

# the Whistler

Newsletter of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council

November-December 2020

## IN THIS ISSUE

<b>Editor's Note</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>November 10th Meeting: Neighborhood Name Change Updates, MBTA Forging Ahead</b>	<b>1-3</b>
<b>December 8th Meeting: City Policy Order Regarding Neighborhood Groups, Neighborhood Name Change Updates</b>	<b>4-6</b>
<b>Community: 2020 Kids Only! Holiday Sale Canceled, Tapestry Counseling Leaving 20 Sacramento St.</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>City Wide: Rental Applications for New Affordable Apartments, Frost Terrace</b>	<b>7</b>

## ANC News

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Please find minutes from community meetings, November through December 2020 in chronological order.

Thank you,  
Phoebe Sinclair, Community Liaison  
Jessica Leach, ANC Scribe

### NOTES FROM NOVEMBER 10TH ANC MEETING

#### Neighborhood Name Change Updates

At the November 10th Agassiz Neighborhood Council meeting, Phoebe Sinclair shared the next steps in the neighborhood name change timeline and offered attendees the opportunity to provide feedback.

The timeline is as follows:

- **November 12th:** Describe process and invite feedback
- **November:** Outreach for video and written statement submissions. Community center staff will collect, compile, and post submissions to a digital "context library" Creation of a survey and a flyer that includes links to the "context library" (for asynchronous viewing/reading) and survey
- **December:** Flyer neighborhood with help from Cambridge Community Development (CDD)
- **December-January 2021:** Survey results tabulated with CDD's help

Kate Frank, Agassiz resident and member of the small working group that includes ABC staff, resident Maya Counter, and CDD staff, Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager and Daniel Wolf, Neighborhood Planner, provided some background on the dialogic approach pursued in this process. She explained that both she and Ms. Sinclair have backgrounds in dialogue and hope to use this approach to help community members feel heard and understood.

Ms. Sinclair then invited those present to submit videos, pictures, works of art, written statements and resources for a "context library" that seeks to provide information for people new to the

### NEXT ANC MONTHLY MEETING



**January 12, 7:30 PM**  
ZOOM - RSVP by visiting  
<http://bit.ly/anc-rsvp>

**AGENDA TBD**

discussion, as well act as a space for residents to describe what's important about the neighborhood name. Residents and community members are invited to answer the question: "When you think about changing the neighborhood name, what is at the heart of the matter for you?"

In addition to submitting to the context library and helping spread the word to other neighborhood residents, Ms. Farooq suggested that anyone interested in helping the process along could make public comments at upcoming City Council meetings. The issue was on the agenda for the November 16th meeting, but Ms. Farooq said that the January City Council meeting might be where neighborhood input is more greatly needed, depending on how the process proceeds and what results are tabulated from the survey.

### **Feedback**

"I'm a little nervous about surveys - they're tricky animals," Tom Delbanco said. "Is it a neighborhood vote? Is it to get more nuanced opinions, thoughts, or creative ideas? I'd be curious in understanding more in how you're planning to do that. I'm worried that we'll get a biased sample."

In response, Ms. Farooq said that while the survey is not scientifically completely neutral or random, something that speaks to someone's passions would not necessarily be random.

"It's actually the people who care who will make a case one way or another," she explained. "I don't think you should see it as a negative if it's not random."

"I [spoke with] City Councilor Dennis Carlone and his suggestion was to leaflet the neighborhood, have a ballot where people can number their choices in order," said Fred Meyer. "I've been hearing a lot of suggested names . . . people can rank them in order, and staff can tabulate the results, just like the vote for City Council."

"I think it's going to be terribly difficult to get

consensus if we name it after a person," said Richard Goldstein. "Everybody has foibles. I'm leaning towards something neutral . . . geography based. I just hope that people will consider an utterly neutral name that satisfies everyone."

Ms. Farooq explained that when a similar process happened to change the neighborhood name of "Area 4" to "The Port," they received a handful of names that were vastly different, but that the majority wanted the Port or Old Port.

"You don't have to reach full consensus," she said. "To try to achieve that would set the neighborhood up for failure. There's likely not going to be something that everyone will agree on, and some folks might not want to change the name at all."

Mr. Delbanco also suggested sending out a smaller initial survey to "take the temperature" on how the neighborhood felt about the name change.

"I was wondering about the familiarity of Maria Baldwin to those who are new to the neighborhood," Susan Keane said. "If this is voted on, people would want to know more about her."

"I originally went to Google and read about Baldwin," shared Jon Schwarz. "What a woman, and what a privilege to say 'I live in the Baldwin neighborhood.' I think it will take time to catch on, but I'd rather be in a position of 'here's what it's been like, here's what it could be like, let's go for it and give it a try.'"

### **MBTA Forging Ahead**

The MBTA recently announced a plan to reduce service in response to lower daily ridership during the past year. Due to COVID-19, the MBTA has a projected budget gap of \$579 million for fiscal year 2022. While representatives from the MBTA could not attend the ANC meeting, they provided a slideshow of information regarding the proposed service update to share with Agassiz residents.

As defined in the presentation, “Forging Ahead” is “the process the MBTA is using to focus operating and capital resources on riders who depend most on the MBTA.” This means evaluating internal spending, reallocating funds and prioritizing “essential transit services,” which the MBTA defines those that support car-less households, low income communities, elderly people, and disabled people.

In one slide, the MBTA provided an overview of the major changes, which includes implementing an earlier end-of-service time for the commuter rail, bus and rapid transit; suspending weekend commuter rail and all ferry services; reducing frequency of rapid transit and bus lines; and consolidating or shortening certain bus routes.

Under the proposal, 78.5% of households within MBTA service areas will have access to transit services within a half a mile, compared to 82% previously. They project that most service changes would go into effect in the spring or summer of 2021.

The MBTA invited public comment through December 4th and planned a number of public meetings from November 10th through December 2nd. Comments can be submitted to: [publicengagement@MBTA.com](mailto:publicengagement@MBTA.com)

The slideshow can be viewed by visiting: <https://bit.ly/MBTA-forging-ahead>

Learn more about the proposed service changes and view the changes on an interactive map at: <https://mbta.com/forging-ahead>

### **Feedback from ANC**

“I use the commuter rail a great deal, especially on the weekend, which is the only time they permit bikes,” shared Skip Schiel. “I don’t drive or own a car, and now people are reluctant to take me as a passenger in their own car. I assume there will be other people impacted by the end of the commuter rail on weekends.”

“I understand that [the MBTA] must have a fiscal calamity, but I think [the plan] needs to have at least a level of connection to statewide programs that relate to larger thinking [around] public transit and reducing cars,” said Kate Frank.

“What’s it going to cost all these communities that people aren’t going to be able to visit?” asked Peggy Kutcher of Neighborhood 9. “It’s one thing to hobble through the winter with shutdown services due to COVID, but there’s no time frame for any of this.”

“Looking at the proposed changes, the elimination of the 68 and 72 buses could have the most impact on our community,” said Jon Schwarz. “That seems like something worth discussing or advocating for.”

“I like Jon’s idea of trying to look analytically . . . at the routes and changes that would affect us most,” Kate Frank added. “There are many people who don’t yet know they’re going to be affected.”

“We all need and use the MBTA,” Richard Goldstein said. “That’s not what they’re thinking about. They’re thinking about the money. We can write all the notes we want and complain, but unless there’s a fare and tax increase without people screaming, there’s no way to keep that system going.”



**NOTES FROM DECEMBER 8TH  
ANC MEETING****City Policy Order Regarding  
Neighborhood Groups**

During the December 8th meeting, Agassiz Neighborhood Council discussed a possible response to a City Policy Order regarding neighborhood groups and organizations.

Phoebe Sinclair provided background on the Order, which was originally presented to Cambridge City Council on November 22, 2020. She shared that, in response to an offensive and homophobic remark made by someone in a leadership role at the East Cambridge Planning Team on a public neighborhood email group, (who later apologized and resigned), Cambridge City Council ordered that the Neighborhood and Long Term Planning Committee should host a meeting to “discuss ways to strengthen community bonds and ensure equitable access to neighborhood organizations.”

In the language of the Policy Order, this would include a discussion of how the City could support neighborhood groups and organizations in creating rules and regulations that promote diversity and representation, codes of conduct so that these groups can ensure “safe and supportive environments for all participants;” a system to ensure that certain groups and voices are not valued more than others in governing process; and policies and practices for members to formally file complaints and seek City support when incidents arise.

In response to this policy order, a number of neighborhood groups signed a letter expressing their shared concerns: Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods, East Cambridge Planning Team, Harvard Square Neighborhood Association, Inman Square Neighborhood Association, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association, and Porter Square Neighbors Association.

The letter specifically highlighted the challenges of being able to attract a wider range of membership and participation or collect demographic information from those who attend meetings, as these groups are typically run by volunteers. The letter expressed their shared belief that it’s important for them to exist separately and independently of the City.

**ANC Response**

“My thought was that the letter seemed much more aligned with ANC’s position, and I would suggest if there’s a general agreement to this, that we sign onto the letter,” said Ted Live, Agassiz resident. “It seems to me that the letter made a lot more sense than the Council Order.”

Ruth Ryals, who is President of the Porter Square Neighbors Association, was in attendance at the meeting. Joel Bard, long-time Agassiz resident, asked what process PSNA used to determine whether to sign the letter.

“The officers talked and decided that we needed to respond, or not respond, quickly, so we signed the letter,” Ms. Ryals responded.

“We currently don’t have a process like that,” Mr. Bard said. “Whoever shows up gets to make the decisions. It’s something for all of us to think about: how do we respond?”

“I was hugely offended [by the policy order],” he added. “I’ve been doing this work for 35 years, and the City Council’s never expressed any particular interest in us or our meetings.”

Mr. Bard also noted that while the language around diversity and inclusion was important, he found it hollow. “I don’t see that they’ve ever done anything to facilitate that in neighborhood groups across the city,” he said. “This is hard work. It’s hard to get people involved, generally speaking.”

“I agree with Joel,” Fred Meyer, long-time Agassiz resident, stated. “My reaction was ‘why are they talking about us? They have nothing to



do with us.' It's not up to City Council to tell us how to run our meetings. I wouldn't even give the letter the dignity of a response."

Tom Delbanco said he disagreed with Mr. Meyer's position. His view was that the letter would encourage conversation between City Council and neighborhood groups and "hopefully out of that will come a better understanding."

"I think [City Council was] a little impulsive trying to address what they perceived as a homophobic grievance," Kate Frank said. "They may have overreacted or not inquired enough. I think, as a group, we're not ready to respond. All of [the views] have merit but need more exploration."

"We've tried hard to get other people engaged, and in some ways, the shift to virtual has made it more possible but maybe not everyone is interested in all issues," Ms. Frank added. "We've had higher attendance this fall without it being as big an issue as a developer having a project in the neighborhood we don't want."

"I respect the thoughtful responses that people have had and the urge to resist being dragged into political grandstanding," said Peggy Kutcher of Neighborhood 9. "There was an opportunity lost during the Envision Cambridge process to look at neighborhood groups across the city, because they are very different. I think the respect for the individual communities should be left to stand. I appreciate the hesitancy to get sucked into something but also the integrity to stand up for other groups."

"My preference would be to not sign onto the letter," Jon Schwarz said. "We welcome suggestions on how to be more welcoming and inclusive, but we would have appreciated it more if it came in the form of an offer instead of an order."

Mr. Bard suggested that ANC write its own letter that would support the sentiment behind the existing neighborhood groups' letter and let the City Council know that ANC welcomes

"their positive involvement, not coming out of an isolated incident that provoked them to take this action."

He said, "My sense is that I wouldn't object to having a new letter go to City Council, but it might be more effective to sign onto a letter that a bunch of other organizations have already signed onto."

Mr. Delbanco suggested inviting the City Council and the Neighborhood and Long Term Planning Committee to an ANC meeting to demonstrate how they are run. Ultimately, the group decided to hold off on taking any specific action until members had an opportunity to learn more. Ms. Sinclair offered an opportunity for the conversation to continue offline.

### **Neighborhood Name Change Updates**

As discussed at the November 12th meeting, the neighborhood name change process reached the stage of wider distribution of information via a flyer and survey to the entire neighborhood, supported by the staff team and interns at Cambridge Community Development. At the December 8th meeting, Phoebe Sinclair shared the flyer as well as the context library, which is a website hosting videos, statements, and resources related to Louis Agassiz, Maria L. Baldwin, neighborhood history, and how certain residents feel about the name change.

After giving attendees the opportunity to record a statement for the library, the conversation turned to feedback on the survey.

"We might not necessarily get preferences if there is one discrete option," Jon Schwarz said, in regard to only Baldwin Neighborhood being explicitly named in the survey as a renaming option. "We could include ranked choice voting in the survey for people to give weighted preference to certain names."

"[Renaming the neighborhood for Maria L. Baldwin] was the initial suggestion on the part

of the person who initiated this effort, resident Maya Counter, so we were following her lead when we created the survey,” Ms. Sinclair responded.

“It seems to me that we’re doing the survey for two reasons,” Tom Delbanco said. “The first is that we’re guiding people to make a recommendation, and the way that will be most helpful is if there’s an overwhelming response one way or another. While I happen to agree with changing the name, I think the survey is framed in a way that very much pushes you in that direction.”

Mr. Delbanco added that the survey should avoid the trap of empowering anyone who disagrees with the results to say it was biased.

“Why is a democratically elected City Council turning to a survey instead of votes?” asked Fred Meyer. He suggested the process include ballots and ranked choice voting, like other elections in Cambridge.

In response, Ms. Sinclair explained that the City advised against this route, and that voting via the Election Commission had never been included among the various process options.

“I wish there was a way to reconsider the survey by having someone see if it really accomplishes what was intended,” Kate Frank said.

Following this, some expressed a concern that there wasn’t enough opportunity for discussion or education around the issue. With that in mind, those in attendance requested to pull the survey and wait until the neighborhood is more educated.

In the meantime, anyone interested in submitting to the digital context library can do so by following these guidelines: <https://bit.ly/library-submissions>. Visit the library at: <https://agassizcontextlibrary.tumblr.com/>

Send suggestions, questions, or comments regarding the neighborhood name change process to Phoebe Sinclair: at [psinclair@agassiz.org](mailto:psinclair@agassiz.org)



## Community



### **KIDS ONLY! HOLIDAY SALE CANCELED**

Since 1986, the Kids Only! Holiday Sale has been an annual tradition that’s helped our community ring in the holiday season. Each year, we turn our space into a shop full of unique, fun, and affordable items that kids independently browse and purchase to give as gifts to family and friends. Of course, sometimes they can’t help buying something for themselves too!

We sadly had to cancel this year’s event, but we look forward to when we will be able to share this experience with our community again. Last year, we had updated this long-treasured tradition by combining it with the first ever “Maud’s Handmade Holiday Market,” which featured work by local artists and artisans that shoppers of all ages could purchase as gifts.

One presence that will surely be missed in next year’s sale is Joie de Vivre, which supported KOHS for many years by supplying many of the wonderful and whimsical items for sale. After 36 years of business, owner Linda Given sadly announced that the store is closing. We’d like to take this opportunity to thank Linda for the years of joy and support from her shop. Here is part of her note regarding the decision:

“I have always loved, and still love, almost everything about running this store... but

most of all, all the relationships with you wonderful customers, the wonderful people who have worked here over the last 36 years, and all the wonderful people I've met because I buy things from them. When I think of my closest friends, I realize the great majority are in some way associated with the existence of Joie, and running it has brought me untold satisfaction, fun, and happiness."

## **TAPESTRY COUNSELING LEAVING 20 SACRAMENTO STREET**

*Prepared by Tapestry Counseling (Beryl, Denise, & Maribeth)*

Since 1976, Tapestry Counseling has served over 1,000 clients. Situated in the vibrant community/arts center at 20 Sacramento St., we have enjoyed close connections to nearby universities and a strong community-based neighborhood. Tapestry has been a haven for serving individuals, couples, families, and groups with varying mental health needs, including children, adolescents, and adults. The combination of skilled therapists, conducting sessions in a beautifully restored building, with a nearby flourishing community garden offered all of the elements to provide healing for those seeking to mend their inner pain. Countless clients commented on the beauty of the building and neighborhood over the years.

It is with deep heartfelt sadness that Tapestry has, like so many other providers and companies, made the difficult decision to end our tenancy and exit our beloved physical space at 20 Sacramento Street, due to COVID, by December 31, 2020. All of us are doing virtual sessions with our clients using our home offices. We intend to remain a small psychotherapy practice under the name Tapestry, with an online web presence.

We value and will miss the collegial relationships between Tapestry members and ABC staff, forged as we all exchanged quick pleasantries within the building. We fondly remember chats at the top of the 3rd floor landing, as ABC/Maud Morgan staff would head downstairs and we watched for our clients in the waiting room. Some Tapestry clinicians have benefited from the many

well-executed programs offered to their children, particularly Outback. We really loved being able to get glimpses of our kids playing in the backyard during our clinical breaks. While Tapestry members offered psychological nourishment to their clients upstairs, we also benefited from opportunities that popped up and nourished individual therapists i.e. gallery openings of celebrated area artists.

One Tapestry member and artist, Beryl Minkle, showcased her art in more than one of Maud Morgan's exhibits. We were delighted when 10 years ago the beautifully transformed carriage house opened its doors, offering many workshops. Festive community and family gatherings in back of the main building were enjoyed by many of us.

In many ways 20 Sacramento St. has felt like another home for us, and we will miss it. We wish ABC/Maud Morgan the best during these really tough times, and look forward to the day when we can return to 20 Sacramento St.

Learn more: <http://www.tapestrycounseling.org/>

## **City Wide**

### **RENTAL APPLICATIONS ACCEPTED FOR NEW AFFORDABLE APARTMENTS, FROST TERRACE**

*Prepared by the City of Cambridge*

Rental applications are now being accepted for Frost Terrace (1791 Massachusetts Avenue), a 40-unit apartment building in the heart of Porter Square. Units will be filled through a lottery process. Applications will be accepted by Trinity Management through January 15, 2021. Lottery results will be finalized in February 2021, with move-in dates expected in Spring 2021.

Frost Terrace includes one, two, and three-bedroom apartments, including three fully-accessible ADA apartments. Section 8 voucher holders are welcome to apply. Visit: <https://www.finchcambridge.com/application>

# Community Calendar

## January 2021

Monday, December 21-Friday, January 1st

ABC & Maud Morgan Arts programs and offices closed for holiday break

Tuesday, January 12

7:30-9:00 PM

ANC Meeting (agenda TBD)  
Receive ZOOM link by RSVPing at <http://bit.ly/anc-rsvp>  
All are welcome, please join us

Monday, January 18th

Martin Luther King Jr. Day Holiday, ABC & Maud Morgan Arts school programs and office closed

The Whistler is published monthly September-June by the Agassiz Baldwin Community, distribution 750 in 2019. Call (617) 349-6287 to receive by email or mail. The newsletter is available online at [www.agassiz.org](http://www.agassiz.org). Items of interest to the neighborhood should be submitted for consideration no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication date. Editorial team: Phoebe Sinclair, Community Liaison & Editor; Jessica Leach, Scribe; Ashley Yee, Guest Writer.

## The Whistler November-December 2020



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