

City of Cambridge

The Food Policy Committee conducted a public meeting on Wednesday, August 13, 1997 at six o'clock and twenty-five minutes p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber.

Present at the meeting were Councillor Henrietta Davis, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born and Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves; Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk; Jeanne Strain, Economic Development Planner for the Community Development Department; Mr. Peter Grenon, City Foods; Tom Kennedy, Kennedy Development; A.C. Gallo, Bread and Circus; Jonathan Ginsberg, Forest City Development and John Higgins, Harvest Co-Op.

Councillor Davis opened the meeting by stating the purpose was to hear from the new owners of the Purity Supreme site on their plans for a supermarket in Central Square; to hear about Bread and Circus' plans and to discuss the transportation and parking issues for the new University Star Market. Councillor Davis noted that access and affordability were important issues for all markets.

The committee heard from Jeanne Strain, who stated that there are concerns about the availability of a food store in the Central Square neighborhood. There are several new projects going forward which should lead to more food being available in the area, she said. Ms. Strain introduced Mr. Peter Grenon, the new owner of the City Foods Store, the new incarnation of Purity Supreme. She stated that City Foods is an independent operator who will take over the store. She stated that the store was closed for four days to paint and rehab the store. Repairs will be continuing while the store is open so as not to interfere with the food operation.

Ms. Strain stated that Bread and Circus will be moving to River Street and Putnam Avenue.

Councillor Davis stated that she wanted to focus on one market at a time. She started the discussion with the City Foods site. She stated that people were concerned about the intent to have affordable food and about the 1/2 million dollar rehabilitation.

The committee heard from Mr. Peter Grenon, owner of City Foods, who stated that the business is family-owned, with the other two partners being his brother-in-law and his niece. He informed the committee that six months ago, they were going to open a store in Hyannis. He looked at the site in Central Square and had a good feeling about it. He said that the store would carry the same type of food as did Purity Supreme. He stated that City Foods could do a better job in the area for ethnic consumers. He stated that the renovations will be started in four weeks and he outlined the changes:

1. Floors, ceiling and lighting will be replaced;
2. Fixtures will be replaced;
3. The check out stands will remain the same;
4. A wall will be knocked down in order to expand;

5. Deli will be doubled in size;
6. Produce section will be increased;
7. Full service bakery department will be added;
8. Small floral department;
9. A buffet service will be added that will serve breakfast, lunch and dinner; a chef has been hired;
10. Delivery services will be offered; shopping can be done through the Internet, he said.

Mr. Grenon stated that his object is to keep the price of the food comparable with other food stores. Produce, he said, would be purchased from a major wholesaler. He stated that he did not have the overhead that the larger chain stores have so the chain store prices are higher. He further stated that the funds for the renovation were committed in a prior lease. The funds are held in escrow, he said. Mr. Grenon stated that he would like to become involved with the community and with the senior citizens.

Councillor Davis inquired about the time table for the renovations. Mr. Grenon responded that he would like to start next week but the liquor store location has not been resolved.

Vice Mayor Born welcomed Mr. Grenon and stated that he would find Central Square a busy place. She stated her concern that the increase in the amount of space for prepared foods will usurp shelf space. She stated the city needs a place with a basic flavor in Central Square. Mr. Grenon stated that the buffet area will have real food for real people. Vice Mayor Born asked about City Foods plans for left over food. Mr. Grenon stated that donations have been made to Salvation Army.

The committee heard from Alexia Hayes, 156 Magazine Street, who stated that older people do not like exotic foods. She said that she was concerned about the prices and the produce prices were high. Mr. Grenon stated that there were five specials that were run this week and that the produce prices were less expensive than Stop & Shop. He stated that within five months, City Foods would have a preferred customer program.

The committee heard from Paul Schlaver, Director of the Consumer Council, who stated that he would like the front of the store changed to get more control of the area. He requested that the front area not be covered with signs. He stated that the grade at the rear entrance is too steep for a handicapped person. He suggested to Mr. Grenon that he work with the Handicapped Commission or the Consumer Council on this issue. He welcomed the utility payment service being kept. He questioned whether City Foods has debit cards. Mr. Grenon responded in the affirmative. Mr. Grenon informed the committee that the rear door will remain open but the hours will be changed from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The delivery service will use the back door, he said. "We are very sensitive to the back door issue, " he said.

Councillor Davis requested that Michael Muehe, Executive Director of the Commission for Persons with Disabilities, review the access issue. The sidewalk in front of the store should be levelled. Mr. Grenon stated that he would work with the Community Development Department regarding the front of the store. Councillor Davis informed Mr. Grenon that there is a sign ordinance that he should be aware of. Ms. Strain informed the committee that City Foods has an architect working with them.

In response to a question on the phone payment service, Mr. Grenon stated that the store was approved three weeks ago but there has been a problem getting the equipment to the store.

Councillor Reeves welcomed Mr. Grenon. He stated that the initial concern is that the prices are too expensive. He recommended that City Foods do an exit interview to find this out from people who shop in Central Square. He stated that the rear door is utilized by the 180 residents of the apartment complex, Manning Apartments. He informed Mr. Grenon that if City Foods gives the days and times to the senior citizens, it would work for them. Mr. Grenon informed Councillor Reeves that City Foods is very sensitive to price. He stated that City Foods prices were comparable to what was existent when the market opened. Councillor Reeves stated that he could give Mr. Grenon names of people he could talk to regarding the prices.

Councillor Davis stated that the store has a long history of customer service. She informed Mr. Grenon that the former manager of the store was kind and generous. She encouraged Mr. Grenon to introduce himself to the senior citizens and the tenants of the Manning Apartments. Mr. Grenon informed the committee that he had made tentative plans to do this.

The committee heard from Laura Booth, CEOC, who informed Mr. Grenon that she would be able to work with Mr. Grenon regarding leftover food distribution.

The committee now heard from Tom Kennedy of Kennedy Development who talked about his development at the intersection of River Street and Putnam Avenue. He stated that he purchased the Elbery Ford site with the intention of building a food store and an Osco Drug Store. He still intends to go forward with the food store. He has an agreement with Bread & Circus. He stated that Bread and Circus wants a larger store and would be more beneficial. He stated that at no time would delivery trucks be seen backing up or dropping off their goods because they would be using the ground level. The food store would be on the second floor. He informed the committee that he intended to create an aesthetically pleasing site. He was planning to go before the Planning Board and the Board of Zoning Appeal to increase the size of the building. He stated that the store will be operational in the fall of next year. He intends to bring affordable food products into the city.

The Committee heard from A.C. Gallo, President of Bread & Circus, who informed the committee that 18 years ago the store on Prospect Street was opened. He informed the committee that Bread & Circus was limited with the space in the store and the produce they can sell. At River Street he stated that Bread & Circus was opening a store at the new location which would serve a large contingency of the community. He stated that the new owners of Bread & Circus have a less strict food policy, though Bread & Circus is not allowed to sell any product with bleached flour or preservatives, he said. He stated that at the new location Bread & Circus would be able to broaden their selection of food items and sell them at competitive prices. Mr. Gallo stated that Osco Drug will back up the line of products that Bread & Circus cannot sell. Between the two stores, he said, a person would be able to buy a good representation of every available product line.

Vice Mayor Born asked about the possibility of the development containing a coffee shop. Mr. Gallo stated the plans were presented to Community Development Department with a glass enclosure which contained a coffee shop with books and will be community oriented, similar to Carberry's. He will be completely separate from the food store.

Vice Mayor Born asked if this is going to happen. She stated that the coffee shop could be the public entrance into the community environment. Mr. Gallo stated that he could see people entering the food market through the coffee shop.

At this time, Mr. Kennedy stated that the plans will be ready for presentation in the first week of September. Vice Mayor Born asked when the architectural plans could be seen. Mr. Kennedy stated they could be seen in the first week of September.

Councillor Davis asked about the traffic plans Mr. Kennedy stated that there will be community meetings about the traffic plan.

The committee heard from Noel Johnson who asked about the plans for the Prospect Street site. Mr. Gallo stated that he did not know and that the building was not owned by them, but by Anthony Harnett. Ms. Johnson asked when there would be an opportunity to look at the plan, a model of the building that is being designed. Mr. Gallo stated that the plan would be ready in two to three weeks, but a model will take longer.

The committee heard from Mary Gannon who asked if Bread & Circus would reduce or maintain its organic products. Mr. Gallo stated that there would be an increased selection.

The committee heard from Stash Horowitz, 12 Florence Street, who stated that the Cambridgeport area is faced with a gridlock traffic situation in the morning and evening hours. He stated the development needed to take into account the increased traffic impact in the Cambridgeport area. Mr. Kennedy stated that Abend Associates, a traffic consultant, have been retained to do an updated traffic study and it will include all of the new development including the Polaroid development. The study will be done, he said, in September to get an accurate number which will include the students. He further stated the development will contain 22,000 to 23,000 actual retail space. Mr. Kennedy stated that the employees would park in a different location. He also stated that 50% of the clientele to the site would be pedestrians. Mr. Horowitz stated that Steve Kaiser, of Cambridge Initiatives, has some reservations about the Abend traffic study and he would like a copy of the revised traffic study.

The committee now proceeded to discuss University Park. The committee heard from Jonathan Ginsberg, Forest City Development, who stated that in March of 1998 the supermarket will be opened. He informed the committee that Star Market has signed a long term lease and is still putting together its product line. He further stated the plans for the product line and delivery are still in the planning stage and will be available closer to the store opening.

Vice Mayor Born stated that it would be economically sound for Star Market to consider running a shuttle service.

Councillor Davis stated that it would be beneficial for the committee to now communicate with Star Market to discuss the issues of traffic, cost of parking and a shuttle service. A letter should be sent by the committee, she said.

The committee heard from Bill Hammond, 191 Franklin Street, who asked Mr. Ginsberg if the traffic situation in the area was considered. Mr. Ginsberg stated that a traffic mitigation plan was put into place in 1987, T passes are sold to employees, a shuttle bus service from the rear of Sidney Street is available, and Forest City has been involved with the roadway improvement plan. Councillor Davis stated that the MBTA could offer better service to the supermarkets in the area. Mr. Hammond asked for specific plans that relate to the whole neighborhood. Mr. Ginsberg stated that he had ridership information he would share with Mr. Hammond. Mr. Hammond stated that he was looking for traffic control. Mr. Ginsberg stated that the goal would be to shift people out of their cars into alternative modes. Mr. Ginsberg stated that the traffic flow was reversed from Massachusetts Avenue down Landsdowne Street, turn right onto Franklin Street and to the truck dock. He stated that through traffic does not go through Franklin Street and Green Street. Star Market had to agree to the truck route policy with the city, he said.

Vice Mayor Born stated that the Truck Traffic Committee has been set up with residents from every corner of the city. She stated new projects can be requested to supply a plan on how the traffic will flow through the city. She further stated that the Interstate Commercial Commission laws were recently changed to allow larger trucks to drive through intercity streets.

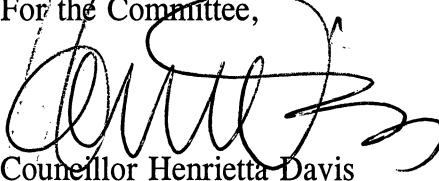
The committee now focused on the Harvest Co-Op. The committee heard from John Higgins, General Manager, who stated that Harvest Co-Op had two stores, one in Cambridge and one in Boston. He stated there was a plan for a major improvements in the next few months, including using the front section for a deli. He stated that the permitting process was complicated. Mr. Higgins stated that the store was poorly laid out, but with the expansion, the space will be better utilized.

At this time, Stash Horowitz submitted a letter from Elie Yarden, 143 Pleasant Street, which was made part of the record of the meeting. (ATTACHMENT A)

Councillor Davis concluded the meeting stating that there will be additional square feet of food stores in the city and all of the food markets were much needed.

The meeting adjourned at eight o'clock and ten minutes p.m.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Henrietta Davis', written over a circular stamp.

Councillor Henrietta Davis
Chair

ATTACHMENT A

To: the Food Policy Committee
From: Elie Yarden, 143 Pleasant St.
Date: August 13, 1997

The price of food for urban populations is a fairly complicated matter. Distribution costs (getting the food from the farmer, food processor, etc., to the people who consume the food) far exceed the costs of production. Accessibility of food to the consumer, nutritional value, the enjoyability of a meal, depend, in part, on the disposable income of the individual purchaser, but other factors, educational and cultural, play a large role as well. People who know how to shop, and how to prepare food, can find themselves spending far less than those who do not have the information. Unfortunately, Cambridge, like every other urban area, has large numbers of working people whose earnings are insufficient to meet basic needs. Poorer people are less likely to be well-informed than the well-to-do about how to get the best value for their money. But all of us are susceptible to certain myths which should be dispelled:

Myth Number One: *Large chain supermarkets are a good source of inexpensive food.* **Facts:** The distribution costs of these chains, including physical waste, advertising, etc., are considerably greater than the production costs. In the case of large supermarkets whose customers shop mainly via the automobile, a distribution cost is transferred to the consumer and a hidden cost to the environment. The cost of parking the car is included in the price of the can of peas you buy.

Myth Number Two: *Smaller food stores cannot compete.* This is obviously untrue. **Facts:** In East Cambridge on Cambridge Street, in small ethnic groceries, in Watertown on Mt. Auburn Street, and other places, one can buy fresh and processed foods of a quality equal to or superior to that found in large supermarket chains, at one-half and even one-third the price. Inexpensive food is found in some areas and not others; why?

Myth Number Three: *Competition, unregulated market determination of the price of food, keeps the price of food low. Large size and sales volume result in lower prices.* **Facts:** Consumer behavior is determined by so many factors other than the actual price of the nutritional value of the food we buy that large chains will spend far more money in persuading the consumer to buy, than they will spend on the quality of what they actually sell. They are equipped with the marketing research and resources to do this successfully.

The above are only a few of the myths to be examined, if a Food Policy Committee can be of help to the citizens.

The neighborhoods in Cambridge that lack a sufficient number of high quality, inexpensive, retail food stores, lack them because of zoning regulations and high rents. The City, (citizens of Cambridge, not its 'bottom-line') would be well-served if the City established about 10 municipal markets, in or adjacent to residential neighborhoods, providing rental space to several (anywhere from 7 - 15, to insure competitive pricing) food shops. These would likely be family businesses for the most part. The efficiency of this distribution method -- food within easy walking distance of most dwellings, deliveries by small wholesale trucks or by owners shopping in wholesale markets -- would assist in reversing the undesirable demographic trend (families with children leaving the city, increased individual automobile ownership) that is making Cambridge a City of more employers and employees than inhabitants and citizens. Any plan for less wasteful, for less costly food distribution will take time and careful planning. It also requires the civic will to decide the future of the city and not leave its fate in the hands of large real-estate corporations and similar large predators.

Meanwhile, the best thing, which the Food Policy Committee can do, is to develop a highly visible consumer education and information program, that would enable all citizens, rich and poor alike, to find the best value for their dollar. Daily public comparative price bulletins are a more public-minded way of spending public funds than providing less useful dollars to people, who do not have access to the best way of using them.

Examples:

- a) for people who can afford a box of Stoned Wheat Thins;
 - \$2.69 at major chain supermarket
 - \$2.49 at large non-chain market
 - \$1.69 at small 'yuppie' market

- b) for people who can afford Natural Herb Cough Drops
 - \$.80 a pack in Harvard Sq. newsstand (no sales tax)
 - \$.99 a pack at major chain drug store in Cambridgeport
(plus \$.05 sales tax)

c) for people who have to watch every penny to insure that their families get enough protein in their diet:

\$7.00 a pound, fresh cod fillet at first quality food market

\$4.40 a pound, fresh whole cod at fish store (high quality)

\$5.39 a pound, fresh cod fillet at large chain supermarket
(medium quality)

\$3.75 a pound, fresh cod fillet at large market (inferior quality)

\$3.30 a pound, high quality frozen cod at local market.

Political appeals to poorer voters, 'affordable food' slogans, must be sacrificed to helping all citizens to be less poor. Good buying is one way. Education about the nature of exploitation by advertising and other forms of mis-education is another. Learning about food is another. But none of these are of much use to people who are forced out of the city because, working in that city, they cannot earn a wage that allows them to live in it.

Glee Yander
8/13/97

A report was received from Councillor Henrietta Davis, Chair of the Food Policy Committee, for a meeting held on August 13, 1997 to meet the new owners of the City Foods and discuss their plans for a supermarket in Central Square, the plans for Bread and Circus and to discuss the transportation and parking issues for the new University Star Market.

In City Council September 8, 1997

Report Accepted
Placed on File