

Agassiz Neighborhood/Lesley College
Negotiations and Discussions on Zoning Issues

MINUTES: 5/11/78

The meeting was held at 20 Sacramento Street and began shortly after 5:00. Present from Lesley College were: Robert Lewis (Executive Vice President), Donald Miltner (Director of Development), Rosemary Oliva (Faculty), Don Orton (President), James Slattery (Director of Planning), John Tucker (Vice President for Financial Affairs), and Marjorie Wechsler (Faculty).

Present from the Agassiz neighborhood: Ken Basler (Mellen St.), Joan Borod (Mellen St.), Elizabeth Dickerson (Mass. Ave.), Paul Kolodner (Mellen St.), Brian Kullman (Oxford St.), Laurence Rothman (Mellen St.) and Susan Scott (Mellen St.).

Present from the Cambridge Planning Board: David Vickery and Michael Robinson.

Discussion began around a number of procedural issues.

1. The role of observers. The neighborhood group wished to encourage the attendance of a few observers from the neighborhood who had expressed interest in the meetings. Lesley representatives expressed concern about the need for continuity of participation. All agreed there were practical limits on the number of observers and both groups wished to encourage continuity of membership. The one "observer" present from the neighborhood, Elizabeth Dickerson, expressed willingness to participate on a regular basis and was invited to keep attending. There seemed to be general agreement that since the number of observers was likely to be small, the issue could be dealt with on an ad hoc basis, with appropriate precautions.

2. Minutes. It was agreed that regular minutes were essential and ought to be the basis of official communication to the City Council and to the press. Concerns were expressed about irresponsible publicity. It was agreed that responsibility for the minutes would alternate between the two groups in order to minimize bias. Within each group, responsibility would rotate among the members. Minutes would be distributed as soon as possible so that they could be reviewed before each meeting.

3. Other procedural matters.

At each meeting, the last fifteen minutes of the allotted time was designated as an agenda-building and review period.

It was thought reasonable to allow brief caucus sessions when necessary.

This meeting would end at 7:00.

On Mr. Vickery's recommendation it was agreed that members of the Planning Board might attend as observers. Mr. Vickery felt that their occasional attendance could help to insure that these negotiations would be taken seriously by the City of Cambridge.

The usual concerns about continuity were voiced.

Substantive discussion

Discussion turned to the question of what issues ought to be handled first.

Brian Kullman, for the neighborhood, wanted to begin with the more divisive issues because of the pressure of time. Discussion of easier issues would be over matters of detail, and might be time-consuming. He preferred to begin with the issue of divestiture/acquisition rather than, for example, design review. Mr. Vickery agreed that there was some agreement on the latter issue and that discussion could be time-consuming.

Don Orton, for Lesley, urged a problem-solving mode of discussion, in order to help the groups move away from what he saw as an adversary relationship.

Robert Lewis summarized Lesley's position on the order of discussion of issues. Lesley needed to seek Trustee agreements on all issues. Lesley could move immediately toward beginning to establish trust with the neighbors but could not promise agreement on all issues right away. A problem-solving approach could ~~begin~~ the beginning of a good working relationship. If the neighborhood group would withdraw the petition, the time pressure would be relieved and a good faith effort to resolve issues could begin.

Brian Kullman replied that there could be no withdrawal of the petition without agreements.

Don Orton asked: when then start with the most difficult issues?

Brian Kullman called for a response from Lesley on the four positions taken by the neighborhood as presented at the previous meeting.

Don Orton again objected to what he saw as an adversary approach.

David Vickery asked if Lesley would be willing to try some agreements without the neighborhood withdrawing the petition.

A confused discussion ensued about when Lesley first became aware that the "gun" was at its head. The focus of discussion was on the fact that the petition had been filed last August, but the secretary was unable to make sense of what was said.

Brian Kullman stated that it was implicit that the petition would be withdrawn if satisfactory agreements were reached.

Paul Kelodner felt the agreements had to be substantial because of the pressure of "radical elements" in the neighborhood who might want to see Lesley "puck it up." C.I. Zoning was not good for anyone, but withdrawing the petition without substantial progress could be viewed as a victory for Lesley.

Rosemary Oliva asked if the neighborhood group saw its role as educating the people it represented about the zoning issues.

Brian Kullman stated that they would continue their informative mailings to the community. Rosemary Oliva and Marjorie Wechsler

asked, as neighborhood residents, that their names be placed on the mailing list for the Agassiz newsletter.

Brian Kullman suggested that the petition could be withdrawn in favor of another petition.

Robert Lewis requested that this issue be reviewed in two weeks.

Larry Rothman stated that the neighbors would have to be consulted.

David Vickery stated that it would not be a bad idea for the neighborhood to withdraw the petition in order to create trust.

It was agreed that the group will reconsider the status of the petition at the end of May.

Discussion turned to the subject of design review.

Robert Lewis raised a question about the criteria for design review as the neighbors saw it.

After some discussion it was agreed that both Lesley and the neighborhood needed to clarify their concerns about design review. Lesley ought to inform the neighborhood in greater detail about its projected needs, and the neighborhood group ought to share its perceptions and fears with Lesley.

Mr. Vickery explained the legal/contractual aspects of design review.

Design review is an expansion of the zoning concept. It allows for greater attention to details relating to specific neighborhood needs.

Design review need not entail a legally binding result, e.g. a builder might be compelled to undergo a process of design review without being bound to follow it. Planners and/or neighbors can participate in this process.

Design review can also be legally binding, i.e., the builder can be refused a permit if he does not follow specified design procedures. Zoning ordinances can include what specific design review procedures will be adopted, with appropriate safeguards against arbitrary refusals of permits.

It was the sense of both groups that there was agreement "in principle" on the concept of design review.

Brian Kullman hoped that there would be firm contractual guarantees built into the process.

Lesley spokespersons expressed the view that agreement "in principle" still allowed for freedom to consider a range of possibilities. Lesley also needs assurance about its future. Lesley College agrees to enter into design review discussions.

David Vickery clarified the meaning of "agreement in principle" on design review. It means that Lesley agrees that discussion of design review is valuable, but, as yet, there is no agreement on details or on the level of design reviews that will result from discussion.

With that clarification, both groups agreed that there was agreement in principle on design review.

Discussion then turned to the question of how the issue of divestiture/ acquisition would be handled.

Robert Lewis suggested that the issue of d/a was related to that of design review.

Joan Borod suggested that discussion of divestiture and acquisition could be facilitated if Lesley shared information about its long-term planning hopes for both the undergraduate and graduate schools.

Both groups agreed that sharing of information would help in discussion of the issue of divestiture and acquisition.

David Vickery suggested that comparing perceptions would be useful for the whole negotiation process.

It was suggested that this might be an agenda item for the next meeting.

Robert Lewis suggested that the latter part of next meeting be devoted to discussion of divestiture/acquisition.

The groups next agreed on two agenda items for the next meeting:

1. Comparing of perceptions on the future of the neighborhood. Lesley would clarify its planning hopes. The neighborhood would clarify its perceptions of Lesley and its fears of the consequences of Lesley expansion.

2. Discussion of divestiture and acquisition of property by Lesley.

Summary of agreements:

1. Procedural matters: see p. 1 of Minutes.

2. Lesley College agrees to enter into discussion of design review.

3. All agree "in principle" on the value of design review discussions, but details and procedures need to be worked out.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie Wechsler

Marjorie Wechsler
Faculty, Lesley College

MINUTES OF THE MEETING BETWEEN LESLEY COLLEGE, THE AGASSIZ
NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

May 18, 1978, 5:00PM, ALUMNAE HALL, LESLEY COLLEGE

Representing Lesley College: Mr. Lewis, Mr. Miltner, Ms. Oliva,
Dr. Orton, Mr. Tucker, and Ms. Wechsler

Representing the Agassiz Neighborhood: Mr. Basler, Dr. Borod,
Mr. Kolodner, Dr. Kullman, Dr. Rothman, Ms. Scott, and Mr. Silver

Representing the City of Cambridge: Mr. Robinson and Mr. Vickery

Observer: Ms. Dickerson

Dr. Kullman started the meeting by introducing Mr. Silver,
who has joined the group representing the Neighborhood in
response to the request of Dr. Orton that this group expand
its membership.

Then the minutes of previous meeting were reviewed. Those of
May 1, 1978 were approved without correction. Mr. Basler
corrected the minutes of May 11, 1978 by pointing out that
he lives on Sacramento St., not Mellen St., as was recorded in
those minutes. Mr. Lewis pointed out that the sentiment of
Lesley College was not that planning board members should be
be excluded from these meetings, as was conveyed in those
minutes, but rather that, should planning board members wish
to attend, Lesley hopes that they will be prepared to come
to all meetings, so that continuity of membership will be
maintained. Mr. Vickery responded by stating that planning
board members had decided not to come anyway. The minutes
of May 11, 1978 were then approved by all present.

Mr. Vickery then suggested that attention be turned to the first
agenda item, presentation by both groups of their future plans
for the neighborhood. Dr. Kullman distributed a statement by
his group (attached) listing six basic objective of the neigh-
borhood. He proposed that discussion of this agenda item
be limited, so that adequate time could be allotted to the
issue of acquisition and divestiture of property by Lesley.
It was agreed that approximately one hour would be spent on
on each of the two topics. Then Dr. Kullman began to summarize

each point of the document. The issue of parking dominated the subsequent discussion. Mr. Lewis asked for documentation of the suggestion that Lesley is straining the parking situation in the neighborhood. Dr. Kullman suggested that the influx of people to the Lesley campus every day must put a strain on the surrounding area. At this point, Mr. Kolodner pointed out that parking is just one aspect of a general problem: for the purposes of adequate planning and design review, this group needs to assess the total burden - of which parking is just a part - that Lesley puts on the physical space it occupies. In this vein, Mr. Silver asked Mr. Tucker for the total number of people who come to the Lesley campus each day. Mr. Tucker responded that Lesley has 250 commuting undergraduates; there are 400 people on Lesley's payroll, but not all of them come to this area every day. Dr. Orton mentioned the problems he has encountered in dealing with Harvard about parking on Everett St. Mr. Silver replied that his group is just beginning to be aware of the needs of the neighborhood and the effects of the institutions on them. He said that subsequent discussions with Harvard will also contribute to this awareness. Mr. Vickery then inquired as to Lesley's policy concerning undergraduates and automobiles. Mr. Lewis explained that undergraduates are discouraged from owning cars, but that they are often necessary for upperclasspeople who have distant student teaching jobs. Parking permits are sometimes issued to students; these basically allow them to park in Lesley's lot after 5:00 PM. It was noted that the lot is underused after that hour.

At this point, Dr. Kullman proposed that, because of the time, the discussion now turn to the problem of divestiture and acquisition of property by Lesley. Dr. Orton responded by asking which community Dr. Kullman actually represents, and whether the neighbors present are indeed the appropriate representatives of that community. Dr. Rothman parried by stating his group's concern that Lesley's trustees might not accept Dr. Orton as their appropriate representative, and that they might not feel bound by agreements he reaches with

the city as a result of these Meetings. Dr. Orton responded that he is empowered by the trustees to act as their representative in these meetings. Then, Dr. Orton agreed to let the record note that he accepts the neighbors present as the appropriate representatives of the Agassiz Neighborhood. He then turned to his presentation of Lesley's plans for the area. In the next five years, Lesley hopes to add new modules to Phase I which would increase its size by about 20%. This construction would add dormitory space for about forty, a few large cost-effective classrooms, and an office for the administration of a federal grant for childrens' education. It would block off Mellen St., but a fire lane from Oxford St. would be provided. Lesley now has about 800 undergraduates and hopes to add about 15 per year until a level of 850 is reached. There are presently about 225 full-time graduate students; the target is 425. 200 students now reside in the frame houses Lesley owns in the Mellen/Wendell/Everett St. area. The college is concerned about the possibility of fires in those buildings.

Dr. Rothman mentioned that, fifteen years ago, Lesley's long-term plans included no more than 600 undergraduates; his concern is that the figure of 850 will also suddenly grow. Dr. Orton and Mr. Lewis responded that one way that Lesley is responding to a shrinking market for teachers, and the economic problems it creates for Lesley, is growth. Mr. Silver pointed out that this growth is what worries the neighborhood. In an effort to ascertain the extent of the burden that this growth puts on the community, Mr. Basler asked how many part-time graduate students attend Lesley. Lesley representatives estimated this number as between 2000 and 6000, and Mr. Lewis promised to have more exact figures for the next meeting.

At the instigation of Mr. Vickery, Lesley's admissions policies were briefly discussed.

Dr. Kullman and Mr. Silver then pointed out ^{that} the new modules

Lesley wishes to construct in the next five years will house 40 students, while during the same period, the undergraduate enrollment will increase by 50. The suggestion that ten students would thus be dispersed into the community generated a discussion of housing problems in Cambridge.

Dr. Kullman observed that Lesley's long-term plans call for 550 resident students, and that the buildings it now owns seem quite adequate for that number. Dr. Orton responded that new facilities other than dormitory rooms are greatly needed. Dr. Kullman noted that the area Lesley owns on the eastern third of the two blocks in question seem more than adequate to provide those facilities. Why then does Lesley continue to buy other property? Mr. Kolodner pointed out that Lesley's Phase II and III plans seem to require only a floor-area ratio of less than 2.0, and that Lesley could provide 200 square feet of academic space for each of 850 students by building to a floor-area ratio of only about 1.6, and only on the land now proposed for the Phase II and III buildings. His feeling was that this represents rather generous use of land in a crowded neighborhood, and he suggested that Lesley does not need land outside this small area to fulfill its needs. Dr. Orton took issue with his numbers, and stated that Lesley does indeed need to buy new property. He hopes to acquire all the buildings on the north side of Mellen St. and the south side of Wendell St. in the next twenty years, although Lesley has no concrete plans for these structures. It was pointed out by Mr. Tucker that Lesley's credit line has run out, so that new construction will require cash - \$2,000,000 in cash for the proposed new modules. Mr. Silver observed that this means that it is much easier for Lesley to buy new property than to build on property it already owns. When Mr. Tucker agreed, Mr. Silver and Mr. Basler stated their concern that Lesley would continue to buy residential property to fulfill its needs, rather than construct new buildings.

At this point, the meeting broke up for about ten minutes of private discussions, after which the agenda for the next meeting was discussed. Mr. Lewis proposed a continuation of the dis-

cussion of acquisition and divestiture. Mr. Vickery passed out examples of design review proposals, to be considered as models of what might be achieved in these meetings. With respect to Lesley's future acquisition plans, he suggested that Lesley draw a "red line" - type border of its property, similar to Harvard's. Mr. Basler expressed his concerns that Harvard's "red line" was drawn without regard for community needs.

Dr. Kullman requested that Lesley present its future plans for the rest of Mellen St. in detail at the next meeting, and Dr. Orton said that his group would firm these up in the intervening time. He also proposed that the design of the Phase II and III buildings be discussed, with more technical support from the Community Development Department.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, May 24, 1978, at 5:00 PM, in Alumnae Hall, Lesley College.

The meeting was adjourned at about 7:05 PM.

These minutes were recorded and submitted by Paul R Kolodner.

Paul R. Kolodner 5/21/78.

OBJECTIVES OF THE AGASSIZ NEIGHBORHOOD

In response to a request by Lesley College for a description of goals and objectives of the Agassiz Neighborhood, the following list has been drafted by the negotiating team. The list is neither exhaustive nor definitive; it does, however, illustrate the concern of the community that we bring to these negotiations.

1. Re-establish the Agassiz Neighborhood as a stable urban community with a sense of future.

As recently as 1972, the Agassiz Neighborhood was seriously threatened by physical extinction from institutional expansion. Conversion of property from residential and institutional use and the resulting spillover effect on the remaining residential areas put the neighborhood in a position where its extinction was a very real possibility. This trend was halted for the present through a series of successful downzoning petitions in 1972, 1975 and 1977.

2. Develop a more stable population of homeowners and tenants.

The transiency rate for the Neighborhood, one of the highest in the City at one time, has declined sharply from 1970. This drop is a direct result of efforts by the community to prevent destructive development and to encourage homeownership and long term residency.

3. Preserve the economic, racial and cultural diversity of the neighborhood.

The diversity of this neighborhood is one of its major assets. That diversity is threatened by development that squeezes any group out of the housing market. The most seriously threatened group in recent years has been the family with children. The Neighborhood was perilously close to the point where the low proportion of families with children would make it unsuitable as a location for families seeking housing. This trend has also reversed itself recently and Neighborhood enrollment in the Agassiz School has risen over the past few years.

4. Encourage investment in the existing housing stock.

The Neighborhood is blessed with a wide range of housing opportunities in a small area. Homes and apartments can be found that span the entire spectrum of housing opportunities in the City. This housing stock, under the ownership of speculators or indifferent landlords, can (and did) deteriorate rapidly as a direct result of the suburban migration of the '50's and 60's and the expansion of Harvard and Lesley into the resulting weakened community.

Significant private investment in housing has occurred in the past few years, especially in the areas recently downzoned. This process must be continued in order to insure the physical survival of one of the Neighborhood's key assets. Any new development must blend in with the neighborhood surrounding it. A fine example is the Town House Development on the corner of Gougham and Hammond Sts.

5. Improve City services

The past erosion of the Neighborhood by institutional growth was accelerated by the difference of the City toward Neighborhood needs for traditional public services. This situation has also improved in the past few years although much remains to be done. The intention of the City to secure the Sacramento Playfield from Harvard is an enormous step forward, demonstrating the will of the City to match with public funds the private investments of many renters and owners in their homes.

Providing space of active recreation is one of several areas where improvement in City services is needed. Other key areas are the need for rehabilitation of the Agassiz School, better care of the Alden Playground, improved police protection, a Community Center, sidewalk reconstruction, replacement of street trees, etc.

6. Reduce traffic and parking problems.

The growth of institutions in the Neighborhood increases dramatically the traffic and parking problems. Since neither Harvard nor Lesley provide adequate parking for staff or students, competition for on-street parking is intense. In addition, the higher the traffic volume the more congestion on local streets at rush hours and the greater detracton from the residential character of the Neighborhood. The Resident Parking Program of the City has alleviated some of the parking problems but spotty inforcement and abuse has undercut its effectiveness. Judicious use of one way streets could do much to discourage use of local streets by through traffic avoiding Harvard Square. Limiting institutional expansion by Harvard and Lesley is the only long term cure for the problem.

+++++



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
Tel. 876-6800

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
JAMES L. SULLIVAN
City Manager

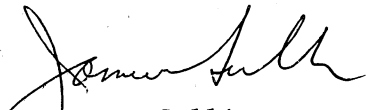
June 5, 1978

To the Honorable, the City Council:

With respect to Awaiting Report No. 19 relative to the Lesley College zoning matter, enclosed please find copies of the minutes of the first two meetings with Lesley College and representatives of the Agassiz neighborhood.

David Vickery, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, and representatives of Lesley College and the Agassiz community will be present at the City Council meeting to report on progress to date.

Very truly yours,


James L. Sullivan
City Manager

JLS/mbf
Enc. 2

Agenda #10 #5
S-283

Response to Awaiting Report No. 19 re:
Lesley College zoning matter.

Cal #5
6/26/78
Placed on File.

In City Council,

June 5, 1978

6/5/1978
L. Wylie requested
opportunity to
hear from the
Committee -
Tracked via memo
Pending Report -