

18 March 74

City Council of Cambridge
City Hall
Cambridge, Mass. 02138

Dear Sirs and Mesdames:

Enclosed find a letter/petition which we, the residents of 5a-19 Sacramento Street, have sent to the Harvard University Committee on Crime (your copy is a photostat). The petition is self-explanatory.

We would like you to keep the letter on file in case the problems outlined therein worsen, in which case we will make further appeals to you for help.

Sincerely,

The Residents of 5a-19
Sacramento Street

We the residents of 5a, 11, 13, 15, 17 and 19 Sacramento Street have repeatedly called to the attention of the Harvard University Police and other University authorities a situation which has recently grown more serious and dangerous to the point of becoming intolerable. For at least four years, the parking lot between 5 and 9 Sacramento Street has been the site of nightly invasions by local teenagers, who use the area for drinking parties. When they are present, there is a constant and disturbing amount of noise, made worse by loud verbal obscenities, screeching cars and flying beer cans. In addition, passers-by are exposed to the frequent sight of males urinating (beer takes its toll) without any regard for anyone's sensibilities. These disturbances have often lasted as late as 3 a.m., and on weekends, the situation has been particularly unbearable, when as many as thirty or more teenagers have gathered simultaneously.

In their wake, they have left a substantial and costly amount of vandalism (involving cars and real property) and enormous amounts of litter (which has to be cleaned up daily) in the lot and in our back yards. They have also left many of the neighbors in a state of anxiety about their personal safety as well as about the security of their property.

The anxieties have grown, not only because of the physical damage and noise, but also because, since September, there have been four fires set within a fifty yard radius. Two involved the torching of stolen or abandoned cars which were parked near enough trees and a wooden fence to have potentially caused a major conflagration. A small wooden shed near 5a was set ablaze in the middle of one night. And worst of all, obvious arson was committed in the vestibule of 17 Sacramento Street which burned out the kitchen of the first floor apartment and threatened the life of the sleeping inhabitant. Although we cannot and do not connect these fires with the young people who shuffle in and out of the area, we have become more concerned than ever about the presence of unwelcome strangers who roam the lot, the playfield behind it, and our back yards late at night.

Residents have written letters, called in complaints and filed petitions in the past. All the appeals for help have met with little response. The Cambridge police have been uncooperative and unsympathetic, especially since they consider this a Harvard University problem. The Harvard police have responded when called, but they have sometimes displayed annoyance with the callers, and have appeared little interested in taking steps which could prevent or eliminate the problem altogether. We are certainly not soothed by the police's complaint that they are busy elsewhere or that they are understaffed. Nor do any of us appreciate the fact that one tenant, who has suffered considerable and expensive damage to her car through mindless vandalism, was told by the Harvard police that the proper solution was for her to move!

Aware that the landlord is responsible for the security and safety of the property we rent, we are concerned about Harvard's lack of response to earlier complaints and pleas for help. In addition, we feel that we have a right to peace of mind relating to our homes, our possessions, and our personal safety. And we do not feel that we should even have to endure undue levels of human noise; nor do we feel that we should serve as trash collectors for unwelcome strangers who abuse our landscape in ways that they would never treat their own.

We all have sufficiently good memories so that we can sympathize with the problems of young people living in an urban community who seek out a sanctuary where they can blow off steam. In this sense, our problem is part of a larger community problem. That is, in part, why we have not pressed charges, and that is also why we are forwarding a copy of this letter to the Cambridge City Council. But we also want to make clear that our sense of hospitality has run out, for reasons which by now should be obvious.

We therefore ask that Harvard provide at least a twice nightly patrol of the Sacramento Street parking lot (and adjacent yards) to remove unauthorized persons. In addition, we feel that the relevant and responsible Harvard officials should contact us on this matter for a further dialogue. The urgency of the situation increases as the warm weather approaches; we expect to hear from you within the week.

Guy D. Smith (SA)
 Robert Clark
 Murray Gross
 Roger Horowitz
 Charles J. Sams
 Helen M. Kubuk
 Susan (SA)
 Rosalind Pallaw (SA)
 Charles D. Klein (17)

Suzanne R. Klein (17)
 Martin Goldstein (13)
 Sarah A. Sumner (13)
 Nancy Feing (17)
 Gregory D. Clark (19)
 Dorothy Wang (19)
 Sally Schwartz (11)
 Jack Chun (15)

cc Derek Bok, President of Harvard University
 Henry C. Cutler, Director of Real Estate, Harvard
 Harvard University Police
 Cambridge City Council
 Cambridge Mental Health Association

Comm. from residents of 5a-19 Sacramento
St. relative to disturbances at the park-
ing lot located at the premises numbered
5 and 9 Sacramento Street.

In City Council,

March 25, 1974

3/25/74

Referred to the
City Manager
For Action -