



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CITY HALL, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139 • (617) 498-9017

OFFICE OF
THE CITY CLERK

May 11, 1987

Mr. James L. Canavan, Jr.
34R Cedar Street
Cambridge, MA 02140

Dear Mr. Canavan:

Pursuant to the request of the City Council, I am writing to inform you that they are in receipt of your communication and appreciate your interest in the establishment of a teen center in Area 4.

Please be advised that the City Council is also very interested in that endeavor and to that end, ongoing meetings are being held with representatives of the Department of Human Services Programs and people within the Area 4 neighborhood in pursuit of achieving the goal of developing a new teen center.

It is my understanding that Human Services is vigorously pursuing the identity of several potential sties, including Newtowne Court and the Saint Mary's Gym.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph E. Connarton
City Clerk.

JEC/mh

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The 1980 census showed 464 children between the ages of 5 and 9 living in Area IV, and 517 between the ages of 10 and 14. Those children would now be 11 to 16 and 16 to 20 respectively. Allowing for minor adjustments for movement in and out of the neighborhood, it is safe to assume that approximately 1,000 teen-aged boys and girls now live in Area IV. It is an understatement to say that these kids are underserved.

Despite the best efforts of existing agencies in Area IV, service to neighborhood teens is, at best, sporadic. Because of physical limitations the Longfellow Teen Center and the Maynard and Fletcher Community Schools offer programs principally to 10 to 14 year olds. The Boys and Girls Club has ceased to function. The Salvation Army lacks the resources to offer even basic programs, and Concilio Hispano has neither staff nor a building suitable for a teen center. For older teens, the nearest teen centers are in East Cambridge and in Cambridgeport; distance and safety issues prevent most Area IV teens from utilizing those teen centers. In any case, where services are offered only the recreational needs of the local teen population are being addressed; that effort is disorganized and of limited effect. Community Schools staff are forced to turn away youth over the age of 15 because older kids tend to monopolize the gym to the exclusion of younger, smaller pre-teens. Another serious drawback to the drop-in model, as opposed to structured programming, is that the over-emphasis on athletic recreation tends to appeal to boys to the point of excluding girls. A teen center would have the advantage of more structured activity with a staff dedicated to meeting the needs of this population.

In 1986 negotiations began between the Maynard and Fletcher Community School staff and the Cambridge Housing Authority. It was the hope of youth advocates that a vacant building in Newtowne Court could be utilized as a site for a city-sponsored teen center. (A precedent exists at the successful West Cambridge Teen Center in Corcoran Park.) Those negotiations have stalled, but Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Service Programs, has indicated her willingness to seek the additional funds necessary to staff a new teen center.

Recently the St. Mary's parish hall building on Prospect St. has been offered for sale by the parish. For many reasons this site is the best the neighborhood has to offer for a Teen Center, but its availability for such use is questionable. The City Manager should be encouraged to acquire that building, but in the interim the empty gym building at Newtowne Court offers the best hope for a near-term solution. (Note: there is a feeling among some adults in the community that boys and girls living outside Newtowne Court and Washington Elms would feel too intimidated to venture into a facility inside Newtowne Court; my discussions with many of those teens lead me to believe that this assumption reflects certain adult preconceptions and misgivings which are not shared by teens. Another reservation sometimes expressed is that a teen center may not be appropriate for a residential setting; the success of the West Cambridge facility, which is located inside Corcoran Park, should ameliorate that fear to some extent.)

Even if the Newtowne Court facility were used on a temporary basis, the teens of the neighborhood would have their facility until an agreement could be reached on the St. Mary's building (but neither should creation of the Area IV Teen Center hinge on the outcome of those negotiations - the issues are distinctly separate). The point is that it shouldn't matter where this teen center ultimately is sited; the prime concern for the neighborhood is that this becomes a reality during the summer of 1987.

34A Cedar Street
Cambridge, MA 02140
April 23, 1987

Editor
The Cambridge Chronicle

Dear Editor:

In 1986 negotiations began between the Maynard and Fletcher Community School staffs and the Cambridge Housing Authority on the establishment of a teen center in Area 4. It was the hope of youth advocates that a vacant building in Newtowne Court could be utilized as a site; a precedent exists at the successful West Cambridge Teen Center in Corcoran Park. Those negotiations apparently have stalled, and hundreds of teen-aged boys and girls of Area 4 face another summer of patchwork programs.

It is the hope of nearly everyone involved that a teen center for this neighborhood will eventually find a home in the St. Mary's gym building on Prospect St., but that seems to be months away, at best. In the meantime the options seem to be limited to either running the center out of the vacant Newtowne Court gym, or to wait until Cardinal Law and the Archdiocese of Boston realize that the only proper use of the St. Mary's building is community programs, including a teen center. Clearly, it is in the best interests of the youth of Area 4 to launch the program now, at the best available site and to relocate it if and when a better site is offered.

At the hearing on the Department of Human Services Programs (DHSP) budget scheduled for Thursday, April 30 between 9:00 a.m. and noon, DHSP will have included in their request for fiscal year 1988 funding for a youth specialist, staff, and programs for an Area 4 teen center. The City Manager should approve that part of the DHSP budget request, and the City Council should work with the Cambridge Housing Authority toward the short term compromise and with the Archdiocese toward the long term solution. The youth of Area 4 deserve no less than what their peers across the city enjoy - a safe, clean neighborhood teen center with structured programming, operated by professional staff for boys and girls alike.

Sincerely,


James L. Canavan, Jr.

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S-320

Comm. from James L. Canavan, Jr. Re: establishment of a teen center in Area 4 & expressing the hope that a teen center for the neighborhood will find a home in the St. Mary's Gym building on Prospect St.

*see letter within to Mr. Canavan
sent 5/11/87 mch*

In City Council,

May 4, 1987

Placed on File

C. Walb.

*City Clerk to respond
to communication*