Re: Inquiry into a community process around changing the neighborhood name
From: Agassiz Neighborhood Council

January 28, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui, Vice Mayor Alanna Mallon, and Councillors Dennis J. Carlone, Marc C. McGovern, Patricia M. Nolan, E. Denise Simmons, Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler, Timothy J. Toomey, Jr., and Quinton Y. Zondervan

At the January 14, 2020 Agassiz Neighborhood Council meeting, Maya Counter, a senior at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School and neighborhood resident, introduced her effort to change the neighborhood's name. Ms. Counter's interest in this subject began in her AP US History class, where she researched the neighborhood's history. After coming upon information about Swiss biologist Louis Agassiz, she said she was "disgusted" by what she read, citing the scientist's racist legacy. After that discovery, Ms. Counter reached out to former City Councilor, now Mayor, Sumbul Siddiqui to discuss how to rename the neighborhood. She also connected with City Councilor E. Denise Simmons, who has initiated an effort to compile a list of landmarks with ties to the American slave trade with the intention of renaming them.

Around thirty community members expressed various opinions on and debated approaches to renaming the neighborhood. Overall, there was significant interest in beginning a process that would include residents who are not likely to attend ANC meetings as well as students at the Maria L. Baldwin school. Ms. Counter, in particular, proposes the neighborhood should be renamed for Maria Louise Baldwin. Ms. Counter's reasons include: honoring the native Cantabrigian, who worked initially as a teacher and later was appointed headmaster, the first Black woman in the state and New England to hold such a role; reconnecting the neighborhood and the school names; and highlighting an individual whose legacy evokes pride for many residents.

The Neighborhood Council voted in favor of the following:

"There is a strong consensus in the neighborhood council in support of a name change, to be discussed in forums over the coming months with an opportunity to educate neighbors about the relevant issues, with the objective to come up with a recommended name from the neighborhood."

ANC looks to Cambridge City Council for support and assistance to develop a thoughtful, effective, and efficient approach to framing this issue so that all neighborhood residents who wish to be involved can participate, and advice on how best to move forward to replace the current official name of Area 8/Agassiz.

We thank you for attention and look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully submitted,
Agassiz Neighborhood Council