Can you visualize any way to keep this tree alive and let it die in a natural way?"

A: Mr. Balon: "We believe that the tree has a high risk of failure. Pruning would probably kill it, which would be the first option we'd go to before giving it any structural support. Bracing and cabling is not going to preserve the viability of the tree."

Q: "How long do you feel you could, with any reasonable degree of safety, keep this tree alive?"

A: Mr. Balon: "There's a greater chance of this tree failing before it dies."

Q: "If this construction hadn't been planned, would someone still come look at this tree and think it needs to come down?"

A: Mr. Balon: "Yes - that's what [Mr. Armstrong] does. We assess trees all over, for different municipalities or universities, etc. . . . Our hope is that some of the trees will be preserved based on our recommendations."

Q: "If this tree is such a danger, why wasn't it noticed by Harvard officials?"

A: Mr. Lucey: "We have been noticing. The level of decay is shocking but in terms of its health and vitality, we knew that it wasn't doing well. That wasn't a surprise to us."

Q: "Is it possible that [the wound in the trunk of the tree] was man or woman inflicted? Does Harvard need to take a look at its tree care practices, especially around sacred trees like this one?"

A: Mr. Balon: "There's no way to know how

the wound occurred, whether it was nature or done by man.”

Q: “What are the statistics for a tree like this?”

A: Mr. Balon: “We would classify this red oak as over mature. It’s old for the species. There are too many variables to say what a median age would be [for this type of tree]. I’m sure there’s data out there.”

Q: “What was Harvard doing to mitigate damage to this tree?”

A: Mr. DeFlorio: “We’ve had the trees reviewed by arborists. In the case of this tree, there’s been some pruning because we were told that certain branches were dangerous and needed to be pruned. It’s a twofold goal that we make sure a tree is safe and that we keep it healthy.”

Q: “How will the new trees grow 10% each year after going through the shock of transplanting?”

A: “First year the tree will grow roots, and the next year it will grow canopy. All these trees have different rates of growth.”

Q: “Does Harvard realize how its students and faculty get to campus? Ubers and Lyfts come down [Francis Avenue] really fast. As a neighbor, it’s pretty scary.”

A: Mr. Lucey: “We can talk to the city about enforcing limits. We’ve been urged to encourage fewer single occupant vehicles, and we’ve been able to reduce that to only 11% of vehicles.”

Q: “How will the use of campus change after the renovation?”

A: Ms. Iatridis: “It’s making the space much better and connecting it back to the mission. The programs that are going on right now will have a better space to accommodate them.”

A: Mr. DeFlorio: “We’re not looking at increasing the amount of events. For example, in this room we have an event where it cannot seat everyone and some people have to sit in a different room and watch the program on TV.

The renovation will address problems like that, but it will not affect the quantity of events.”

Q: “Why does the school think it’s a good idea to put a cafeteria near our rare book collection when we have a vermin problem?”

A: Mr. DeFlorio: “We did a lot of focus groups, and one thought [that came from them] was that it would be great to have that close to the library. It creates a vibrant central space where students and others can be together and share meals.”

Learn more about community organizing efforts around the Divinity School red maple on Facebook at <http://bit.ly/fb-divinity-tree>

Read a recent Harvard Crimson article on the tree: <http://bit.ly/harvard-crimson-tree-update>

Letters concerning the tree can be sent to:

- Harvard Divinity School Dean David N. Hempton: dhempton@hds.harvard.edu
- Harvard President Lawrence Bacow: president@harvard.edu

To publicly post letters to the related Facebook page, email a copy to: sbrodie@hds.harvard.edu.



Community

HIP HOP FESTIVAL RECAP

The 23rd Annual Hip Hop Festival featured returning favorites OrigNation, FloorLords, The Hip Hop Transformation Project, Intrigue Boston, and our fantastic MC Naheem. This year, we gladly welcomed the newly renamed Rhythm Beat Squad of King Open School and DJ Dru-Nyce.

Many thanks to Ana Balbino, Andrea Breen, Micah Eglinton-Woods, Phoebe Sinclair, our

photographer Ashley Yee, and other Agassiz Baldwin team members for helping to organize the event. Special thanks to all the kids, families, and hip hop enthusiasts who attended.

View more photos online at:
<http://bit.ly/hip-hop-fest-photos-2019>



THANK YOU ABC ANNUAL FUND DONORS

Agassiz Baldwin Community thanks our Annual Fund supporters between July 2018 and February 2019.

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Summer Fund

Additional donations to Agassiz Baldwin come through Maud Morgan Arts and the Living Well Network. We're also grateful for the many in-kind donations of volunteer hours, wisdom, and turkey-roasting acumen.

Support ABC

Donations to ABC provide valuable funds for many programs and services. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to: Agassiz Baldwin Community, 20 Sacramento Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 or made online at: [http:// bit.ly/donate-to-ABC](http://bit.ly/donate-to-ABC).

Learn about more options for supporting ABC at: <http://agassiz.org/about/support-abc/>

WHISTLER ARCHIVE: HOLIDAY POETRY

In its first holiday edition (December 1970), *The Whistler* printed selections of poetry and prose from “some of the people who don’t normally write for these pages - our neighborhood children” (as it was put in the introduction). As this time of year can often evoke nostalgia for our childhoods, it feels particularly appropriate to reflect on the history of this neighborhood through the voices of those who grew up in it.

“Snow and Ice” by Rachel Golden, Grade 4

I really love snow,
Boy!!! It really does glow,
Some people just pout at snow
But I feel so sad when it has to go

I love ice very much
Slipping, sliding, lots of slush

Ice and snow are alot alike
And there are lots of places to hike

“Giving” by Sybil Ferguson, Grade 2

There once was a tired Santa and he had a wife and elves. One day it was time to give all the toys out to the children. The tired Santa Claus was sleeping. Mrs. Santa Claus could not wake him up. She heard all the little children crying for their toys. She could not stand the crying so she dressed up as Santa and soon they were all laughing.

“If I Was A Giraff” by Helen Slavin, Grade 4

All I'd like to be is a giraff, living along and roaming the country free.
And when I die, I want to be alone,
And right then and there I would have
Finished my travels. But I'd remember my travels,
And my happy travels being alone.

“People are not the same” by Julie Slater, Grade 2

Mommy is mommy
And
That's who she is.

Daddy is daddy
And
That's who he is.

My cat is my cat
And
That's who she is.

Me is me
And
That's who I am.

The Whistler Archive is an ongoing project conducted by ANC Scribe Jessica Leach to document Agassiz's history as told by this newsletter. We plan to reprint the highlights in upcoming issues. If you have any suggestions or curiosities, please send them to press@agassiz.org.



Maud Morgan Arts

GRAY MATTER: HEIDI WHITMAN AT CHANDLER GALLERY

Dates: February 19–March 15, 2019
Artist Talk: Thursday, March 14,
6:00–7:00 PM

Thoughts and dreams don't simply appear in our heads, though they often feel sudden and random. Instead, they travel from one part of our brains



to another, creating a path of neurons and reactions that ends in our consciousness. In her show at the Chandler Gallery, “Gray Matter,” Heidi Whitman creatively maps these journeys in sculptures and drawings.

Learn more: <http://www.maudmorganarts.org/chandler-gallery/>

City Wide

CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN SURVEY

The Cambridge Public Library has begun a strategic planning process to determine how they can best serve the community. Help the library learn about what residents want and need by taking an online survey. The deadline is Monday, March 11, 2019.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/38L32H9>

Learn more: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/cpl>

Community Calendar

March 2019

Tuesday, March 12	7:30-9:00 PM	ANC Meeting (see page 1 for agenda) Maud Morgan Arts, 20A Sacramento St., 2D Studio All are welcome, please join us
Wednesday, March 13	6:00-7:30 PM	ABC Board Meeting, 20 Sacramento St, 2nd Floor Public welcome

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The Whistler March 2019



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