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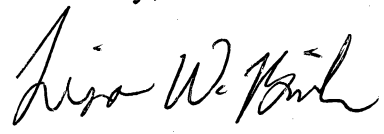
Ms. Margaret Drury
City Clerk
Cambridge City Hall
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Madam Clerk:

On August 16, 1995, the Alewife Study Group, a subcommittee of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, held a community meeting about Spaulding & Slye's proposed development of the Alewife site. An estimated 150 concerned neighbors attended. The enclosed summary and recommendations were derived from both oral and written comments made at that meeting. On Wednesday, September 13, 1995, the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee unanimously approved both documents. Further, they directed that the Alewife Study Group submit these documents to the council.

At this time, the Alewife Study Group respectfully requests that the summary and recommendations be included in the City Council's agenda for Monday, September 18. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lisa W. Birk

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**COMMUNITY RESPONSE
TO A PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE W.R. GRACE SITE**



**Prepared by
The Alewife Study Group**

September 12, 1995

This document is submitted on behalf of the North Cambridge Community by the Alewife Study Group. The group was formed as a subcommittee of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee in June, 1995 to assess the proposed Spaulding and Slye superstore and retail development at the W.R. Grace site in North Cambridge and to obtain community feedback on the proposed plan.

The comments and recommendations that follow were derived from both oral and written public comment at a meeting held on August 16, 1995 attended by an estimated 150 concerned neighbors.

Summary of Community Comments Meeting of August 16, 1995

Introduction

The Alewife Study Group, a subcommittee of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, firmly believes that the W.R. Grace parcel currently under consideration for retail development is a unique and valuable resource to its immediate neighborhood, to the North Cambridge Community and to the City of Cambridge as a whole.

The development proposed for the site includes a 70,000 square foot 'superstore' along with a number of additional retail shops, a restaurant and hotel.

At the heart of the 23-acre site is a vital public corridor used by hundreds of people each day. Many are pedestrians coming and going from the North Cambridge MBTA building. Others are bicyclists, runners or roller-bladers who use it as a link to the Minuteman Bike Path, to the adjoining path of the Linear Park, or to other destinations east and west. At the perimeter of the site on the north is the green expanse of Russell Field, made vibrant three seasons each year by athletes and onlookers of all ages who spill into all of the connecting pathways that surround and divide the site. In the parcel's southeast corner is a unique urban wetland that embraces two ponds. Its sensitive ecology provides a rich habitat for plants and wildlife, and it is a crucial area for flood control. Natural conditions predominate on the rest of the site as well, and its trees, shrubs and grasses buffer both the recreational areas and the surrounding residential neighborhoods from the high-volume traffic of Route 2 and Alewife Brook Parkway.

The convergence of pedestrian and recreational uses within and around the site and its rich and unusual environmental attributes give it a highly complex and unique character. Any program for development of the site should acknowledge and enhance its unique characteristics.

Traffic and Parking

The sentiment that current traffic volumes preclude the siting of a 70,000 square foot super-sized supermarket was overwhelming. Reasons stated included the impact of vastly increased traffic upon major access routes (Route 2 and Alewife Brook Parkway), increased noise and air pollution, and the proposed development's inevitable effect upon traffic bypass routes (see recommendation 2b). Increased traffic volume on these routes will create greater safety concerns, and these must be addressed before rather

than after they arise. (For example, could a safety issue similar to the current problem of pedestrians crossing the railroad tracks to reach the Fresh Pond Shopping Center arise on Rindge Avenue when traffic and frequent, random pedestrian crossings inevitably increase as a result of this proposed development?)

The traffic and parking dilemma created by potential customer access from Whittemore Ave., Harvey St., and Clifton St. was also raised. Comments were heavily weighted towards eliminating access to the proposed site from those avenues for all vehicles. Major doubts were also raised about the viability of the proposed plans for entry and egress of both commercial and customer vehicles.

Community Fit / Type of Store

Designation as "open space" found surprisingly broad support. Suggestions ranged from taking of the site by eminent domain to creation of a botanical garden. It was generally felt that an "open space" designation should become more of a concrete consideration in the planning process.

While the idea of a neighborhood-sized supermarket was generally supported, near unanimous resistance to a super-sized supermarket and to stores targeting consumers in Belmont, Arlington, and Somerville rather than the host Cambridge community was expressed. Concern was raised about the dubious compatibility of any super-sized operation with existing neighborhood-style, mom-and-pop sized stores. Neighborhood-oriented and neighborhood-scaled businesses were generally preferred, with particular preference expressed for book and clothing stores and coffee shops.

Support was expressed for MDC acquisition of Jerry's Pond and the Babo and Lehigh Metals sites (the Lehigh Metals site is the proposed location of the hotel). Such purchases were viewed as natural complements to existing wetlands and necessary adjacent open space buffers.

Support for creation of alternative plans with broad-based community participation was unanimous.

Siting

The currently proposed siting of the various buildings comprising the proposal was met with significant objection. The superstore was located too close to the abutting residential properties. Members of the community emphatically expressed major concern with the potential for noise from trucks, truck loading, truck waiting areas, late hours, garbage, air and noise pollution and potentially harsh lighting. It was generally felt that the supermarket was situated too far from the subway entrance. Conversely, support for a smaller neighborhood-sized market at the "T" station entrance was near-unanimous.

Support for preservation of the existing Linear Park and other potentially effected bicycle/pedestrian paths was voiced. It was widely viewed that any development should not become a barrier to the established recreational patterns at Russell Field, Linear Park, and Minuteman Bike Path. Rather it was expressed that any development should enhance the continuity of these active areas.

Bicycle / Pedestrian

Significant concern with the proposed development's traffic impact upon the Minuteman Bike Path and other bicycle and foot paths was expressed. Additionally, vehicular impact upon established pedestrian access patterns to the "T" was raised.

Environment

The environmental concerns seemed to be the most multi-faceted. Participants expressed a strong desire to preserve as much of the site as possible as open space for both enhanced recreational and natural benefit. Suggestions for implementation included persuading either the MDC or the City or some entity such as the Trust for Public Land's "Urban Greenspace Program," or some combination of all three to consider a taking via eminent domain or by a friendly purchase, if the present owner agrees. Citing a litany of unanswered questions from a previous public review process, residents repeatedly raised grave concerns regarding hazardous residues of various types (naphthalene, fuel oils, unknowns) on the site prior to, during and after any proposed construction. The displacement of and impact on wetlands, concern with potential negative impacts upon the site's primary natural function as a flood plain for three abutting communities, and the desire to have Jerry's Pond cleaned up and restored, were all emphasized repeatedly.

Crime/Neighborhood Quality

Neighbors expressed a strong desire to have a plan from the developer that would mitigate potential problems regarding loitering at the proposed retail sites, especially those near and abutting the "T" station. Concern was also expressed that the development may cause an increase in local break-ins.

Preliminary Recommendations of the Alewife Study Group

Introduction

Based upon the cumulative weight of public comment and preliminary thought, The Alewife Study Group concludes that, unless otherwise proven, the very limited traffic circumstances at this site would alone speak against the wisdom of the current proposal. It must therefore predicate all recommendations that follow upon a burden of proof to the contrary. Unless and until the viability of this proposal with respect to any and all vehicular matters has been proven and demonstrated to the satisfaction of the affected community, this study group shall remain in opposition.

Position of the Alewife Study Group

The Alewife Study Group unanimously rejects the current proposal for development of the W.R. Grace parcel as a retail center including a 'superstore,' anchor retail tenant, additional mixed retail facilities, and hotel. The key reasons for rejecting the proposal include; a) **traffic impact** of the proposed retail development; b) the **community impact** of the development; c) the uncertain **environmental impact** of the development; d) **types of stores** contemplated; and e) **proposed siting** of those stores. For these reasons the Alewife Study Group makes the following preliminary recommendations:

Recommendations

1. Joint Determination of Best Use

All appropriate steps should be taken by the City of Cambridge and its development agencies to determine the best use for the site in a cooperative manner. This endeavor should include the community, the City Administration, the property owner, and the developer.

2. Traffic and Parking Concerns

- a. A comprehensive traffic impact study of the proposed retail development is necessary. The study area must be defined by the affected community and should include not only Route 2 / Route 16 (Alewife Brook Parkway), but also the inclusive area from Massachusetts Avenue to Concord Avenue. Analysis

must be undertaken to determine the traffic bypass routes that would result from the proposed retail development and the impact of those routes on area streets including **without limitation** Massachusetts Avenue, Concord Avenue, Rindge Avenue, New Street, Walden Street, Sherman Street, Sargent Street, Fayerweather Street, Huron Avenue, Whittemore Avenue, Columbus Avenue, Seagrave Road, Madison Street, Magoun Street, Harvey Street, Clifton Street, Jackson Street, Clay Street, Reed Street, Montgomery Street, Dudley Street, Cedar Street, and any streets requested by the Cambridge Highlands and Area 9 Neighborhood Associations.

b. Complete and timely disclosure should be made of all raw traffic counts and analysis undertaken in connection with traffic studies of the proposed retail development.

c. The current automotive access scheme for the proposed retail site is inadequate and should be revised. Any development of the site must present a viable traffic management plan. The plan, including the definitive vehicular entry and exit scheme for both customer and commercial traffic, must not be narrowly focused. It must address in a satisfactory manner the proposal's several impacts and, in particular, it must protect the residential nature of the immediate neighborhood in its proposed commercial traffic access method.

d. The number of vehicle trips the proposed retail development will generate and their impact must be taken into account in any City of Cambridge traffic study.

e. The impact of increased traffic volume (passenger vehicle and truck) upon the several affected roadways in East Arlington should also be included in the study.

f. The City of Cambridge Traffic/Transportation study should provide for standing community participation and input.

g. In addition to a comprehensive study of automotive traffic, a separate study of non-automotive transportation uses at the Grace site should also be undertaken.

h. Access by commercial vehicles to or from the site via Whittemore Avenue should be strictly prohibited. Any future legal claim to this Avenue as a truck route should be prohibited prior to the negotiation of any and all leases at this site. It should be understood that any and all truck exclusions which may be imposed in the future on Route 16 shall not affect the prohibition proposed for Whittemore Avenue nor shall such potential exclusions affect any vehicular prohibition currently in effect at this site (e.g. Harvey Street).

i. The Community Development Department should clarify and document the City's position with regard to all current and potential parking capacity at the site, with relevant confirmation from the Traffic and Parking Department as well as the Interim Parking Control Commission.

3. **Zoning**

Consider more restrictive alternatives.

4. **Department of Environmental Protection**

The Cambridge City Council should direct the city manager to formally request the Department of Environmental Protection to become directly involved in the public process concerning any and all response actions involving cleanup at this site.

5. **Health Commissioner**

Any development at this site should receive prior approval in writing from the Commissioner or Acting Commissioner of Public Health after detailed review of all documentation provided by environmental and other relevant agencies.

6. **Hydrology Study**

A hydrology study should be undertaken in order to evaluate the impact of any proposed development at this site on the flood plain and the watershed system.

7. **Conservation Commission**

The Cambridge Conservation Commission should test for wetlands and should apply the new soil standard in so doing.

8. **Environmental Program**

Any development at this site should receive prior approval in writing from the director of the City's Environmental Program. This approval should be accompanied by a comprehensive analysis of all environmental impacts that will ensue from the site's development.

9. **Master Plan**

The proposed retail development site should be re-included in the Master Plan for Alewife. This Master Plan should also review and make recommendations concerning the potential for development of adjacent sites owned by Arthur D. Little, Martignetti, and W. R. Grace. The Community Development Department

should consider all feasible and appropriate alternatives to retail development of the site, and should earnestly encourage the MDC to acquire as much of the site as possible (including in particular the areas now under consideration for MDC acquisition.)

10. Types of Stores

a. **No Super-sized Supermarket**

No super-sized supermarket should be built at the proposed development site under any circumstances.

b. **Other Supermarket Plans**

Subject to resolving other issues affecting the site, a "standard" or smaller-sized supermarket may be a more appropriate option. A particular effort should be made to recruit an independent operation that would offer more competitive pricing.

c. **Hours of Operation**

Stores should be open no later than 10 PM and should not accept deliveries during pre-dawn hours.

d. **Integration with Current Neighborhood Establishments**

Any retail development should complement current neighborhood stores. Retail operations that would jeopardize the vitality of existing neighborhood-based, mom-and-pop operations should be discouraged. Additionally, businesses generating excessive amounts of destination (non-Cambridge based) traffic should be discouraged.

11. Siting

Stores should be situated as far from the neighborhood and as close to the "T" as possible.

12. Pedestrian/Bicycle

Any development of the site should make clear provisions to accommodate the significant volume of pedestrian and bicycle traffic within and around it. Development should also take into account pedestrian safety and the nature of the site as the hub of a number of overlapping practical and recreational uses.

13. **Appearance**

The study group encourages a single floor height for all buildings within the contemplated development. All signage associated with the development should comport accurately and fully with the ordinances of the City of Cambridge.

14. **Community Integration**

- a. Any development plan should include an affirmative plan for community hiring.
- b. Any development plan should include an affirmative plan for ongoing retail tenant/community activities.
- c. Any development plan should be integrated with the current use of Russell Field and the community recreational areas adjacent to the site (for example, overflow parking during football games and other athletic activities should be provided).
- d. Any development plan should be integrated with a plan for clean-up and restoration of Jerry's Pond, and sensitive landscaping should link the ponds and wetlands to other green space existing or created within the site.



If you have questions or comments on this document, write or call:

*Gail Pendleton
Co-Chair, Alewife Study Group
42 Madison Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140*

(617) 876-5003

Consent Communication #4 CM-420

Communication was received from
Lisa W. Birk, enclosing a summary
and recommendations made by the
Alewife Study Group, a subcommittee
of the North Cambridge Stabilization
Committee.

In City Council September 18, 1995

Referred to the
City Manager
9/19/95 - copy sent to City
mgr (ll)