



# City of Cambridge

72.

IN CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR WALSH

September 13, 1993

- WHEREAS:** In a recent edition of the Sunday Globe, the attached editorial appeared; and
- WHEREAS:** The history of the Commonwealth Day School in Cambridge has remained a most painful and unforgettable reminder to all citizens of Cambridge; and
- WHEREAS:** The City of Cambridge has spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in defending itself and its agents during the course of events which transpired around the history of the Commonwealth Day School's experience in dealing with the City and various departments; and
- WHEREAS:** The full and true history of these events have never been explained to the citizens of Cambridge whose tax dollars have been spent to defend the city's actions; and
- WHEREAS:** The Globe editorial is correct when it states that the struggle over the Commonwealth Day School has not received the attention that other similar events have received; now therefore be it
- ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to inform the City Council in writing within two weeks as to the status of any and all litigation on this matter with a detailed written report and cost-to-date status as well as an estimate of future legal costs; and be it further
- ORDERED:** That in the event that this matter has been resolved in Court or that this matter is no longer in the Federal Court, then a public hearing should be set up before this City Council with copies of all documents including but not limited to records of the Building Department, Department of Public Works, Zoning Board, interoffice memoranda; and be it further
- ORDERED:** That included should be all correspondence of any nature pertaining to the school interacting with any city agency and/or department, and at the time of the public hearing, all department heads who were in charge during the controversy surrounding the school should be invited to attend along with parents of students of the school and officers of the school with the purpose in mind of once and for all allowing the public and the press to have full knowledge and access to all fact surrounding this situation.

In City Council September 13, 1993.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

*D. Margaret Drury*  
D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk

# A school's hard lessons

The recent closing of the Commonwealth Day School is a painful reminder of the ugly scenario that played out three years ago when the school was forced from its site on Brattle Street in Cambridge. Although a soured real estate deal sealed the fate of the school, its former Brattle Street neighbors bear much of the responsibility.

The school was established in the early '70s as a preschool and kindergarten for children of low- and moderate-income families. It prided itself on its nurturing atmosphere for children of color. In 1988 the school moved from its home on Newbury Street to a Brattle Street Victorian that had been a school for adolescent boys. The school planned to add grades 1 through 7 so the children who attended could remain there through their elementary years. The expansion would also have allowed the thriving school to expand its financial base by increasing enrollment.

Although the zoning board unanimously approved the plan, the school's highbrow Brattle

Street neighbors appealed the decision, and expansion plans were halted. After a losing yearlong struggle, the Commonwealth School finally moved back to Boston, but in the process it lost most of its students.

Parents of former students sued several city officials and Brattle Street residents, charging civil rights violations. Almost a year ago the defendants requested a summary judgment dismissing the case. A decision has yet to come from US Judge Douglas P. Woodlock.

In the meantime, the school, which could have served as a model in this time of charter schools and educational innovation, has closed. Parents of 40 children are doing a mid-August scramble to find places for their children next month.

The struggle over the Commonwealth Day School has not received the attention of Boston's busing crisis or the battle over school desegregation in the South, but it is nonetheless a painful chapter in our history.



RECEIVED BY  
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
**City of Cambridge**  
1993 SEP -9 PM 4:52  
CAMBRIDGE MA.

12

IN CITY COUNCIL

September 9, 1993

**COUNCILLOR WALSH**

- WHEREAS:** In a recent edition of the Sunday Globe, the attached editorial appeared; and
- WHEREAS:** The History of the Commonwealth Day School in Cambridge has remained a most painful and unforgettable reminder to all Citizens of Cambridge; and
- WHEREAS:** The City of Cambridge has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in defending itself and its agents during the course of events which transpired around the history of the Commonwealth Day School's experience in dealing with the City and various departments; and
- WHEREAS:** The full and true history of these events have never been explained to the Citizens of Cambridge whose tax dollars have been spent to defend the City's actions; and
- WHEREAS:** The Glob editorial is correct when it states that the struggle over the Commonwealth Day School has not received the attention that other similar events have received; now therefore be it
- ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to inform the City Council in writing within two weeks as to the status of any and all litigation on this matter with a detailed written report and cost-to-date status as well as an estimate of future legal costs. In the event that this matter has been resolved in Court or that this matter is no longer in the Federal Court, then a public

hearing should be set up before this City Council with copies of all documents including but not limited to records of the Building Department, Department of Public Works, Zoning Board, interoffice memoranda. Included should be all correspondence of any nature pertaining to the school interacting with any City agency and/or department. At the time of the public hearing, all department heads who were in charge during the controversy surrounding the school should be invited to attend along with parents of students of the school and officers of the school with the purpose in mind of once and for all allowing the public and the press to have full knowledge and access to all facts surrounding this situation.

City Council Sept 13, 1993

Adopted by the affirmative vote

of 9 members

Margaret Drury City Clerk

# A school's hard lessons

The recent closing of the Commonwealth Day School is a painful reminder of the ugly scenario that played out three years ago when the school was forced from its site on Brattle Street in Cambridge. Although a soured real estate deal sealed the fate of the school, its former Brattle Street neighbors bear much of the responsibility.

The school was established in the early '70s as a preschool and kindergarten for children of low- and moderate-income families. It prided itself on its nurturing atmosphere for children of color. In 1988 the school moved from its home on Newbury Street to a Brattle Street Victorian that had been a school for adolescent boys. The school planned to add grades 1 through 7 so the children who attended could remain there through their elementary years. The expansion would also have allowed the thriving school to expand its financial base by increasing enrollment.

Although the zoning board unanimously approved the plan, the school's highbrow Brattle

Street neighbors appealed the decision, and expansion plans were halted. After a losing yearlong struggle, the Commonwealth School finally moved back to Boston, but in the process it lost most of its students.

Parents of former students sued several city officials and Brattle Street residents, charging civil rights violations. Almost a year ago the defendants requested a summary judgment dismissing the case. A decision has yet to come from US Judge Douglas P. Woodlock.

In the meantime, the school, which could have served as a model in this time of charter schools and educational innovation, has closed. Parents of 40 children are doing a mid-August scramble to find places for their children next month.

The struggle over the Commonwealth Day School has not received the attention of Boston's busing crisis or the battle over school desegregation in the South, but it is nonetheless a painful chapter in our history.



# City of Cambridge

72.

IN CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR WALSH

September 13, 1993

**WHEREAS:** In a recent edition of the Sunday Globe, the attached editorial appeared; and

**WHEREAS:** The history of the Commonwealth Day School in Cambridge has remained a most painful and unforgettable reminder to all citizens of Cambridge; and

**WHEREAS:** The City of Cambridge has spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in defending itself and its agents during the course of events which transpired around the history of the Commonwealth Day School's experience in dealing with the City and various departments; and

**WHEREAS:** The full and true history of these events have never been explained to the citizens of Cambridge whose tax dollars have been spent to defend the city's actions; and

**WHEREAS:** The Globe editorial is correct when it states that the struggle over the Commonwealth Day School has not received the attention that other similar events have received; now therefore be it

**ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to inform the City Council in writing within two weeks as to the status of any and all litigation on this matter with a detailed written report and cost-to-date status as well as an estimate of future legal costs; and be it further

**ORDERED:** That in the event that this matter has been resolved in Court or that this matter is no longer in the Federal Court, then a public hearing should be set up before this City Council with copies of all documents including but not limited to records of the Building Department, Department of Public Works, Zoning Board, interoffice memoranda; and be it further

**ORDERED:** That included should be all correspondence of any nature pertaining to the school interacting with any city agency and/or department, and at the time of the public hearing, all department heads who were in charge during the controversy surrounding the school should be invited to attend along with parents of students of the school and officers of the school with the purpose in mind of once and for all allowing the public and the press to have full knowledge and access to all fact surrounding this situation.

Consent Order #12  
Councillor Walsh RE Commonwealth  
Day School

CM-246

①

In City Council,  
September 13, 1993

*Order adopted*