

March 12, 1998

Cambridge City Council
Cambridge City Hall
795 Mass Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

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CAMBRIDGE MA.

Dear Council Members:

At the last Council meeting, the matter of the North Massachusetts Avenue upgrade project was raised and referred to Subcommittee. I would like to bring to your attention the following communication which makes the public discussion of this issue of utmost importance. This communication appeared in the *Cambridge Chronicle* on March 5th:

North Mass. Ave. planning open to all

The following was submitted by Susan Clippinger, director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation; DPW Commissioner Ralph Dunphy; DPW Dept. Commissioner Steven White; and Susan Schlesinger, assistant city manager for Community Development.

We read with great interest the recent article in the Open Forum concerning the north Mass. Ave. sewer separation and surface improvements projects. The Cambridge Departments of Public Works, Community Development, and Traffic, Parking and Transportation have been working with area residents and businesses on these improvements for over a two-year period.

Sixteen meetings were held with the objective of obtaining community input. To ensure widespread participation, we scheduled meetings on weekday evenings and Saturday mornings, provided day care, posted notice boards at multiple locations on Mass. Ave., and sent notices to hundreds of North Cambridge residents and businesses. This fall, design drawings of the entire corridor were mailed to all who had expressed interest in the project, some 3,700 mailings in all, to make clear exactly what was being proposed and to keep informed those who could not attend all of the meetings. In addition, team members visited every business on Mass. Ave. at

least once to discuss the evolving design. Additional visits were made to businesses and individuals with specific concerns and continue on an as-needed basis.

The plan for North Mass. Ave. reflects the collaborative effort of residents, local businesses, city staff and design professionals. Participants have had numerous opportunities to comment on curb placement, number and location of crosswalks, parking, medians, bike lanes, and urban design elements such as trees, benches and lighting fixtures. There is no question that the design which has emerged is much stronger for the many suggestions made by the community during this process. It is worth noting that at every meeting residents speaking in support of the plan outnumbered those who opposed it.

The project accomplishes a number of important objectives. Bike lanes have been added on both sides of the streets, for the length of the corridor. Seven new pedestrian crosswalks have been added, bringing the total number to 21, with average crosswalk length being shortened by more than 10 percent. The plan preserves approximately 87 percent of parking spaces and we continue to work with particular businesses and residents to minimize parking loss. After much discussion pro and con at the community meetings, the median is being

retained in areas where it facilitates safe pedestrian crossing or controls undesirable vehicle moves and is being removed in other locations. Approximately 50 percent of the existing median is being retained. At the key intersections of Beech Street, Walden Street, Rindge Avenue and Trolley Square, a special effort has been made to improve traffic operations and pedestrian safety, while creating a greater sense of place through design improvements such as curb extensions and shorter crosswalks.

The city is making every effort to minimize disruption associated with construction by combining the court-ordered sewer separation project with these surface improvements. The sewer project must be bid this spring, to meet a court-mandated construction start date of July 1998. To meet this aggressive schedule, the general alignment of the curbs has been set. However, the public will continue to have an opportunity to fine-tune the plan with respect to urban design treatments such as placement of trees and lighting. The public will also have input into developing construction phasing and mitigation plans.

In closing, we want to thank the many North Cambridge residents who devoted evenings and Saturdays to this project, making a significant contribution to the future of their neighborhood.

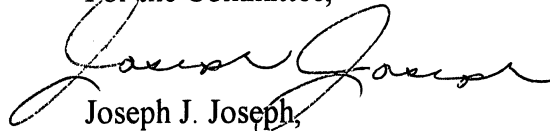
In the first place, it is inappropriate for municipal administrators to inform the public of the status of this sort of plan in an editorial response in a newspaper. To claim that meetings and initial visits to businesses with follow-up mailings is sufficient outreach for a project of this size and scope is utter deception. The complaint from the business community had nothing to do with initial visits. It involved their lack of understanding of when decisions would be made, who would make them, and what those decisions would in fact be. What this description leaves out is an answer to the central question. Why was the general public and the business community not allowed to exercise choice in this process when it came to the central issues. At no meeting did the planners solicit an opinion from the public as to the general desirability of bicycle lanes, removal of median strips, loss of street parking, and installation of bump-outs.

A claim has been made in this letter that "it is worth noting that at every meeting residents speaking in support of the plan outnumbered those who opposed it". Later in the letter, the 'plan' is described as an "evolving design". If the 'plan' were in fact an 'evolving design', how would it have been possible for residents to have voiced "support of the plan" At "at every meeting". As curious as this phenomenon may sound, it in fact explains the fundamental flaw in the entire process. What 'evolved' was a colossal obfuscation around what an average citizen would consider simple common courtesy from an administrator to a taxpayer: Ask first, plan later. Residents of North Cambridge would appreciate it if Ms. Clippinger could provide documentation to the Council and the neighborhood affirming her contention. In addition, could Ms. Clippinger please provide addresses of the attendees of these meetings including addresses of citizen facilitators some of whom though members of the bicycle lobby, are not residents of Cambridge. At the very least, Ms. Clippinger's comments with respect to the businesses seem to be at direct variance with the signatures of businesses between Route 16 and Beech St. submitted to this Council at your last meeting. The "plan for North Mass Ave." does not reflect "the collaborative effort of residents, local businesses, city staff and design professionals". It represents an embarrassingly amateurish attempt to deceive a neighborhood.

Respectfully, the neighborhood requests that a public hearing regarding these matters be scheduled as soon as possible. It is manifestly obvious that the issues of the desirability of median strip removal, installation of bicycle lanes, loss of over 13% of the Avenue's parking inventory between Route 16 and Beech St. and the desirability of bump-outs have not been measured and characterized truthfully with respect to the business community or among residents. At the very least, the public deserves a formal summation of the plan to

date in some vehicle other than the local newspaper, and the public ought to be asked for formal approval. This has not occurred. This issue because of its magnitude and importance needs no less than the Council's full attention as do the correlative aspects of an intentionally muddled process and an approval procedure that is essentially non-existent. Once again, in light of this most recent and surprising declaration of completion, the neighborhood respectfully requests that the Council schedule a public hearing promptly.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joseph J. Joseph".

Joseph J. Joseph,

Chair

North Cambridge Stabilization Committee
Cambridge, MA

Consent Communication #19

Communication was received from
Joseph J. Josphe, Chair, North
Cambridge Stabilization Committee,
transmitting a letter regarding
the North Massachusetts Avenue
upgrade project..

In City Council March 16, 1998

CHARTER RIGHT

BY Councillor Thomey

3/23/98

Referred to

hearings of 4/8/98 + 4/13/98