

City of Cambridge

The Environment Committee held a public meeting on February 25, 1993 beginning at 5:37 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber, City Hall, for the purpose of: 1) Discussing a need to beautify the approach to Cambridge from the West along Route 2 and the Alewife Brook Parkway; 2) Receiving a report from the MDC on its plans for this area; and 3) Receiving a report from the Alewife Task Force. Present at the hearing were Councillor Francis H. Duehay, Vice Mayor Edward N. Cyr, Councillor Sheila T. Russell and Councillor William H. Walsh.

Councillor Duehay convened the meeting and outlined the agenda. He introduced Ron Fleming, Urban Designer. Mr. Fleming said that he has been concerned about the ugliness of this entryway to Cambridge for many years. He presented a slide show which gave examples of design solutions utilized by other communities to beautify urban areas on the edges of highways and city entries. Councillor Duehay said that the committee might want to consider recommending a special zoning district that runs all along the edge of the parkway with design requirements.

Vice Mayor Cyr said that the Alewife area has not had the public commitment to infrastructure improvements that other areas of the city have had. He added that the greenspace at Fresh Pond should be utilized to improve the view from the road. Vice Mayor Cyr also said that enforcement of the existing sign ordinance is necessary. Ron Fleming said that the city might also want to consider design clinics for owners.

Councillor Duehay then introduced John Kojovick and Dave Lenhardt from the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). Mr. Kojovick said that he is a planner for the MDC. He said that the MDC system was designed 100 years ago to preserve open spaces and connect them by parkways. Alewife Brook Parkway is a key link to the Mystic Lakes park area. Two important projects are the truss bridge renovation and the MDC Reservation. The parkway segment between Rindge Avenue and the Concord Avenue rotary will be rebuilt. MDC land in the Fresh Pond Parkway will be reclaimed and planted with a double row of trees. The budget project will cost about \$16 million, 80% from federal funds. Contractors are submitting bids; selection will occur March 23rd. The beginning of construction will be late Spring. The project is expected to be completed in about two years from the start of construction. There will be pedestrian and bike paths. The bike path will eventually connect to the Minuteman Bike Path. The median strip will be grass.

In response to a question from Councillor Duehay, Mr. Kojovick said that the MDC will be responsible for maintenance.

Jack Kelly, City Arborist, said that he is concerned about the maintenance. The trees at the Route 2 rotary have been totally abandoned. Care at the beginning is very important. Mr. Kojovick said that the Route 2 trees were planted about a foot and a half too deep. There is no irrigation system going in. He has been told that there will be a maintenance contract. Jack Kelly said that there has to be a water system in place. The trees will not thrive without a constant and reliable water system.

John Kojovick said that Algonquin Gas has provided mitigation funds to be used for plantings along Alewife Brook Parkway and restoration of the Alewife Brook. He said that will address some of the issues raised by Ron Fleming's presentation. He noted that MDC's approach to parkways is to encourage small uniform signs rather than gateways. He recommended support for preservation of the park system and retaining the parkways as a part of this system rather than separate control by the Highway Department. Councillor Duehay said that the committee would make this recommendation as a part of its report.

Mr. Kojovick reported that clean-up has been scheduled for Blair Pond. He then reported that improvements are planned for the Alewife Reservation. Arthur D. Little is interested in purchasing the parking lot it rents from the MDC. A possible hearing has been scheduled on this issue for April 15, 1993 at Arthur D. Little. It could represent significant financing for improvements to the renovation.

Mr. Kojovick announced that the MDC is developing a canoe program for the Charles River. There is also an ongoing study of a shuttle bus from Watertown to Harvard Square. He noted that the Community Development Department and the Conservation Commission have been extremely helpful in these planning projects.

Councillor Duehay thanked the MDC for their presentation and then introduced Michael Rosenberg, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, to give a report on the work of the Alewife Task Force. Mr. Rosenberg described the ongoing process of the Alewife Planning Study. Draft recommendations have been made. Many areas are covered. It looks at the broad range of planning issues.

Mr. Rosenberg introduced Chris Chadbourne, the Urban Design Consultant for the Alewife Master Plan Process. Mr. Chadbourne presented slides and described the planning issues that have been raised, including ways to improve pedestrian and bicycle enjoyment of the area leading to the Minuteman Bike Path; improvements to the street and parking patterns in the quadrangle area between Concord Avenue and the railroad tracks through encouragement of public/private cooperation; and the improvement of connections between the quadrangle and the triangle. He also discussed the Alewife Reservation Area.

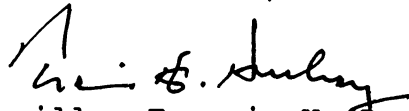
Jim Barton, Cambridge, asked about the possibility of nature trails in the reservation.

Councillor Duehay asked when the study would be done. Michael Rosenberg said that the committee expected to have recommendations for the Planning Board in May or June. Mr. Rosenberg said that there was major public investment in East Cambridge and to achieve the desired results in the Alewife area, such investment will be needed. The East Cambridge area had the benefit of major state and federal funding. That should be sought for Alewife also. Vice Mayor Cyr said that in addition, at Alewife, there has been ability for development to succeed by building as-of-right. Density requirements have not been used to force design review.

Councillor Duehay said that he would like to have a follow-up meeting on Alewife Planning issues. He recognized Hugo Salemmme and Carolyn Meith of the Planning Board and thanked them for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

For the Committee,



Councillor Francis H. Duehay
Chair

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S-119

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Environment Committee Report for a hearing held on February 25, 1993 regarding the need to beautify the approach to Cambridge from the West long Route 2 and the Alewife Brook Parkway, receive a report from the MDC on its plans for this area and to receive a report from the Alewife Task Force.

In City Council,

March 15, 1993

*Report accepted
Placed on file*