

City of Cambridge

NEIGHBORHOOD AND LONG TERM PLANNING

In City Council May 14, 2001

COMMITTEE MEMBERS*Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Chair**Councillor Kathleen L. Born**Vice Mayor David P. Maher*

The Neighborhood and Long Term Planning Committee held a public meeting on May 3, 2000, beginning at 5:35 P.M. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of discussing the issue of master planning and town/gown relations.

Present at the hearing were Marjorie C. Decker, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Kathleen L. Born, Vice Mayor David P. Maher, Councillor Henrietta Davis and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Beth Rubenstein, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning and Iram Farooq, Community Development Department. Present from Harvard University were Mary Power, Travis McCready, Tanya Inities, and other staff members. Present from MIT were Sarah Gallop, Steve Marsh, Catherine Donaher, and other staff members.

Councillor Decker convened the hearing and explained the purpose. She explained that Councillor Davis has to leave for another commitment and invited her to comment.

Councillor Davis said that the universities are a tremendous resource; they are also sometimes seen as a burden by the neighborhood residents. Good relationships with the universities would be something that we could all be proud of. It is worth working towards. Councillor Davis said that there are other models for town/gown relationships that we may want to look at. She thanked the university representatives for coming and stated that she looks forward to further discussion on this very important issue.

Councillor Decker then extended her thanks to all those present. She said that ten years ago Mayor Wolf convened a committee to look at town/gown development. She has been reviewing the report of the process. Much of it could have been written this year. We still struggle with the issues that committee addressed. She is very interested in hearing from university representatives on their needs and perceptions relative to town/gown relations. Councillor Decker said that she believes the City has deep responsibility to build a partnership that works. She noted that she plans to invite Lesley College and Cambridge College to be a part of this discussion as well.

Vice Mayor Maher stated that he thinks that it is time to bring this relationship to a different level. He filed a resolution for a permanent town/gown relations committee and he would like to work towards a more productive relationship. Vice Mayor Maher

stated that the universities make this city what it is. But they also put a strain on the neighborhoods. Elected officials of the city cannot just let that slide by. He noted that he and Councillor Decker are new and do not bring to this issue a lot of "baggage." That may be good. He is going to ask university representatives to try to start from a similar place. There was some good mutual work with citywide rezoning. It was a small step but it shows what can be accomplished. Vice Mayor Maher also said that he had filed another order to ask for information about how the universities can help the city tie into the new economy. The city doesn't have the good business partners that it used to - Polaroid, Stride Rite, Lotus, etc. The City Council doesn't know the new businesses. There is a need to integrate the new businesses into civic life. This is something that the universities could help with. He sees it in his own work for Cambridge Family and Children's Services. He would like to see a designated group that represents the city and the universities. The group needs to be from the highest level of the universities to bring in the private CEO's.

Councillor Decker then invited all present to introduce themselves. She compared the confusion that university representatives experience regarding decision-making in a Plan E government with the public officials' difficulties in understanding who are the decision-makers in the university setting, and invited comments from university representatives.

Sarah Gallop said that she was a member of the 1991 committee on university-community relationships convened by Mayor Wolf. The committee included Harvard, Lesley, MIT, Cambridge College, city residents and public officials. It was an amazing process. It was very difficult when it first started. At the beginning there was a profound lack of understanding of one another's needs. While there was a great deal of discord, at the end, every single member signed the document. Ms. Gallop stated that she believes that there really is an opportunity for the entire community to benefit from a commitment for city/university communications.

Ms. Power stated that she agrees that there is tremendous opportunity if the city and universities can find a way to cooperate. Town/gown relations are by their very nature tense. She said that she hopes to be able to focus on the resources and opportunities with the right spirit of cooperation.

Councillor Decker agreed that tension is a natural part of the town/gown relationships. To her, the most important step is to find a process that means there will be a structure that requires the parties to keep communicating and meeting despite the tensions engendered. Councillor Decker then raised the issue of whether there should be a permanent committee. She said that she knows that there are those who think it is not a good use of time. But she believes that all have too much to lose by not working or communicating. She stated that she would like a group to meet to talk about a permanent committee.

Councillor Born asked about what kind of committee is envisioned. Would it be a Council Committee? Councillor Born then asked if the joint neighborhoods committee

still meets. Ms. Power answered in the affirmative. Mr. McCready listed the neighborhood organization participants - Mid Cambridge, Agassiz, Riverside, Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods, Neighborhoods 9 and 10.

Councillor Decker asked how people are appointed. Mr. McCready said that Harvard sees this as a neighborhood decision. It is rather fluid and not completely clear.

He said that John Pitkin is the neighborhood co-chair. Mr. Pitkin is working on a detailed description of the neighborhood representative process. There is not necessarily one representative from each neighborhood group.

Councillor Born asked what are the topics that are discussed. Mr. McCready said that when he first began attending the joint neighborhood committee, real estate projects dominated the discussion. The committee now receives real estate updates in writing beforehand, so the bulk of the meeting can be focused on relationship issues.

Councillor Born said that she just heard that Harvard acquired 1033 Massachusetts Avenue and asked if the acquisition of 1033 Massachusetts Avenue was discussed. Mr. McCready said yes. Councillor Born asked if the information from these meetings goes to anyone else. Mr. McCready said that there is a recording secretary. The minutes are all available at 2 Garden Street. Distribution to the neighborhood is the responsibility of the neighborhood group representative.

Councillor Born said that perhaps the structure and communication of this committee could be improved. For example, the City Council doesn't get information about these meetings.

Mr. McCready said that he agrees that communication is key and that he is always interested in improvements. Councillor Born suggested looking at how to enhance the model and then have MIT look at adopting this model.

Councillor Born suggested that a process like the facilitated City Council goal-setting process might be very useful for the City to have with each university in a neutral, facilitated atmosphere.

Ms. Power said that the goals set by the City Council at its goal setting meetings have been very important to Harvard in understanding the City's priorities. Ms. Power said that the roundtable format has also been very helpful in moving toward a dialog.

Vice Mayor Maher agreed that an informal session is best for a continuing dialog.

Councillor Decker said that she envisions a permanent ongoing City Manager-appointed committee. That would take it out of the spotlight, and, in turn, create an atmosphere more conducive to dialog.

Ms. Inities said that the goals being expressed at this committee meeting are very heartening. She described a process she was part of that was very successful - the transition zone on Hammond Street. The group met at first without a specific development program, and talked about goals. At the beginning there was a lot of mistrust. Over time the group members found a common interest in predictability.

Mr. McCready said that he struggles with relationships with the City Council as opposed to relationships "on the street" on a day-to-day basis with individual neighborhood residents.

Councillor Decker said that the City Councillors' relationships "on the street" also affect the town/gown relationship. The City Council meeting discussions and orders are reflective of what the City Council is hearing from their constituents "on the street."

Ms. Power discussed some of the lessons Harvard learned from the successful Hammond Street neighborhood process. The neighborhood association infrastructure in the neighborhood meant that the residents got a lot of information - both from Harvard and from the neighborhood. There was also a strong commitment from all involved and a recognition that it takes a long time to come to consensus.

Ms. Gallop said that the way MIT and the City communicate now is through ad hoc communication, issue by issue. Months pass without communication until the next issue comes up. This also means the communication is at the least advantageous time. MIT is very supportive of ending ad hoc communication and beginning something permanent.

Ms. Donaher noted that another problem with current communication is that good news doesn't make it into the process. Ongoing communication would be very helpful in this respect.

Councillor Decker invited those present to make any final comments about the idea of master plans and any other thoughts on town/gown relationships.

Ms. Rubenstein noted that there are ways that the universities participate with residents and with city departments and personnel that would continue and would not be supplanted by a permanent town/gown committee, and gave the universities' participation in the citywide rezoning process as an example.

Ms. Gallop noted that town/gown reporting process came out of the 1991 committee. She believes that it continues to improve each year. It is very useful to MIT. She hopes it is useful to the City as well.

Ms. Power agreed. She added that one of the issues is what is meant by master planning. In Boston the master plan process is an aggregate review. Once that review has been done, there is no project-by-project city review of each project. She urged

looking at the concerns. If the main concern is more information, then perhaps expanding the current town/gown report process could be useful.

Councillor Decker said that this is an important question, and it is the kind of question that could be best considered in the committee now being contemplated.

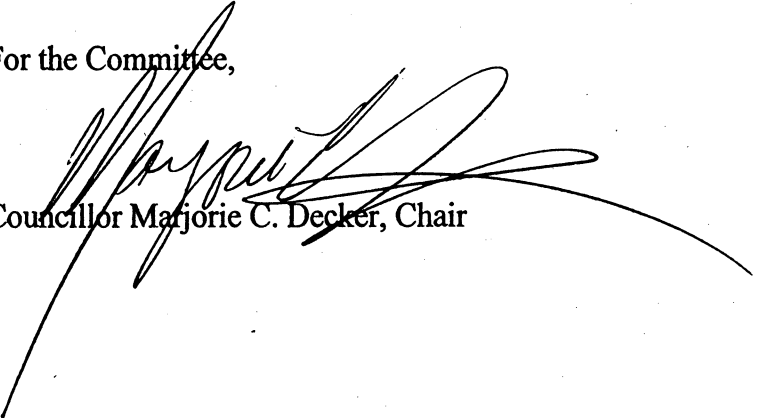
Councillor Born noted that a master plan is a completely different kind of zoning. Once the plan is in place, the City Council is completely removed from the process. That might be a good thing, but once the action is taken to approve the plan, the public review of individual projects is diminished.

Ms. Gallop emphasized the importance in tone, mutual respect and a commitment to successful dialog. Ms. Power stated that there are a variety of processes that can assist dialog. She said that perhaps the city and university could undertake a facilitated vision discussion to begin with.

Councillor Decker thanked all those present for their participation.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

For the Committee,



Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Chair

City of Cambridge

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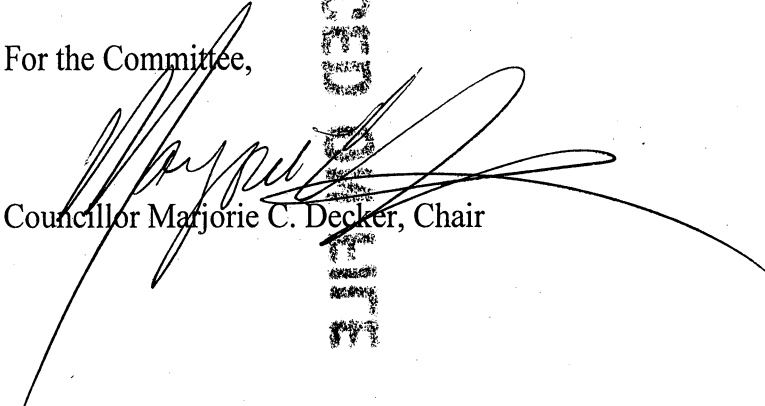
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For the Committee,


Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Chair

2135

Committee Report #7

Committee Report from Councillor
Marjorie C. Decker, Chair of the
Neighborhood and Long Term
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Report Accepted

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