March 1989

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AGASSIZ NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

Community News

Neighborhood Council Notes........

(This section of The Whistler reports on last month's Agassiz Neighborhood Council meeting. All members of the community activate their membership by attending council meetings held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. You may bring up any issue of general neighborhood interest during general business. For a formal place on the agenda, which appears on the front page of The Whistler, call the council at 498-9056.)

We were fortunate to have STEPHEN JAY GOULD speak to us at our February 8th neighborhood council meeting on the life of Louis Agassiz, and the racist views of his day. (Louis Agassiz is the namesake of our neighborhood and school.) We learned about Louis, who came from Europe and achieved preeminence in the field of comparative zoology, as well as Boston society. He established the glacial theory, Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology on Oxford St., and he helped organize a school for girls established by his wife, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz (who later helped establish Radcliffe). Louis Agassiz's blatant racism, shown in letters read by Gould, was the mainstream thinking of the powerful people (white males) of his day. If we condemn, it should be society, not the man.

This was another offering in our continuing series on our neighborhoods' diverse cultural and social history. A video tape of the talk may be borrowed from the Agassiz Neighborhood Council for appropriate use.

March Council Meeting

Wednesday March 8th at 7:30 p.m.
Agassiz Neighborhood Council Meeting
20 Sacramento St. (call 498-9056 for information)
Agenda:
7:30 p.m. General Business
- Update on the recent Porter Square traffic study
- 8:00 p.m. Cambridge NOT included in Watershed Protection Act
  speaker Chris Barnor-Sen. Mike Barrett's Office (see article).
- 8:30 p.m. Report from Betty Desrosiers-Cambridge Community
  Development on Amendment to Cambridge Zoning Ordinance:
  Traffic Mitigation + Parking Supply Restrictions (see article).

Other Neighborhood Updates................

Comprehensive Rezoning Plan from CCD

The Cambridge Community Development Department has devised a plan that will amend zoning in Cambridge by adding a new section entitled "Traffic Mitigation and Parking Supply Restrictions" (section 11.400). Betty Desrosiers from that office contacted us in late January to speak about this plan, and she will at the March 8th meeting of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council, 20 Sacramento St. This agenda item will begin at 8:30 p.m.

The information we received is summarized by the community development department as follows (for a complete copy of the proposed amendment and/or the traffic analysis report call the council office at 498-9056):

Trip Generation Study for Office Uses
- Survey conducted at Alewife and Harvard and Lechmere Squares
- Results showed vehicle trip generation rates to be substantially below national averages (ITE).
- Percentages of trips by automobile was:
  80% for Alewife
  40% for Harvard Square
  70% for Lechmere Square

Traffic Mitigation Zoning
- Special Permit required for all non residential projects
  of 15,000 or more GSF if developer proposes to build
  other than minimum required parking.
- Vehicular trip generation rate is restricted to 35% of
  national average (ITE manual) for the Harvard, Central
  and Kenmore Square areas, and 55% for the Alewife,
  Porter Square and Lechmere Square areas, with the
  restriction eased to a maximum of 75% as the distance
  from the project to the closest MBTA station increases.
- Proponents must develop a mitigation program and
  monitoring plant to ensure compliance
- Additional mitigation programs will be required for the
  following concerns:
  • Impacts to neighborhood and other sensitive areas:
  • Impacts during construction;
  • Delivery and Service Vehicle Impacts; and
  • Making the area more amenable to pedestrians and
    bicyclists
- This zoning package was filed with the City Council
  for adoption in early January [1989].
Program for Existing Businesses
- Contract with CARAYAN FOR COMMUTERS, INC. to provide a "Commuter Coordinator" who will work exclusively in Cambridge:
  - Encourage commuters to use transit, high occupancy vehicles and other transportation alternatives to the single passenger car for their trip to work; and
  - Work with employers and developers to facilitate implementation of such programs at work sites.
- Implementation of this program will begin this month.

Cambridge Water Not Protected

The following is taken from Protection of the Cambridge Water Supply prepared by Senator Mike Barrett's Office:

A bill is moving through the (State) Legislature to protect the drinking water supply for many metropolitan communities, but not that of Cambridge. Cambridge is the only community within ten miles of Boston whose reservoir would continue to be exposed to unregulated pressures from growth. This omission is very harmful to Cambridge citizens. It is also shortsighted policy for the state, since Cambridge would place additional stress upon the MWRA (Mass. Water Resources Authority) system if its own were to go down.

It is imperative that Cambridge be included in the bill, the Watershed Protection Act.

The city of Cambridge depends entirely upon its own independent drinking water supply. It has the right, however, to rely upon the metropolitan Boston system (the "metro system") should something happen to its own supply.

The report goes on to outline 1. Cambridge’s drinking water sources (which originate in Waltham along Rte 128, also abutted by Rte 2) including its right to participate in the system, and 2. Problems facing the Cambridge water system which include:

- Loss of watershed (an area of land that drains into a body of water) due to new development that covers ground surface making it impermeable.
- Nitrate contamination which occurs when in-ground septic systems percolate toward water supply or leaks occur in sewage systems (Cambridge is tracking down a potentially damaging leak in the Waltham system now).
- Sodium contamination of which the most common cause is the storing and use of road salt. Cambridge currently has tested at levels greater than 50 mg. per liter. The most recent figure is 43 mg. per liter. The Mass. health standard is 20 mg. per liter.

The report states that the salt contamination in the reservoir is so high that even if the sources of sodium chloride were completely eliminated a substantial drop in sodium concentrations in the reservoir would not be realized for nearly 15 years. Estimates for construction of a plant that could eliminate sodium chloride run $300 million, with annual operating costs of $15-20 million.

- Lack of protective legislation. Waltham has permitted three out of the five roads adjacent to the Cambridge Reservoir to be heavily developed: Rte 128, Winter St. and Trapelo Rd. Another large commercial development proposed for the watershed was recently denied, but power to protect watersheds from inappropriate development is unclear. Waltham does not have a watershed protection ordinance. The MWRA has no present intention of requiring Waltham to implement such ordinances. As a result of the lack of state and local protections, commercial development has occurred without check in the watershed, and the end result is degraded water quality due to loss of watershed and road runoff.

Come to the Agassiz Neighborhood Council meeting on March 8th at 7:30 p.m. at 20 Sacramento St. Chris Berner from Senator Barrett’s office will speak at 8 p.m. For more information call Chris Berner at 722-1280 or the council at 498-9056.

School Committee Funds Agassiz Repairs

About 100 students, faculty and parents of the Agassiz School attended a meeting on January 25th filling the school’s Baldwin Hall. This was a special meeting of the Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee of the Cambridge School Committee which was called to address the physical problems of the Agassiz School building. The meeting was called in response to problems outlined by the Agassiz School Building Committee, chaired by John Case. The school committee was given a tour of the school, and Subcommittee Chairman James Rafferty opened the meeting to comments from the floor. First speakers included students Mirebene Asamoah, Holly Bailey, Heidi Bailey, kale Hinderlie, and Emily Bard. Each student highlighted a different need currently unmet: lack of lunch facilities (children eat lunch in their classrooms), the general lack of common space (difficulty of scheduling auditorium events in the same room as gym events), the lack of a standard size gym (sports practices must be scheduled at Peabody School, to which the students must walk and follow Peabody’s gym schedules), the lack of permanent auditorium seating (chairs often must be moved several times each day), lack of lockers, clocks that don’t work, not enough bathrooms that do work.

David Clem, Agassiz parent and member of the Agassiz Building Committee, lamented the deteriorated condition of the physical plant, the lack of response to repeated requests for repairs (and the escalation of cost for repairs when they are not made on a continuous basis), as well as a need for both short and long term improvements. He unveiled a plan for the renovation of Baldwin Hall which included a storage closet in back of the equipment. (This is part of a larger plan by the Agassiz Building Committee that would, with the help of others, completely renovate and finally re dedicate Baldwin Hall to Maria Baldwin, Agassiz School headmistress and first black woman headmistress in Massachusetts, for whom it was named after her death in 1985.)
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Clem challenged the School Committee to give the Agassiz School $20,000. He asked them to make Agassiz a model school, and the Agassiz School would show how members of the business community could be called upon to form a partnership with them, and match the school committee's $20,000. This proposal would be overseen by a joint committee of parents, teachers, and school department personnel.

There were many others in the audience prepared to speak before the committee and express their support for this plan and the need for renovation and maintenance of the building. They never had a chance to speak, since all school committee members expressed overwhelming support for both short and long term improvements immediately.

Mayor Al Vallucci agreed to lead a delegation to the city manager's office the next day to request $20,000 for immediate renovations to Agassiz. The next day at 8:30 a.m. Mayor Vallucci was at the Agassiz School. He then transported the delegation to City Manager Healy's office, and that morning the $20,000 was committed by the city for the Agassiz School.

Heavy Equipment removed from Oxford Street site

The council contacted Inspectional Services regarding the storage of heavy trucks and equipment at 105 Oxford St. (next to the Alden Tot Lot) to see if this use was permitted.

We found that there are zoning regulations regarding the storage of motor vehicles, as well as traffic regulations regarding the parking of heavy equipment on city streets.

An inspector met with the owners to advise them that the equipment was there illegally. As of now all equipment has been removed from the site.

Update on Community Residence at Hammond St.

The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) has purchased a house at 71 Hammond St. In order to provide a fully staffed community residence for 8 mentally ill adults (see The Whistler January, February 1989).

In the past month the CHA has moved ahead. They have named three neighborhood representatives: Noelle Blanchard, George Hein and Robert Whalen who will take part in the committees to select a vendor (the mental health organization that will run the site) and select an architect. They have been given volumes of information on these selection processes by CHA, and you can contact them through the council office at 498-9056 with questions or concerns.

At this point three organizations are interested in becoming the vendor: Basic Health Management (with facilities located in Needham MA), Northeastern Family Institute (based in Peabody, MA) and Cambridge and Somerville Cooperative Apartment Project (CASCAP). Site visits to facilities run by these organizations may be scheduled by contacting Chris Weller at Cambridge Housing Authority 497-6800.

CHA will soon be sending a letter that details the above information to all who have asked to be on the mailing list for this project, or who have signed in at any meeting regarding it.

Porter Square Development

The most recent traffic study for Porter Square is entitled "Evaluation of Porter Exchange Parking Options and Related Topics" and was prepared by Howard Stein-Hudson and dated 2/3/89. This includes traffic considerations on the yet to be built Mt. Vernon St. development.

For a copy of the actual traffic study, please call the council office at 498-9056. The study will be discussed at the March 8th Neighborhood Council Meeting, 7:30, 20 Sacramento St. The overview and conclusions of the study are quoted below:

Overview, Conclusions and Recommendations:
1. It is slightly preferable to locate all of the Porter Exchange parking behind Porter Exchange, i.e., option B. [201 spaces plus 88 spaces, on 1st and deck, all behind Porter Exchange, for a total of 289 spaces to serve Porter Exchange; PLUS, at grade across Massachusetts Avenue, 71 spaces total (53 for residential use, 18 for office use).
2. Two or more reservoir spaces should be provided just inside the lot entrance under option B.
3. The Massachusetts Avenue/Roseland Street westbound intersection would benefit from two turning lanes—one for southbound traffic and one for northbound—from Roseland Street onto Massachusetts Avenue, under either of the parking options.
4. If option A [88 spaces underground across Massachusetts Avenue from Porter Exchange, plus 201 spaces at grade behind Porter Exchange, for a total of 289 spaces devoted to Porter Exchange; PLUS, in garage across Massachusetts Avenue, 81 garage spaces (62 for residential use, 19 for office use), and 12 spaces for commercial/White Hen Pantry] is selected, the 88 WSMA spaces should be restricted to assigned/stickered users, excluding general public/retail use, during weekday office hours.
5. It is acceptable from a traffic standpoint to make Mt. Vernon St. a cul-de-sac, and it is desirable from the standpoint of eliminating diverting traffic (even in small volumes) from the neighborhood street. Measures must be provided to ensure emergency access by fire and other such vehicles, via movable bollards or other means acceptable to city safety standards.
6. The assumptions, data and methodology used previously to assess the potential traffic impacts of the health club are professionally sound and reasonable.
Holiday Spa Charged with Discrimination

The latest charges faced by the Holiday Health Spa (trailer at Mass. Ave and ML Vernon St. and resident of Porter Exchange) are those of racial discrimination. The Boston Globe (2/11/89, p.5) reports that

"The Justice Department charged Holiday Spa, a major East Coast health club chain, with racial discrimination...The 260,000 member health club chain, which advertises heavily on television with Boston Celtics guard Denny Ainge, actress Cher and singer Sheena Easton as their spokespeople, was believed to have a policy of corporate discrimination that discouraged blacks from joining the club...The first count alleges US Health had 'implemented a policy and practice' of denying to blacks the full and equal use of their facilities in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act...The second count says US Health has denied credit to blacks interested in buying membership or offered blacks credit on less favorable terms than offered to whites in violation of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act."

Previous charges from area residents, some in our neighborhood, were reported by local papers in the last few months and included many false promises. They were investigated by the City of Cambridge's consumer board and the State Attorney General's office.

Oxford Laundry Victimized by Crime

The Oxford Laundry (previously the Gold Star) located next to the Oxford Spa at 102 Oxford St. has experienced an unusually large dose of crime, and has offered a $50 reward for the return of their sandwich sign, which stood in front of the laundry.

The sign, which was handmade, was not the only thing stolen. Also taken was an old television (provided by the owner for the comfort of the patrons) and carts for laundry. The windows were broken and doors were torn off. The fact that none of the items stolen were worth much suggests that the thieves were not professional.

Another break in was for the Mass. Lottery Machine, but the latest theft was the owners truck, parked in front of the laundry.

The Oxford Laundry has made many improvements that even non patrons can enjoy including a clock, a bench and a new garbage can. Please be sure to be a good neighbor, and report any suspicious activity to the police. If you have any information on the whereabouts of the sandwich sign, call the Oxford Laundry at 354-3290.

Whistler deadline for APRIL is March 23rd. Please call or send us any newsworthy information.

Special Cultural Programs

AGASSIZ YOUTH CHORUS TO PERFORM

The Agassiz Youth Chorus under the direction of Ada Snider will perform at Lesley College in Welsh Auditorium on April 13th at 7:30 p.m.

The April performance will include selections from Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story. Admission is free. For information call 498-9056.

Join the Agassiz May Day Celebration

Register for dance rehearsals on March 12th

Agassiz families celebrate May Day with early morning dances and song in traditional dress on Sacramento Field. The celebration proceeds to the Alden Tot Lot across from the Agassiz School. Dances and music are taught by Ada Snider and Jill Gleim, and performed by children, who collaborate with musicians and dancers to make the event possible.

Dances will be taught on seven Sunday afternoons, beginning on March 12th at the Agassiz School in Baldwin Hall.

Morris Dances 4 p.m.
Pole Dances 5 p.m.

We especially encourage returning dancers. If you have danced two years or more - come to 2 rehearsals only. Be sure to register early, though, so we can save you a ribbon. If you have danced one year, come to 5 rehearsals. If you are new, please plan to come to all rehearsals.

Morris Dancers - We hope to have two levels this year so that returners can learn a new dance.

Registration will be on March 12th at the first rehearsal for school age boys and girls. Questions? Call Ada Snider at 661-2961.

Quilt Work at Agassiz

A Passion for Life: Stories and Folk Arts Of Palestinian And Jewish Women is the title of a project sponsored by the Oral History Center that highlights the "cultural richness of two peoples whose common humanity has been obscured by stereotyping and political conflict."

A part of this project is a quilt of two cultures which will be displayed in June at the Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center. The quilt is being worked in the Agassiz Community Center. For more information call The Oral History Center 661-8288 (their new address is 186 1/2 Hampshire St. Cambridge 02139).

Family Folk Dancing at Agassiz

The next session of Family Folk dance with Jill Gleim will be held on Friday, March 10th from 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. in the Agassiz Gym. The cost is $2. per person. Everyone, adults and children, are welcome.
MARCH COMMUNITY CALENDAR

3/8 Wednesday ........................... Agassiz Neighborhood Council Meeting
  7:30 p.m. Agassiz School (See page one for agenda)
3/8 Wednesday ........................... School closes, afterschool opens 12:45 p.m.
3/9 Thursday ............................ The Hundred Languages of Childhood 3:15 City Hall Annex
  57 Inman St. (see article)
3/10 Friday .............................. Family Folk Dancing 7:30 p.m. Agassiz School
  Baldwin Hall $2 admission—Children welcome
3/12 Sunday ............................. Registration—May Day Dance Rehearsals 4 p.m.
  Agassiz School Baldwin Hall, 28 Sacramento St.
3/15 Wednesday .......................... Agassiz School Improvement Committee
  3 p.m. Agassiz School—Resource Room
3/15 Wednesday .......................... Early Childhood Forum 6–8:30 p.m. King School (see article)
3/16 Thursday ........................... Youth Expression Theatre, King School 7 p.m. (see article)
3/17 Friday ............................... St. Patricks Day—No school or community school programs
3/24 Friday .............................. Good Friday—No school or community school programs
3/27 Sunday .............................. Easter Sunday

ADS* HELP AVAILABLE* HELP WANTED
Shotakan Karate Classes at Agassiz School for children and adults. Evenings and Saturday afternoons—Call Sensei Gabriel Trance at 783-5145; Agassiz Community School 498-9056

The illustrations in this month's Whistler were done by Agassiz Community School students in Courtney Skinner's afterschool illustration classes

Registration begins on March 1 for classes in camcorder, production, editing at Cambridge Community Television. Call 225-2500 for more information

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Agassiz Neighborhood Council
20 Sacramento Street
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