Neighborhood Council Notes

Notes from the September 13 council meeting

City Budget Cuts - Eileen Keegan, Division Head of Community and Youth, Cambridge Department of Human Services, contacted the council office to request that the Agassiz Neighborhood Council give back $200 from this year's contract in order to share the burden of the city expenses equally with other neighborhoods. The contract totals $20,500 for payroll and $5,000 for program expenses. Because the Agassiz Neighborhood Council is a tax exempt, non profit corporation, there is a contract renewed yearly with the city of Cambridge. All other neighborhood councils are part of the City of Cambridge. While the program budget is the same ($5,000) for all neighborhoods, payroll expenses vary among neighborhoods.

The Agassiz Neighborhood Council is the only council that is responsible for all of its expenses: insurance, staff benefits, payroll taxes, office supplies and equipment, postage, and programs. These expenses are covered by the City of Cambridge in other neighborhoods. Some residents felt it was unfair to be asked to shoulder more.

There were questions regarding the way these decisions are made and what the future holds regarding funding. In light of these questions, Ms. Keegan was asked to attend a meeting and discuss them with us.

Candidates Questionnaire - A committee has been working on a questionnaire for all 28 candidates for City Council, and the final draft was refined at the meeting. Below is the letter that was mailed to all council hopefuls (responses will be out in early November before elections):

The Agassiz Neighborhood Council has developed the following brief questionnaire that addresses concerns of the residents of this neighborhood and the city as a whole. Your response along with the responses of the other 28 candidates will be printed in a special edition of "The Whistler" (copy attached), and distributed to 2,000 residents. In order to print responses from all 28 candidates, we are requesting that you limit your answers to 50 words or less for each question.

The deadline for receiving your completed questionnaire is 4 p.m. Friday October 6th.

All questionnaires should be returned to the above address. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the questionnaire, please call the council office...

1. Rent control has become a major and polarizing issue in the City of Cambridge. If you think that improvements to the Rent Control Law are necessary, what three improvements would you make?

2. Do you favor limited terms for appointed board and commission members in Cambridge? Yes No

3. Do you favor limited terms for elected officials? Yes No

D. Are you in favor of a weekly recycling program in Cambridge?

E. As candidate for City Council, what three issues facing Cambridge do you feel most qualified to address and why?

next council meeting...

Wednesday October 11 at 7:30 p.m.
Agassiz Neighborhood Council
20 Sacramento St. (call 498-9056 for information)

Agenda:
- 7 p.m. General Business
  (All neighbors are invited to voice their concerns)
  Update on CDIA's latest plans for Mt. Vernon St.
- 8:00 p.m. Deputy City Manager Richard Rossi will address "The accountability and follow through of City Departments"

Surf N Cycle - Complaints were made regarding the sidewalk and street congestion made by bicycles and vehicles at the corner of Mass Ave. and Forest St. In addition to the bicycle display in front and boxes of stock in back, test bicycle runs are also made and stock is now being moved in and out via a plywood sheet covering a former window. Inspectional services was notified of the violations this summer. It was agreed to send a letter to the owner requesting that he clear up the violations.

Oxford St. Traffic - Wendell, Forest and Eustis/Garfield Streets are dangerous places to cross while driving or walking, and noise due to large trucks is an increasing problem. The traffic committee...
changed priorities when Porter Square development became the larger issue, but the committee is being reformed. The first meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 25 at 7:30 p.m. in the community center at 20 Sacramento St. A main goal will be to urge the traffic department to study the entire length of Oxford St. for solutions. If you are interested in helping on that committee, please call the council office at 498-9056.

August 13th Flooding - Commissioner William Sommers and Superintendent of Sewers Jerry Lucey from the Department of Public Works (DPW), and a representative from the Maguire Co. Also in attendance was Vice Mayor Alice Wolf (engineers for the Phase VI sewer design) were on hand to explain the current status of the sewer project. Although state funds are in question, Alice Wolf assured the council that funds would be found by Cambridge to finish the construction of this project. Most residents are aware that the construction completion date is estimated to be 1994; what they wanted to know was what can be done until then.

There is not much help forthcoming before that. However, one practical suggestion was made by Alice Wolf, and agreed to by the DPW. A tour of the neighborhood will be made to individual houses, and suggestions on how to avoid flooding for each individual set of problems will be made by DPW representatives. These solutions must be carried out by the individual homeowner.

If you experienced flooding on August 13, or at other times, please contact the council office at 498-9056, and a more detailed letter will be sent to you. (All those people who currently are on our flood mailing list should have received the mailing already).

Other Neighborhood Updates.............
Candidates Night to be held at Peabody School

Neighborhood Nine Association will hold a City Council Candidates Night on Thursday, October 5th at 7 p.m. at the Peabody School. Twenty-five candidates have accepted, and all Cambridge residents are invited to attend.

Mary Lou McGrath, School Superintendent Visits Agassiz

On Monday, September 25th Cambridge School Superintendent Mary Lou McGrath visited classrooms at Agassiz School, and later that evening she addressed parents at the annual Agassiz School Open House. The last formal meeting with school officials was with the school board, who were called in to see the appalling condition of Baldwin Hall. The renovations requested at that meeting were evident in Baldwin Hall which had been patched, plastered and painted, a new curtain was installed, and the supply cabinet with a loft where lighting has been created—thanks in large part to David Clem for organizing the business community to volunteer their resources.

McGrath spoke on many issues, and answered many parent questions. She agreed that in the past Agassiz had been overlooked for capital improvements, but she felt that in terms of pupil services all Cambridge schools were equal. When challenged she agreed that if Agassiz parents could prove there were inadequate services, she would correct them in next year's budget. She pointed to the new science teachers at Agassiz, who are there thanks to Agassiz parents who advocated for them at school committee.

McGrath brought up the poor state of the library herself, and she agreed to look into services offered and lack of adequate books. She discussed the lack of adequate custodial support and agreed to have a major clean up done on a weekend.

The important role of the teachers and the personnel process was stressed by Superintendent McGrath. Parents argued that the lateness of in house personnel decisions caused Cambridge to lose good candidates to other school systems who can hire earlier. McGrath said that due to Cambridge's process, it is difficult to complete earlier.

Parents asked Superintendent McGrath to address the fact that parents who have been satisfied at Agassiz through the elementary and middle grades, become worried about their children's education beginning in 6th grade. McGrath noted the small graduating class at Agassiz last year. She said that in the Peabody School the teachers determined that the children would not leave, so they worked at making the upper grades as attractive as possible to the other students, and she suggested that it could also be done at Agassiz.

McGrath said that now is the time for Agassiz, through the School Improvement Committee to find the direction for the future. She agreed with David Clem, who spoke earlier about building, that before the school can be renovated parents and teachers must plan their needs for the future.

Superintendent McGrath clearly gave the school community the responsibility for that decision, but she did mention the notion of dropping 7th and 8th grades and making the Agassiz School for grades K-6. This would solve the problems of the physical inadequacy of the Agassiz School for upper grade children.

Community Residence at 71 Hammond St. Update

Last year Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) purchased property at 71 Hammond St. for a residence to house 8 chronically mentally ill adults. The residence will be run by CASPAR.

This update has been taken from a letter from CHA to Agassiz neighborhood representatives for the project:

"The kick off meeting with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Communities and Development (EOCD) for the 71 Hammond St. residence was held on September 6.

The purpose of this initial meeting was to discuss the scope of the design, work and establish some directions for the architect.

One of the concerns raised by neighborhood representatives at the kick off meeting was whether there would really be funds to operate this group residence, given the Commonwealth's fiscal crisis. The letter from the Cambridge Somerville Mental Health Center confirms..."
The Department of Mental Health’s commitment to fund the operation of any facilities that are built as Chapter 689 Special Needs Housing for mentally ill people. They will fund its staffing whether or not they receive additional funds from the State Legislature.

The draft schematic floor plan design is very preliminary... it would not change the outside of the building except to close-in most of the back porch and half of the windows facing [3 Howland St.] for fire protection and privacy.

The floor plan design will probably be the major topic at the next EOC meeting... scheduled for Sept. 29th.

A neighborhood fear is that a loss in state funds will result in changes to the current plan and/or lack of adequate supervision at the site. CHA assures us that this will not be the case. If you have concerns, be sure to attend the November 8th neighborhood council meeting when representatives from CHA and CASPAR will be on hand to answer questions in detail.

If you would like to see the letter quoted from above in complete form, contact Chris Weller at CHA 497-6800.

Eustis St. Garage Update

We have heard from City Councillor William Walsh regarding a councilors he sponsored to resolve the concerns of neighbors regarding the license that was applied for by Brodie Auto Rentals to sell cars at 8-10 Eustis St. Walsh sent us the following information written by Zoning Specialist Ranjit Singanjayam:

The above property [10 Eustis St.] is located in a Residential C-1 Zone of the current Zoning Map. The use of the above mentioned property for storage and repair of automobiles is prohibited in the current Zoning Ordinance. Art. 4.000, Sec. 4.31 (h)(k).

However, based on the pre-existing status of the building, a Certificate of Occupancy was issued to Brodie Auto Rental for the premises to be used only as a place of repair and storage of automobiles, Art. 8.000, Sec. 8.21.

As I understand, the premises is used for repairs, storage, and for used car sales. I would consider the use to be strictly for storage of automobiles awaiting repair and a repair shop.

The uses of storage of rental vehicles and vehicles for sale is not allowed by the certificate of occupancy. I have informed the owner by certified mail to cease and desist the use of premises for storage of rental vehicles and for used car sales, immediately.

Residents of Eustis and Traymore Streets should take notice if there is any evidence of violations. Councillor Walsh said that if drivers bring cars in too fast or without caution, he could file another order to resolve that. Call the council office at 498-9056 if there is anything to report.

Special Cultural Programs

Thanks to Mass Council on the Arts and Humanities which has awarded us Merit Aid for another year. Due to the state financial crisis all agency awards were cut equally. Our award this year is $1,100.

AGASSIZ YOUTH CHORUS TO PERFORM

The Agassiz Youth Chorus, made up of Cambridge youth ages 9 and up, will perform in Harvard Square on October 14th at a Multicultural Festival organized by the Cambridge College located at 15 Mifflin Place.

The chorus will perform between 1:45 and 2 p.m. There will also be South and Central American Bands and other entertainment. For more information call Cambridge College at 492-5108.

Parents check out these new classes for 5-6th graders at Agassiz which have just begun. There are still some spaces left. Call Steven Winter at 498-9056 for additional information. Most classes run from 3-5 p.m. through December. Bookmaking, Monday with Artist Pam Hogan. Visual Art Workshop, Wednesday with Artist Bernice Klim. Music Improvisation for Kids, Thursday with Musician Liz Hamill. Chorus, Friday with Musician Ada Snider (held at Lesley College)


FAMILY FOLK DANCING

Folk dancing for the whole family will be held at Agassiz on Friday evening October 20 run by dancer Jill Gleim. There will be live music. Call for cost and information 876-1194.

LESLEY COLLEGE News and Events

The Lesley Agassiz Resource Committee will begin the new school year with an October 30th meeting. This committee organizes programs and deals with mutual issues and problems.

This year Lesley College has given us space for the Agassiz Youth Chorus under the direction of Ada Snider, and the Agassiz Neighborhood Council has given meeting space for a Lesley evening course in the community center.

If you have any issues for the Lesley Agassiz Resource Committee, call the council office at 498-9056.

PLANTING TREES TOGETHER

The Lesley and Agassiz Communities will purchase and plant a tree together for the neighborhood which will be planted in the spring for the benefit of both communities.

Alvin Thompson To Hold Office Hours

State Representative Alvin Thompson will hold office hours at the Agassiz Community Center on 20 Sacramento St. between 6-7 p.m. on Thursday October 19th. Come to the community center and let him know what you’re thinking so he can bring it to the State House.
FRUSTRATED BY CITY DEPARTMENTS????
The Agassiz Neighborhood Council has worked long and hard to keep our neighborhood liveable. We only expect the city to follow the rules made by the city: zoning codes, licensing requirements, building requirements, traffic laws, etc.

What happens when we point out violations to our city government and the problems are not corrected? How can we, as a neighborhood group, persuade the city to follow through with enforcement?

Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, will be on hand to help us with this problem on October 11 at the Community Center at 8 p.m. (council meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m.)

FOR SENIORS

DAILY LUNCHES AVAILABLE

THE NORTH CAMBRIDGE SENIOR CENTER located at 2050 Massachusetts Ave. sponsors daily lunches between 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. Reservations should be made 2 days in advance, and there is a suggested donation of $1

Please call the center at 495-0110 to make a reservation or for more information.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

The Cambridge Council on Aging's Volunteer Visitor Program enables elders to maintain more independent and interesting lives within their community. The council is seeking volunteers to serve as weekly visitors to the homebound elderly. It is an opportunity to offer friendship and companionship to an elderly person and enrich their lives and yours. Please call Sandra Kahn if you would like to join the Volunteer Visitor Program in Cambridge, at 498-9039.

The Whistler

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

October COMMUNITY CALENDAR

10/9 Mon. Yom Kippur/ Columbus Day - No School
10/11 Wed. Agassiz Neighborhood Council Meeting
7:30 p.m. 20 Sacramento St.
10/17 Wed. Public school half day - after school opens 12:45 p.m.
10/18 Wed. Agassiz School Improvement Committee
Agassiz School - Resource Room 3 p.m.
10/19 Thu. State Representative Alvin Thompson
Office Hours 6-7 p.m. 20 Sacramento St.
10/20 Fri. Family Folk Dancing 7:30 p.m. Baldwin Hall Agassiz School, 28 Sacramento St.
10/25 Wed. Oxford St. Traffic Committee Meeting
7:30 p.m. 20 Sacramento St.
10/28 Sat. AGASSIZ SCHOOL FAIR 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
(Rain Date Sunday 10/29)

Agassiz School Fair
COME AND SUPPORT THE AGASSIZ SCHOOL on Saturday October 28 (Rain date October 29 Sunday) 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the school and on the Allen Tot Lot. This is the major fundraising effort of the year with raffles, games, food and other booths and events throughout the day for children and adults alike.

The fair committee is now in the process of organizing the event, so no details are available. For more information call the Agassiz School at 498-9256.

Trees for the Neighborhood

The Agassiz Neighborhood Council must order a tree now for planting in the neighborhood next spring. We have had a request from Carver St. that a tree be replaced there, but if there are any other requests for sites, call the council office at 498-9056.

Help us fund our programs (including The Whistler which everyone receives free) and purchase a calendar. For $5 plus $1 postage and handling you can receive a calendar from October 89 through December 1990. It will feature photos of children around Cambridge, children's art and work from our after school art teachers. It will include a Cambridge Public School Calendar, important Cambridge City Phone numbers, and more.

PLEASE SEND ME A CAMBRIDGE CALENDAR FOR 1990. ENCLOSED IS A CHECK FOR $6. to include postage and handling. Calendar will be mailed sometime in October.

Name:

Street:

City State Zip:

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