



# City of Cambridge

30.

IN CITY COUNCIL  
February 5, 1996

COUNCILLOR RUSSELL  
COUNCILLOR DAVIS  
COUNCILLOR BORN  
COUNCILLOR DUEHAY  
COUNCILLOR GALLUCCIO  
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN  
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY  
COUNCILLOR TRIANTAFILLOU

RESOLVED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to arrange to have a presentation of the Library expansion made before the City Council.

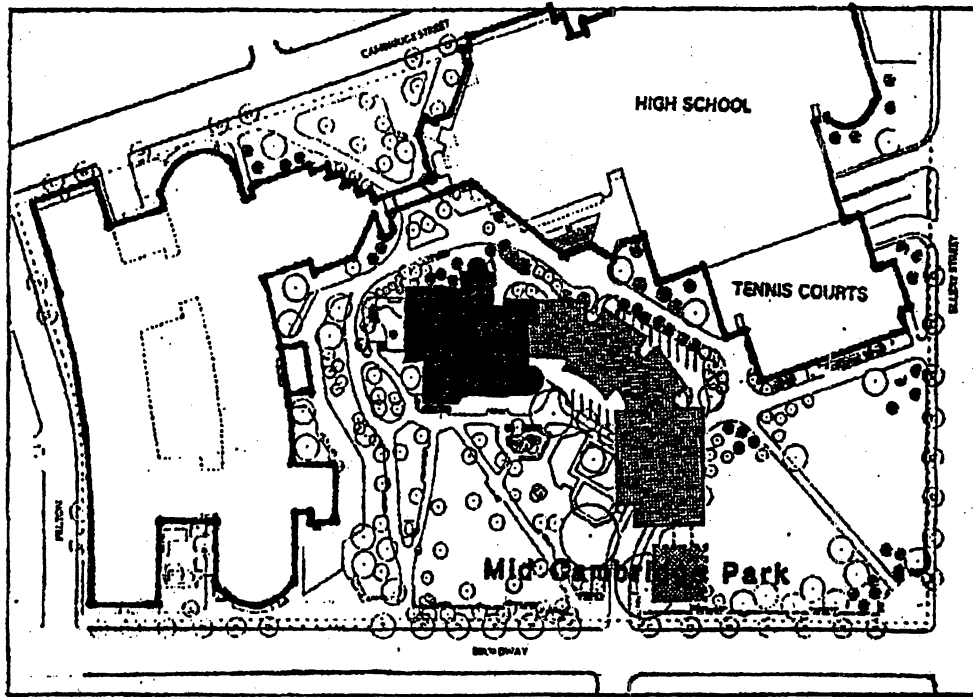
In City Council February 5, 1996  
Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.  
Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

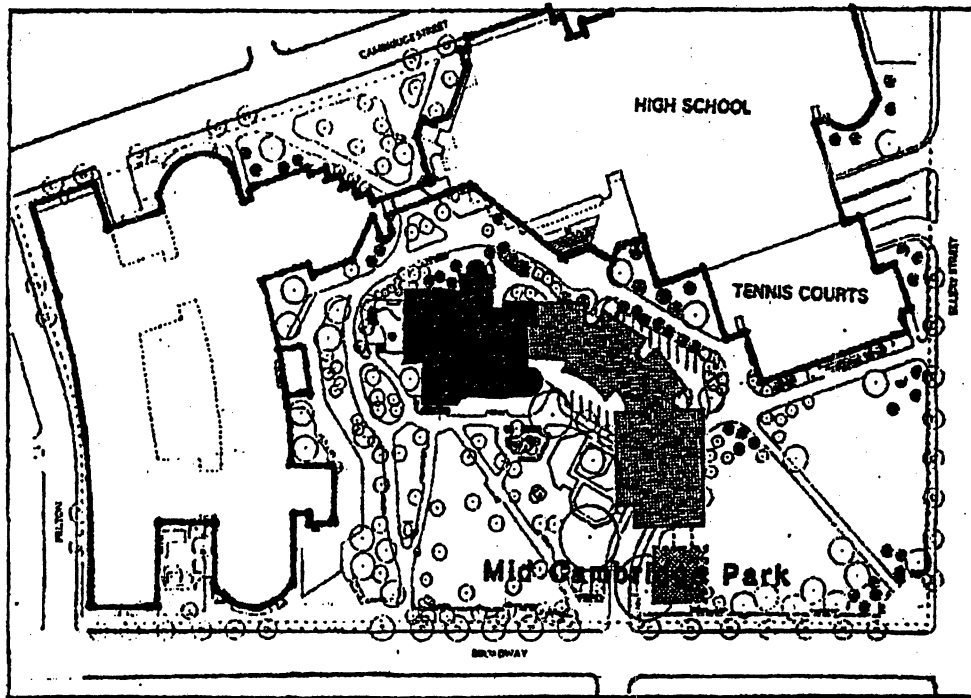
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

D. Margaret Drury  
City Clerk



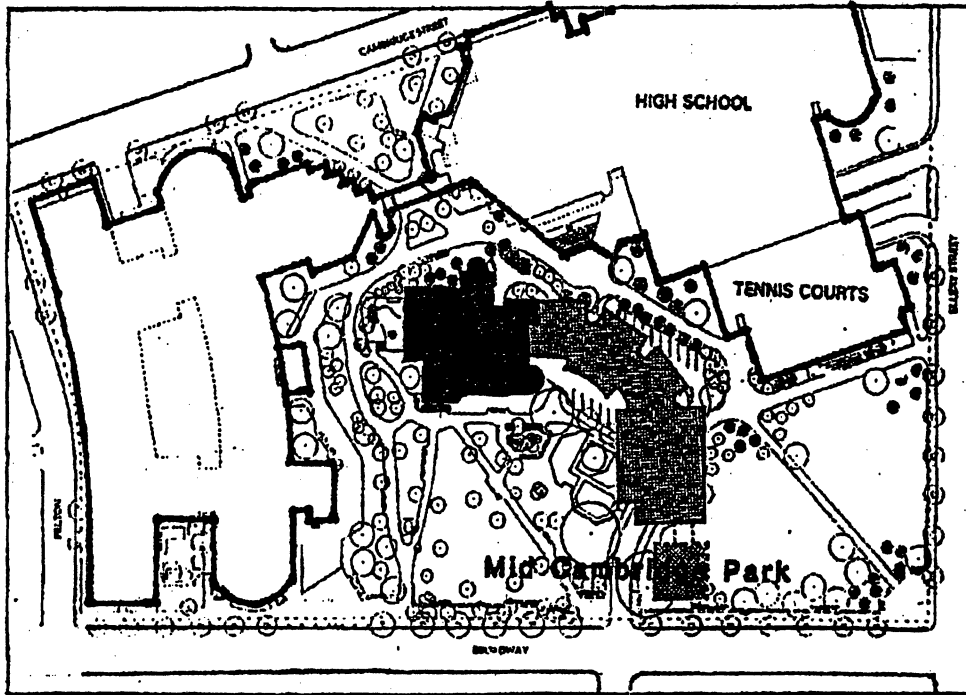
**SCHEME A**

New building (shaded) on existing parking lot forward toward Broadway (bottom of drawing) in general area of driveway.



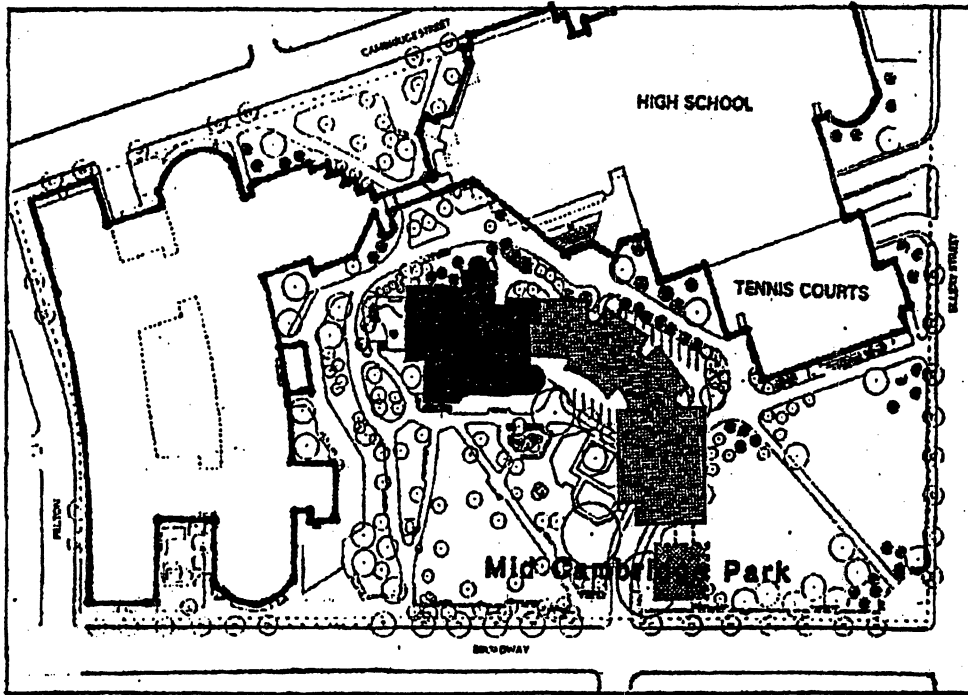
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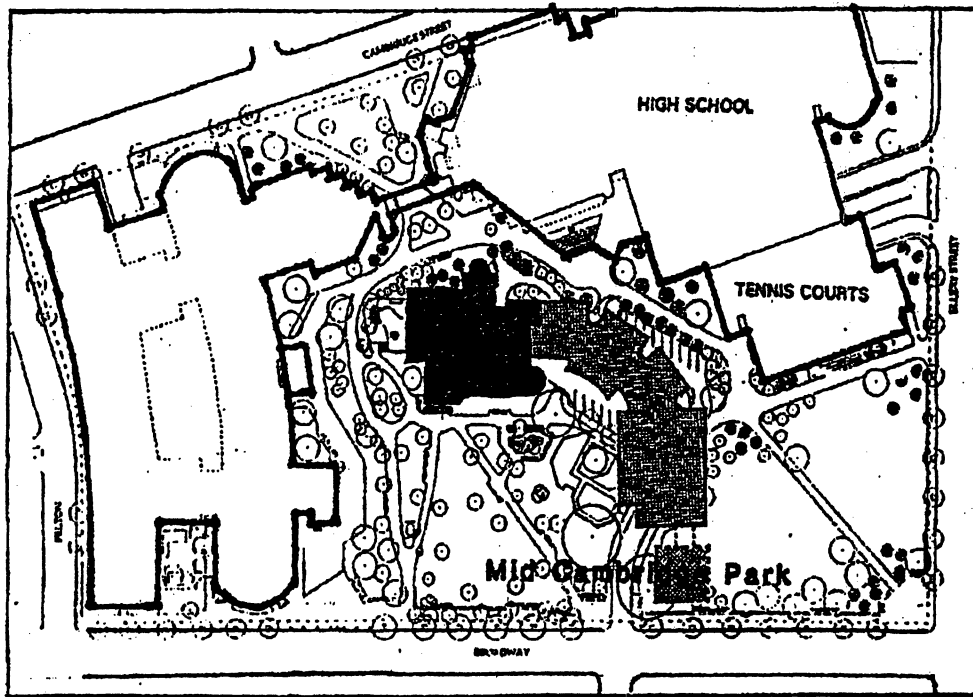
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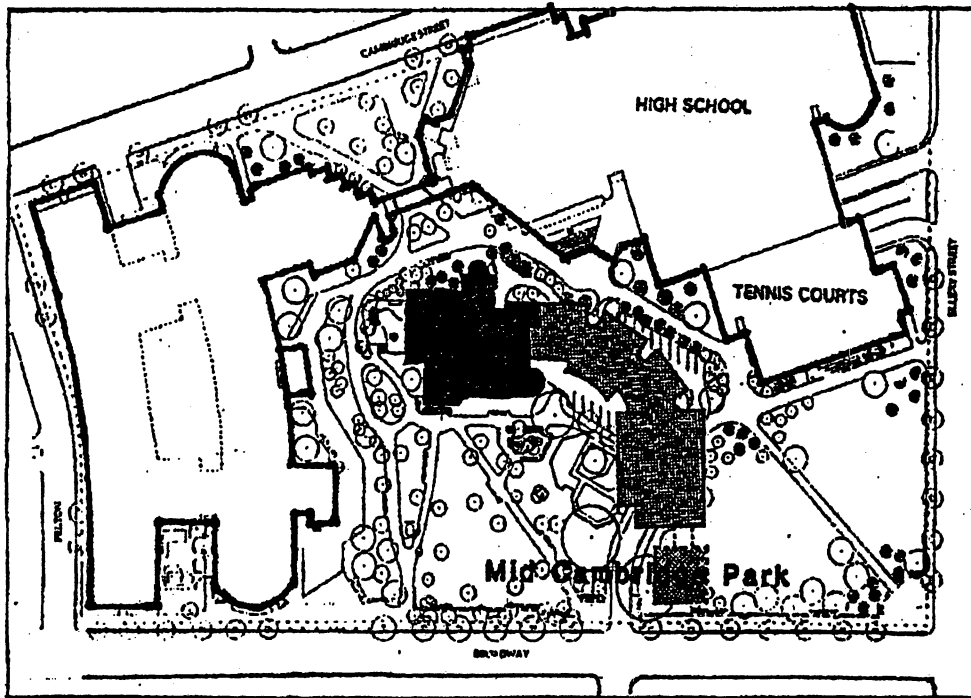
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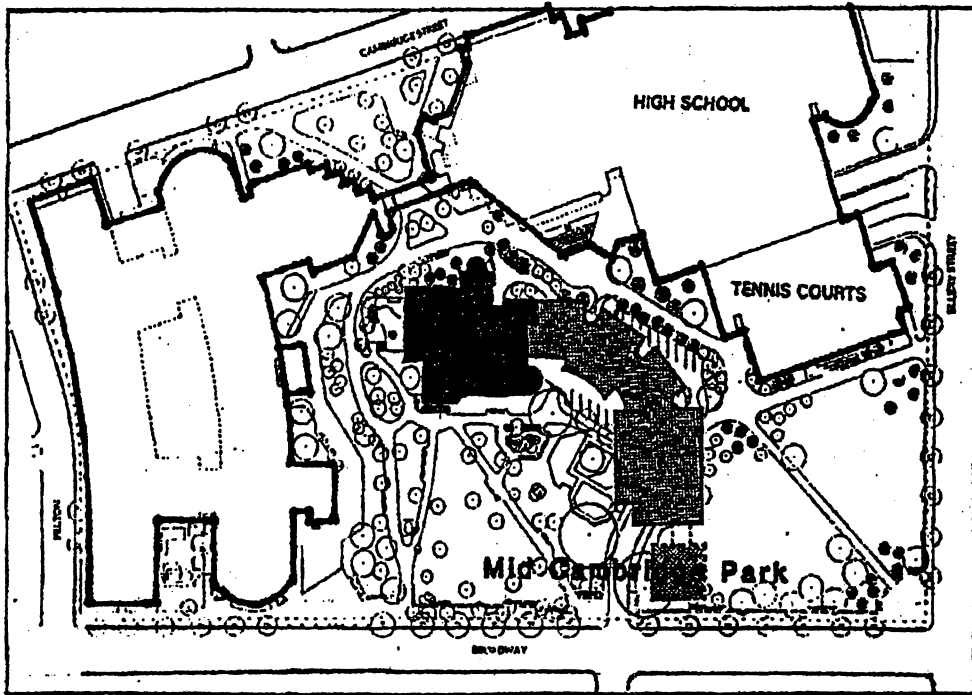
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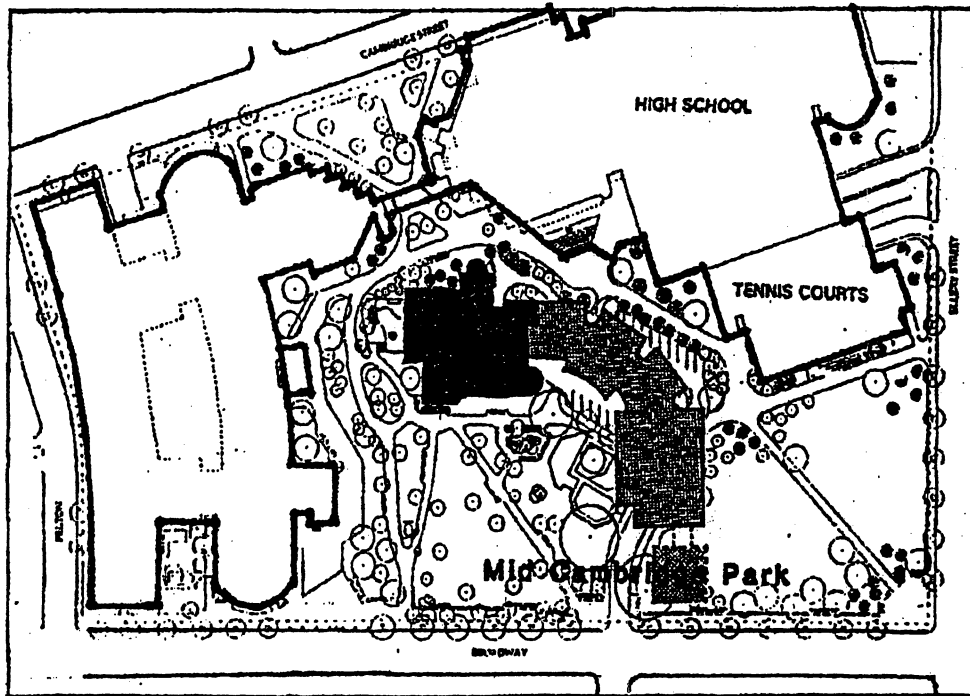
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**SCHEME A**

New building (shaded) on existing parking lot forward toward Broadway (bottom of drawing) in general area of driveway.

Subject: Library Expansion  
Re: Letter to the Editor - Advance Copy to Cambridge City Council  
Date: February 5, 1996

Forcing a choice between library space and open space is a contrived manipulation which will not serve the citizens of Cambridge well.

The necessity to choose between library space and park space is the result of a questionable planning process undertaken by library proponents to justify the need for a new 85,000 square foot Library/Cultural Center Complex. The proposed location for the complex already provides more municipal services than any other site in all of Cambridge.

The Main Cambridge Library and a plot of land, a gift from Frederick H. Rindge to the citizens of Cambridge, has endured over 100 years as a legacy most Cambridge residents treasure. Over the years, the site of the library also evolved into the home of the Cambridge High School buildings.

Eighteen years ago Cambridge was faced with a need to expand the high school on the existing site, which it shared with the Main Library and a park located on Cambridge Street. Another option was to relocate the high school, at greater cost, to another, less central site. At that time, the Mid-Cambridge neighborhood agreed to accept the high school expansion on the existing site in exchange for the construction of a modest, but well planned, neighborhood open space located on Broadway, to compensate for the park lost on Cambridge Street.

Aptly named the Mid-Cambridge Park, this new small park was then, and is now, the only open space in Mid-Cambridge. Representing about 1% of the land area of Mid-Cambridge, this park successfully meets the social and recreational needs of diverse groups: children and parents, dogs and owners, high school and neighborhood groups. In summer it serves as a weekend sun spot for those residents without the means or time to go to the beach, and year-round it offers a visual reward of open space to passers-by. Few views in the neighborhood are as picturesque as the sight of the cherry trees in blossom before the Romanesque Main Library.

Construction of the high school and the park were completed in 1981. The park, the high school, and the library have harmoniously functioned together since that time. My experience in the using the library over the years has been highly rewarding. I have found the library staff to be knowledgeable and helpful. They need and deserve the space to perform the responsibilities that their important service mandates. However, library administration would like to extend its range of services to those covered by other city departments and community agencies. Certain of these city services are provided within feet of the library!

With a goal of duplicating existing services, a development plan for the new Library/Cultural Center has been proposed. It calls for the needless division of the small open space and thereby needlessly forces residents into an untenable choice between the library and open space. Sadly, this contrived dilemma is not the work of unscrupulous, self-serving developers but, at best, an inexperienced venture into land planning by a library administration rendered short-sighted by a paternalistic "we know best" attitude or, at worst, a process deliberately orchestrated to be both selfish and exclusionary. In either case, the citizens of Cambridge will needlessly lose valuable resources and have the dubious pleasure of paying for it!

The library administration's "preferred" Library/Cultural Center scheme is predicated on debatable research regarding user satisfaction, needs assessment, available options, design direction, cost estimation, and environmental issues. If this data were presented by a private developer and reviewed in accordance with planning board criteria, it would likely be returned for additional study or rejected with recommendation that another site be found in order to preserve two irreplaceable resources: a small but crucial city park and a handsome historic building.

Residents were only recently made aware of the Library/Cultural Center planning process, which has been underway since 1994. The only Cambridge group informed later than the residents was the City Council!

Despite the late notification, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association residents have shared their insights, concerns, and suggestions in the hope of being able to assist in accommodating library expansion needs on the site. Few, if any substantive suggestions have been incorporated in the scheme being pushed forward, despite serious deficiencies.

The proposed scheme will eclipse the 19th century Romanesque library by a design intended to impress on the small site an assertive 20th century monument. Ellery Street, an already busy and accident-prone cross street, will be further degraded by the traffic increase and related emissions attributable to the four-fold library user increase predicted by project proponents. Increased traffic can only increase the hazards for related pedestrian access in an area where 2,000 students attend daily classes in the high school. Three tennis courts, as attractive as they are innocuous, will be replaced with the view of a two-story parking garage. (No serious address has been made to the placement of the required increased parking if the high school does not agree the tennis court location.) And Lastly, resources within the park will be unnecessarily squandered and desirable visual and recreational attributes of the open space will be irrevocably lost.

A touring of the library conducted by library staff helped confirm the need for a building update. A low level of maintenance over the years has made renovation imperative. However, the real eye-opener of the tour, was how inefficiently the existing building is being used. It would be helpful if the library administration were to spend some time planning for the best use of the existing building, as well as drafting plans for a new library.

It would also be helpful to remember that Cambridge is essentially an urban community with limited land, unlike many of the surrounding communities (such as Waltham, Newton and Arlington) which have been cited as models for emulation in expansion. The improvements we contemplate require more creative and thoughtful resolutions than those our neighbors are able to make or those presented by the Library/Cultural Center proponents to date.

Having taken leave of nearly all common sense and neighborly courtesy, the Library/Cultural Center proponents should plan to take leave of the present site and find a more appropriate location to impose their "civic statement". The Rindge Library Gift to the citizens of Cambridge and previous neighborhood efforts in establishing the open space should be respected and preserved for this generation and those to follow.

David H. Szlag  
Ellery Street, Cambridge

Order  
# 30

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COUNCILLOR DAVIS  
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RESOLVED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to arrange to have a presentation of the Library expansion made before the City Council.

Duehay, Galluccio, Sullivan

Consent Order #30 Toomey

Councillors Russell, Davis and Born  
re: Arrange to have a presentation of  
the Library expansion made before the  
City Council.

Triantafyllou CM-70

In City Council February 5, 1996

Order Adopted