

CAMBRIDGE COMMON CONCERT COMMITTEE

26 June 1969

Mr. Philip Cronin
City Solicitor
Cambridge City Hall
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Mr. Cronin:

Pursuant to our phone conversation of 25 June, about proposed antinoise legislation in Cambridge, this letter is to indicate what steps we have undertaken to deal with complaints of people bordering on the Common regarding noise from the concerts on Sundays.

For the last several months, we have been making subjective checks of noise levels around the north (Waterhouse St.) end of the Common, where the bulk of the complaints originated. Members of the sponsoring committee have stood at that location and listened to the level of each band; but we felt this was not enough, and wanted some objective measurement of the loudness of the bands. As a result, we contacted John Spencer of Bolt, Beranek and Newman, the Cambridge sound engineering firm. Last Sunday, 22 June, Mr. Spencer brought a decibel meter capable of rough frequency discrimination to the Common, and a series of sound level checks were made at several points in the neighborhood of the Common. Mr. Spencer is writing up these measurements, putting them into a finished form. As of today (Thursday) the report is not completed, but we expect it to be done by Monday.

Points where measuring was done were the following:

Corner of Waterhouse St. and Garden St.

In front of Commander Hotel

Corner of Follen St. and Garden St.

Courtyard of 1 Waterhouse St.

NE corner of Common

SE corner of Common

Directly behind the band playing.

The results of these measurements were all basically in agreement: outside the northern edge of the Common, the level of the band playing is at virtually the same level as that of passing traffic, and the music is drowned out when any vehicle passes by.

The complaints from 1 Waterhouse St. seem to stem from the unusual architecture of the building. It has a courtyard, fronting on Waterhouse St., which extends upward the full height of the building and is faced in brick, which is very reflective of sound. It was Mr. Spencer's opinion that this courtyard acts like a resonating chamber, and magnifies the volume of notes in the low bass, much like a pipe on a pipe organ. We talked to several of the residents of this building and the superintendent, Mr. Banis, and they all agreed that it was the bass part of the music that seemed most bothersome; and Mr. Banis said that it was the tenants who fronted the courtyard who were most unhappy, so this all seemed to bear out the conclusion. The noise level in the courtyard was higher than fifty feet away, on the corner.

The other location that complained was 50 Follen St., which fronts on both Follen St. and Waterhouse St. Follen St. runs directly up and down a line-of-sight from the site at which concerts have been held, and it seems probable that sound goes straight down the street and is reflected off the brick walls of the Christian Science Temple.

Broadly speaking, higher frequencies of sound radiate primarily uni-directionally from a sound source, while lower frequencies tend to radiate omni-directionally. This means it is relatively easy to construct baffles that would cut off the treble; but cutting off the bass is much harder. Yet the treble portion does not seem to be the problem.

However Mr. Spencer thinks that most of the problems can be solved by moving the bands from the present location, just in front of the cannons, to a site a hundred or two feet away, that puts the bulk of the Abraham Lincoln Monument between the bands and the two buildings affected. The monument will then block off most of the bass and reflect a large portion of it back into the audience, and people and clothing are very effective acoustical deadeners.

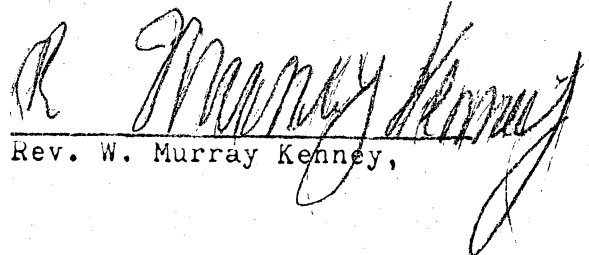
Before this weekend, we will talk with representatives of the city and the police, to work out problems that might arise from this move, and we should be able to report to the City Council on Monday on the success of change.

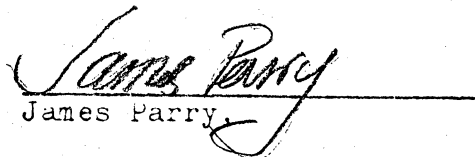
We also have been in touch with several other acoustical engineers, and plan to continue taking surveys of the area for the next several weeks, and if need be experimenting with varying locations and sound configurations in an attempt to find the setup that will cause the least disturbance to everybody concerned.

In conclusion, it seems that the objective measurement of sound is far from a simple matter, far more complex than simply setting a decibel level, since it depends, among other things, on frequency, character of the area, background noise, and even on the direction of the wind. It seems further that the sound level of the concerts is not, as nearly as can be determined significantly louder, if any, than the normal sound background level. The complaints from residents north of the Common seem to be caused primarily by unique architectural features of the area, and the complaints can probably be drastically reduced by a simple shift of a hundred feet or so within the Common.

We of the Concert Committee are doing everything we can to prove to be a good neighbor to everyone in the Common area. We are trying everything in our power to work out the noise situation, and we welcome any suggestions anyone can make toward this aim.

Yours sincerely,


Rev. W. Murray Kenney,


James Parry,

for the Cambridge Common Concert Committee

cc: Mr. James Sullivan, City Manager



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

James L. Sullivan
City Manager

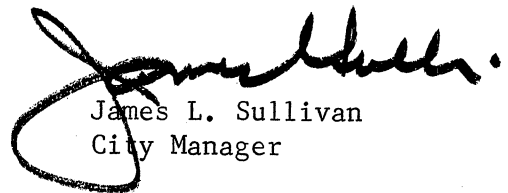
John H. Corcoran
Assistant City Manager

June 30, 1969

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I transmit herewith for your information copy of a communication received from the Cambridge Common Concert Committee, dated June 26, 1969, regarding noise from the concerts on Sundays on the Cambridge Common.

Yours truly,



James L. Sullivan
City Manager

JLS:pv

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COMMUNICATION
from the City Manager trans-
nitting one from the Cambridge

Common Concert Committee, dated June 26,
1969 regarding noise from the concerts on
Sundays on the Cambridge Common

June 30, 1969

6/30/69 Placed on File