

4 Trowbridge Place, Apt. 1 D
Cambridge MA 02138-4110
Feb. 21, 1995

Vice Mayor Sheila T. Russell
5 Hawthorne Park
Cambridge MA 02138

Dear Vice Mayor Russell:

I am writing you (along with the other members of the City Council) to express my concern over the lack of proper maintenance for the flag which is flown near the Cambridge Commons from the tall pole near Harvard. It is painfully obvious that the City of Cambridge has consistently been negligent in fulfilling its obligations to fly such a flag with the respect that any American flag is due, let alone one that is situated a short distance from where George Washington took command of the Continental Army. I have been ashamed watching tourists look aghast at a badly shredded flag as they begin a tour of the Harvard Yard. They too have been offended seeing an American flag in such a condition in a city of a state which prides itself as a source of American tradition.

The city has chosen the route of continually flying flags 24 hours a day, a choice which is permitted under flag codes provided that the flag is well lighted. Since the city seems to be able to meet its responsibility for proper lighting, it is all the more puzzling why it has not made sure that regular flag replacement is mandatory, erring on the side of insuring that no flag be left up so long as to fall into disrepair. It is particularly disturbing when national holidays come and go with tattered flags flying.

Just before the weekend of the Fourth of July, I was instrumental in getting the city to agree to replace an old flag. I just happened to pass when three city workers removed the old one and carefully raised a new one in a very respectful manner, just in time for the holiday. Since that time, I have had to continually nag the city to replace flags, one so torn that there were four or five long streamers. My sense of shame turned to great anger on seeing that.

I am in my sixties, and we grew up with everyone understanding that the flag was the premier symbol of our nation and deserved special care. Although I served as an active duty reserve Navy officer for three years, I saw no combat. Even so, it troubles my soul deeply to see us officially treat the flag with such neglect, knowing that a vast multitude has died defending that banner.

Let me recount a tale of heroism by two foreigners who risked retribution for helping Americans exercise the right to

fly their flag overseas. In the 1960s, I served as a Foreign Service Officer at the American Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia. In an extremely tense period, the embassy was attacked by a crowd (with the obvious approval of the government). Our flag was torn down and the Indonesian flag put up and tied to the pole. After setting fire to vehicles and a building adjacent to the chancery where I and the rest of the staff huddled together in great fear, the crowd left when the local police blew whistles after 45 minutes. Their rampaging ceased, the crowd obeying like players on a stage. An Indonesian employee of the embassy climbed up the pole and cut the Indonesian flag down. When it fell like a rock to the ground, he was promptly arrested on embassy property by the very police who had orchestrated the whole event. He was hauled off to jail to be beaten. Following this a second Indonesian (just an employee of an embassy subcontractor) volunteered to climb up the now empty pole and restrung a cord through the pulley at apex. He came down and was also promptly dealt with by the local police. The Marine guards came out and went through their morning colors at 2 PM, re-raising the Stars and Stripes. I could barely see the event, my eyes were so full of tears. I don't think there was a dry eye among anyone else either. I spent the rest of the afternoon roaming around a hostile city looking for the whereabouts of the two Indonesians. Our own employee apologized the next day for being late. He was more afraid of meeting the Ambassador than he had been during his act of bravery on our behalf the day before.

It is not up to me to judge whether the city official involved is overburdened and/or not provided with the staff to maintain the flags properly, or just plain negligent, that falls to you as the city's legislative body to determine. If the City of Cambridge can not afford to fly a flag properly from that pole, then it must stop attempting to do so, or turn over that responsibility to some group who will carry out that task as a patriotic honor. Perhaps it should supply the flags to a group who would accept the city's invitation to replace the flag on a regular schedule as well as monitoring its condition every day. The following possibilities come to mind:

- (1) the Cambridge Police, or
- (2) the Harvard Police, or
- (3) a local veterans' group, or
- (4) ROTC students at Harvard College,
- (5) students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin.

Lest you think this a letter from some right wing kook, I happen to be an atheistic, bisexual quasi-liberal Democrat. The country fortunately has room for me and the likes of Newt Gingrich and Ted Kennedy. That flag flies over all of us.

Sincerely,

Dale Alan Diefenbach

Dale Alan Diefenbach

Senior Reference Librarian
Harvard Law School



City of Cambridge

3.

IN CITY COUNCIL

March 6, 1995

VICE MAYOR RUSSELL
COUNCILLOR DUEHAY
COUNCILLOR BORN
COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO
COUNCILLOR MYERS
MAYOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY
COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to properly display and maintain the flags flying over Flagstaff Park (see attachment).

In City Council March 6, 1995

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

3.

March 6, 1995

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COUNCILLOR DUEHAY

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City of Cambridge

3.

IN CITY COUNCIL

March 6, 1995

VICE MAYOR RUSSELL
COUNCILLOR DUEHAY
COUNCILLOR BORN

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to properly display and maintain the flags flying over Flaggstaff Park (see attachment).

Entire membership

Consent Order #3

CM-85

Vice Mayor Russell, Councillors Duehay
and Born re: Lack of proper maintenance
for the flags at Flagstaff Park.

In City Concil March 6, 1995

Order adopted