

the Whistler

Newsletter of the Baldwin Neighborhood Council | Fall 2025

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"There have been several acts of community in the past year to establish some opposition to what seems like an overwhelming force against our efforts to be both welcoming to affordable housing and, at the same time, try to maintain our street and neighborhood and community in a recognizable way," said one participant.

Many participants also reflected on their hope for more interaction and friendliness among neighbors.

"From the past year what stands out to me is that I haven't been very involved in my neighborhood," one council member shared. "What I notice is that when I walk around the neighborhood, I don't really know who lives there. People really don't say hi that much. That's something I want to work on."



Baldwin Neighborhood Council News

NOTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 9 BNC MEETING

BNC Members Reflect

Each September, Council and community members are invited to reflect together to kick off a new session of Neighborhood Council meetings. In these reflections, participants can respond for three minutes to the following questions:

- What stands out for you about living in the neighborhood at this time?
- Describe an 'act of community' that you witnessed or participated in.

The responses had common themes. For many neighbors, there is considerable concern for the availability of affordable housing in the area, as well as a strong desire to preserve the neighborhood's character.

As BNC moderator, Maria L. Baldwin Community Center (MLBCC) Co-Executive Director Phoebe Sinclair asked how BNC might support the concerns and ideas raised in these reflections. As a clarification, she noted that MLBCC as an organization generally does not take official stands on issues. The Council provides a platform from which residents can engage and advocate.

Participants suggested hosting joint meetings with other nearby neighborhood groups, such as Porter

NEXT BNC MONTHLY MEETING

January 13, 7:30 PM

Baldwin School Cafeteria
85 Oxford St. Cambridge, MA

- Presentation by Elizabeth Badger, Senior Attorney for the PAIR Project

Square Neighbors Association and Neighborhood 9, inviting guest speakers such as staff from the Cambridge Planning Board, and talking to more neighbors face-to-face to foster connection and bring more voices into BNC meetings.

If you'd like to attend an upcoming BNC meeting, find future meeting dates, or join our email list to receive reminders, please visit: agassiz.org/neighborhood-council.

NOTES FROM THE NOVEMBER 18 BNC MEETING

Affordable Housing Development at 1826 and 1840 Mass. Ave.

Just A Start joined Baldwin Neighborhood Council at its November 18th meeting to discuss a new affordable housing development at 1826 and 1840 Massachusetts Avenue. Just A Start is a local nonprofit organization founded in 1968 whose mission is to promote equity by creating access to stable housing and building pathways to economic opportunity.

At the November BNC meeting, a team from Just A Start discussed its purchase of two parking lots on Mass. Ave. from Lesley University in November 2024. Though a year out from the sale, the project is still in its early phases. Prior to this BNC meeting, Just A Start held a community meet and greet on October 14th at Lesley University's Lunder Arts Center to conduct outreach for the new residences and collect community feedback.

Madeline Lee, Project Manager, shared that the goal is to create approximately 100 units of affordable housing, between 1-3 bedrooms, with active use on the ground floor.

Just A Start is working with RODE Architects to study initial design feasibility. Their considerations include building height, context, and construction type. Ms. Lee described amenities such as community space, outdoor space, retail, on-site bike storage and parking, and on-site management that are being considered as part of the design.

"I'm glad to see that building height and context are at the top of your list," Joel Bard, Baldwin resident, said.

Just A Start's team emphasized that they like to be "good neighbors" and be part of the neighborhood. They are weighing community feedback regarding the building's impact on local parking and traffic, open space and trees, and potential interim garden space while lots are not being used prior to construction.

Ms. Lee noted that the design team must balance trade-offs between elements such as active ground floor use or onsite parking, community or retail space, and family-sized apartments or single bedroom units.

The team also asked BNC for feedback on design and ground floor uses they would like to see, adding that there will be small retail spaces to balance other ground floor requirements, such as the lobby and bike storage.

"It should be cheerful, whatever you do," Cynthia Smith, Baldwin resident, said of the building's design.

"I just love having stores I can walk to but there seems to be less demand," said Hull Fulweiler, Baldwin resident and MLBCC Board Clerk, of his desire for ground floor use. "I see empty storefronts that stay that way for a while. Just providing that space doesn't mean somebody is going to take it."

Just A Start will continue engaging the community through spring 2026, before presenting the plan for review by the Cambridge Planning Board next summer. Construction is anticipated to begin in fall 2027 and finish in fall 2029.

For more information, you can visit the project website at: <https://bit.ly/4qs7P1a>.

Contact Ms. Lee via email at: madelinelee@justastart.org.

Mass. Ave. Zoning Updates

Daniel Messplay, Director of Community Planning and Design, and Drew Kane, Senior City Planner, with the City's Community Development Department (CDD) joined the November 18th BNC meeting to discuss the zoning updates to Mass. Ave. following the Mass. Ave. Planning Study (or MAPS).

In their presentation, they summarized the petition which will allow up to 12 stories for housing projects along the Mass. Ave. corridor (from the edge of Cambridge Common to the Alewife Brook Parkway), and up to 18 stories for residential development in Porter Square if a development applies for a Planning Unit Development (PUD) permit, which allows additional height in exchange for significant community benefits.

With the new zoning petitions, there is the potential for 3,820 new units of housing along Mass. Ave. While commercial densities will remain the same, the zoning will encourage active ground floor use on new residential buildings with permitted uses.

"This is the neighborhood's main street, and we want to respect that," said Mr. Messplay.

To incentivize pedestrian level commercial uses of space in new buildings, projects will be able to build up to 12 stories if they include ground floor space for active uses.

CDD defines active uses as all retail and consumer services, institutional uses including daycares, libraries, community centers, and some office uses like a dentist's office, accountant's office, or insurance agency. This would not include general offices, banks, or labs. The Planning Board can approve other uses if they promote pedestrian activity along Mass. Ave.

"Active ground story use is ambiguous," Paul Levenson, Baldwin resident, said. "Could an architect's office be considered active ground use?"

Mr. Messplay said he thought an architect's office could be considered active ground story use in some cases.

Their presentation also touched on how the zoning updates will impact setbacks and design standards. Open space requirements are 15% of lot area for buildings 9 stories or higher, with 10% publicly accessible and beneficial. Development review procedures will depend on a building's square footage.

"How are you going to get a vigorous street tree corridor with a five foot setback?" asked Cynthia Smith.

"Street trees are behind the curb," Mr. Messplay responded. "Yard setbacks are a legal minimum, and we have seen buildings scoot back a little more if they want to include a street tree in front."

He added, "There is also the cool score, a site-based performance standard for cooling in the city, and you get double the points for planting in the front versus back of the development."

"Sticking a tree in the city standard narrow pit with a tall building shading it out, creating a hostile environment, is not a good design standard for the health of the tree," Ms. Smith said. "Getting that street tree corridor built healthily and properly should be important. The zoning isn't ensuring that."

"The zoning itself can only do so much," Mr. Kane responded. "Mass. Ave. is unlikely to go under reconstruction any time soon, so the dimensions are limited. You can at least get a bigger tree well, but you're making a great point that it's difficult for trees to grow in that environment."

As of the November 18th meeting, the zoning petition was reviewed by the Cambridge Ordinance Committee, with a meeting scheduled for December 2nd open for public comment.

“Whether you support it or not, having your voice heard is important,” Mr. Messplay said. “Write a comment or attend the meeting. The City Council will vote whether or not to ordain the petition and make it zoning law.”

Residents can contact Mr. Messplay and Mr. Kane with any questions via email at: dmessplay@cambridgema.gov and dkane@cambridgema.gov.

ABOUT THE UPCOMING JAN. 13 BNC SPECIAL MEETING

Join us for a special Baldwin Neighborhood Council meeting on Tuesday, January 13th, 7:30 PM. We'll be meeting in-person in the basement-level cafeteria at the Baldwin School, 85 Oxford Street. Hear from area residents Elizabeth Badger, Senior Attorney at the PAIR Project, and Ragini Shah, Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the Immigrant Justice Clinic at Suffolk University, about the latest developments in the immigration landscape and how they are affecting local communities.

The PAIR Project is a state-wide not-for-profit legal services organization which has been providing free immigration legal representation to low-income non-citizens in MA since 1989, when it was created to serve Central American refugees arrested in a raid at the Suffolk Downs racetrack.

PAIR continues to be at the forefront of defending the immigrant community, including many workers serving Cambridge and the surrounding cities, against the current immigration enforcement regime, and is the only organization with negotiated access to those detained in immigration custody in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Elizabeth and Ragini will also share their experience defending the community in the current environment and ways that residents can support the work. In the meantime, learn more about the PAIR project by visiting: pairproject.org.



Maria L. Baldwin
COMMUNITY CENTER



HELP SUSTAIN OUR COMMUNITY

Every day at the Maria L. Baldwin Community Center, we see what happens when creativity and care come together. A child who once felt shy stands proudly at a clay wheel. An older adult discovers new friends through a memoir workshop. A parent, after months of uncertainty, finally feels safe knowing their family has stable housing.

These small moments add up to something big: belonging.

This year, your support helped us keep that sense of belonging alive through a time of real challenge. While the cost of running community programs has soared and emergency funding has faded, our doors have remained open to everyone: because of people like you.

Your generosity fuels:

- Arts programs that reach over 2,000 children, adults and seniors each year.
- Scholarships providing more than \$367,000 in essential childcare support.
- Embedded counseling and casework that help families stay housed and hopeful.
- Creative spaces where artists of all ages find purpose, joy, and connection.

A parent recently shared, “This is the one place

where my child feels safe, creative, and free to be himself. You've given us so much more than a program, you've given us peace."

Your gift makes this possible.

We are looking toward 2026 with renewed purpose, guided by our values of welcoming, empowering, collaborating, and creating joy.

Please consider a generous gift today to sustain this place of belonging where art, care, and community meet. Donate now by visiting bit.ly/donatembcc.

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING KIDS ONLY HOLIDAY SALE & MAUD'S HANDMADE HOLIDAY MARKET



Thank you to everyone who attended and shopped at the Kids Only Holiday Sale and Maud's Handmade Holiday Market! We hope you were able to find some unique gifts, connect with friends and neighbors, and enjoy the warmth of the holiday season. We love how this event has evolved over the years since Kids Only Holiday Sale first began in 1986.

We want to give special thanks to the local businesses and community members who donated inventory and supported this year's sale:

- Ward Maps
- Magpie Kids
- Porter Square Books
- Pod

- Meg Bond
- Jean B.
- Julia M.
- Anne S.
- Adriane B.
- Nicole Stone
- Michelle M.

If you have any questions about how you can support the sale next year, please email Taylor Mortell, Director of Development & Impact, at tmortell@agassiz.org.

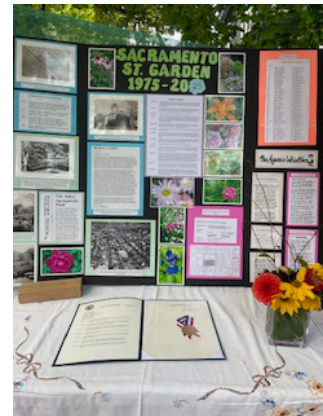
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SACRAMENTO STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN

Prepared by Regina Kelder, 50th Anniversary Potluck Coordinator

A fixture in the Baldwin neighborhood for fifty years, the Sacramento Street Community Garden celebrated its golden anniversary in September with a festive potluck at the Maria L. Baldwin Community Center. More than fifty

current and former gardeners, including several inaugural members who still lovingly tend their plots, came together to celebrate the garden's longevity. City Councillor Patty Nolan presented a proclamation from the City of Cambridge honoring the garden for its years of service to the community. Cambridge Conservation Commission Director Jen Letourneau, whose department oversees the city's community gardens, also attended.

The Garden's 66 plots are located across from the Community Center on a parcel of land that once housed a large home and gardens owned by Harvard University. Community Center staff organized the original community garden in 1975 after Harvard tore down the home on the



property, then the city took ownership of the garden in 1980 after Harvard's plans to use the abutting Sacramento Field for student housing were scuttled by neighborhood protests.

For fifty years, the garden has provided a respite for dozens of urban gardeners of all stripes growing everything from azaleas and asparagus to zinnias and zucchini. The community garden is bound on two sides by gorgeous common beds of flowers and shrubs (and even a few trees) that bloom most of the year.

Sacramento Street Community Garden is a working garden, but it is also open to the public to enjoy. People frequently drop by to shoot pictures and videos of the plots and to relax on the garden's benches. Painters and musicians are often drawn to the garden's beauty, while local scientists have studied its diverse beneficial pollinators, well established after decades of organic gardening.

The garden has faced challenges over the years, including an unexpected multiple-plot disruption in the mid-1990s due to an irrigation installation for the abutting Sacramento Field, and another major upheaval, including a permanent shifting of garden boundaries, during the 2017 Sacramento Field renovation. However, in 2020, when COVID-19 forced playgrounds, basketball courts, and tennis courts to shut down, Sacramento Street Community Garden remained open, albeit with strict adherence to social distancing and mask guidelines. During the dark days of the pandemic, annual planting and harvesting continued, serving as a poignant reminder of the garden's resilience during a particularly challenging time.

Nearly every participant has a fond memory or story to tell of the garden. Geoff Marietta, who was part of the garden from 2008-2013, served on



the garden's composting committee. After turning over the compost one fall day, he and his wife, Sky, headed home. As he remembered, "I quickly realized that I had lost my wedding band in the compost. We frantically searched for the ring but couldn't find it." Luckily the community came to Marietta's aid: "in the spring, another gardener found my wedding ring growing around an early carrot near the compost area!"

Hopefully, the garden and its community will continue to offer each other support (and extra veggies!) for many years to come.

REMEMBERING KATE FRANK

It is with great sadness that we share the passing of Kate Summey Frank on August 25, 2025. She died peacefully at her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, after a lengthy and ongoing struggle with a number of chronic diseases, and following a serious hip fracture due to a fall in December of 2023.



Kate was a long-time educator, special education consultant, and community activist in Cambridge where she lived most of her adult life. She was the widow of Thomas Frank, MD, and is survived by five children, four grandchildren and four great grandchildren, along with numerous other relatives, close friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

Kate's full obituary and tribute wall can be viewed by visiting: <https://bit.ly/49geIMa>

Memories of Kate from the Baldwin Community

Staff at the Maria L. Baldwin Community Center celebrate Kate as a longtime friend of the organization and dedicated Neighborhood Council member. We fondly recall her many thoughtful and salient observations at Council meetings, her support for constructive dialogue and equity for all

participants, and her joy in working together with neighbors to bring about a better Cambridge for everyone. Kate and Tom frequented the neighborhood Thanksgiving Potluck Feasts, participated in themed Crescent St. Halloween block parties, and in later years Kate was a dedicated member of the Living Well Network. We miss Kate's voice at Neighborhood Council meetings, and are forever grateful for her engagement with all the many aspects of our community center. - **Phoebe Sinclair**



Memories from Crescent Street Neighbors

Kate was a vibrant presence in our Cambridge community and a caring and supportive neighbor to our kids and all their fundraising efforts. We have fond memories of spending time with her helping her choose the right iPad (something light) so she could continue staying in touch with friends, news, and the larger community. She was so enthused to learn and stay technologically current. Her sharp mind, warmth, and generosity touched everyone who knew her. She will be deeply missed, and we hope her family finds comfort in knowing how cherished Kate was by her friends and neighbors. - **Kamal and Brinda Kirpalani**

Kate and I lived across the street from each other. We easily formed a close friendship, often going on long walks together and on occasion attended events together. She often invited me over for tea and conversation and I reciprocated. We shared many stories of our upbringings as well as conversations about local politics and educational issues. Kate was always involved in Cambridge issues and especially active in educational issues. She had a wealth of knowledge on so many things and often wanted to hear my opinions on things that she knew I was involved in, and I was just as interested in her thoughts. So our conversations

were very rich. She often let me know that our friendship was very important to her and I was honored to have this very kind, gentle and amazing person as my friend. - **Nella LaRosa-Waters**

Having grown up on Crescent Street, Kate was a constant in my life, and a family friend. She was part of the fabric of our community, a source of encouragement and support, and whenever we saw each other on the Street, we would stop to chat, whenever there was a community gathering, she would be there. Mahmood remembers how engaged and thoughtful Kate was, and what a loving neighbor and friend she was. She will be greatly missed. - **Deidre Deegan and Mahmood Firouzbakht**

Share a Memory

If you have any remembrances of Kate Frank you'd like to share, please email them to Phoebe for inclusion in the next edition of *The Whistler*: psinclair@agassiz.org.



REGISTRATION NOW OPEN FOR 2026 VACATION WEEKS

2026 is almost here, and if you like to plan ahead, you can register now for our 2026 Vacation Week Programs for K-5th grade! Vacation Week programs are full day care from 8:30 AM-5:45 PM and are split into different activity blocks, which offer children a variety of options to choose from. 1st-5th grade students can participate in art activities in our studios at Maud Morgan Arts.

Before registering online, please note that there are registration options depending on your child's grade and enrollment in our current afterschool programming. Please register for the group that applies to you. The tuition rates for 2026 Vacation Week Programs are:

- \$350 for students who are currently registered in one of the MLBCC afterschool programs
- \$525 for all other families

We also have financial aid options available. Or, if you are not interested in signing up for the full week, we will be offering a drop in option for currently enrolled afterschool families at a rate of \$130 per day. Drop-in slots will be offered closer to the start of the program and dependent on available space.

For more information and to register online, please visit agassiz.org/vacation-week-programs. If you have questions or need help registering your child, please contact Children's Programs Registration Coordinator Milo Proscia at registration@agassiz.org.



RENEW YOUR LIVING WELL NETWORK MEMBERSHIP FOR 2026

By joining or renewing your Living Well Network membership, you keep vital opportunities for connection, wellness, and support accessible to all. Membership gifts sustain our beloved traditions and make room for growth: more workshops, more arts experiences, and new offerings in 2026 that members have already begun to imagine.

As an LWN member, you'll enjoy:

- Access to social groups and activities like the book group, walking group, and aging support group.
- Technology help when you need it.
- Vetted snow removal services for members in our neighborhood area.
- A private Google group for online community and planning for outings and social activities.
- ...and most importantly, the friendships and connections that make our community stronger.

We continue to offer memberships on a pay-what-you-can basis, with scholarships available, so that cost is never a barrier.

Our suggested membership donations are \$100 per individual or \$150 per household. Larger gifts, if you are able, go even further in strengthening our shared community. Your investments make LWN possible today, and expand what we can offer in 2026.

Please take a moment today to renew or join for 2026 by visiting agassiz.org/lwn-membership.



WINTER ADULT ART CLASS REGISTRATION

Registration for the winter session of adult classes at Maud Morgan Arts began Thursday, December 4th. There are classes for all levels of artists, and students must be 18 years or older to participate. The session begins on Monday, January 5th. All adult classes are for students 18 and older and run from 6:30-9:30 PM. The Winter 2026 session classes include:

- Beginner Handbuilding on Mondays with Emma Murphy
- Screenprinting on Mondays with Nicole Stone

- Beginner Pottery on Tuesdays with Bee
- Advanced Pottery on Wednesdays with Gustavo Barceloni
- Intermediate Pottery on Thursdays with Moon Rodriguez
- Linoleum Relief Printmaking on Thursdays with Nicole Stone

Learn more about this session's offerings and visit maudmorganarts.org to register or join waitlists now!

Citywide News

CITY PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Prepared by All In Energy

The City of Cambridge supports programs to help make your home more energy efficient, make a plan to replace fossil fuels, and make sure you aren't overpaying for energy. Cambridge's official non-profit partner, All In Energy. Contact the Cambridge Energy Helpline at (617) 430-6230 or cambridge@allinenergy.org for assistance.

Electrify Cambridge

Electrify Cambridge is a City of Cambridge program that helps homeowners and building owners make upgrades to use less energy, rely less on fossil fuels, and make homes more comfortable and healthy.

Sign up for a free meeting with a home energy expert who will give you personalized advice and support as you make these changes. You can sign up for a free Electrify Cambridge consultation by calling the Cambridge Energy Helpline at (617) 430-6230 or visiting: <https://bit.ly/4apj0D0>.

Mass Save® Home Energy Assessment

A Home Energy Assessment is the first step to taking advantage of statewide energy efficiency and electrification incentives. Sign up for a Mass Save Home Energy Assessment below or by calling the Cambridge Energy Helpline at (617) 430-6230.

Owners and renters in 1-4 unit buildings (including condo owners) sign up by visiting: <https://bit.ly/4aws7lw>. If your last assessment was more than two years ago, you are eligible for another!

If your income is below 60% of the state median income, or you participate in qualifying programs you are eligible for additional incentives. Check if you are eligible or sign up by contacting (617) 884-6130.

Owners, property managers, or condo board leadership for 5+ unit buildings and condo associations sign up for your whole building or property at leanmultifamily.org/apply-now/

Renters in 5+ unit buildings and small businesses: call the Cambridge Energy Helpline at (617) 430-6230 or send an email to cambridge@allinenergy.org for assistance connecting to programs you are eligible for.

Energy Bill Check-Up

An Energy Bill Check-Up helps you understand your energy bills and make sure you aren't paying more than you need to for energy.

Sign up for an Energy Bill Check-Up by calling the Cambridge Energy Helpline at (617) 430-6230. Please note that we will ask to see your most recent electric bill in advance of your bill check-up.

Small Business Energy Assessment

The Mass Save® small business program provides energy efficiency and electrification incentives and assistance to small business, non-profit organizations, and houses of worship.

Non-profit organizations, houses of worship, and small businesses who rent their space may be eligible for up to 100% off the cost of projects. To get started, call (617) 371-4512 or email: sarah.stewart@aecom.com.

Community Calendar

Winter 2026

Wednesday, December 24-Monday, January 5		MLBCC Closed for Winter Holiday Break
Monday, January 5		First Day of Winter Session of Adult Art Classes
Tuesday, January 6		Outback 2026 Registration Lottery Period Begins
Tuesday, January 13	7:30-9:00 PM	Special Baldwin Neighborhood Council Meeting
Monday, January 19		MLBCC Closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Tuesday, February 10	7:30-9:00 PM	February Baldwin Neighborhood Council Meeting
Monday, February 16		MLBCC Closed for Presidents' Day
Tuesday, February 17-Friday, February 20		February Vacation Week Program

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MLBCC is located on the traditional homelands of the Massachusett people, and their close neighbors and relatives, the Nipmuc and Wampanoag.

The Whistler Fall 2025

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DO NOT FORWARD



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