

City of Cambridge

The Health and Hospital Committee held a public hearing on May 12, 1998, beginning at 5:45 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of discussing plans for Neville Manor.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Kathleen L. Born, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves, Councillor Sheila T. Russell and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Robert W. Healy, City Manager; John O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer, Cambridge Public Health Commission; Paul Hollings, Administrator, Neville Manor; Harold Cox, Chief Public Health Officer; Michael Feloney, Cambridge Housing Authority; Neil Rosenberg, Chair, Neville Manor Board, Cambridge Public Health Commission; and several other City of Cambridge and Health Commission employees and board members.

Councillor Triantafillou convened the hearing and explained the purpose. She introduced Mr. John O'Brien and requested that he introduce his staff and associates who would be making the presentation on behalf of the Public Health Commission. Mr. O'Brien proceeded to introduce Paul Hollings, Administrator, Neville Manor, Michael Feloney, Cambridge Housing Authority, representing Neville Community Partners, and Neil Rosenberg, Chair of Neville Manor Board.

Mr. O'Brien then introduced the discussion. He stated that it has been clear for several years that Neville Manor is an outmoded facility. The plant needs \$10 million dollars worth of renovations. In addition, unlike several years ago when there was a waiting list of more than 200 for Neville Manor, there is no longer that demand for nursing homes. Far less than the 179 beds presently at Neville Manor are now needed. Mr. O'Brien stated that he is proud that Neville Manor pays its workers decent wages, but mostly nursing homes do not. These wages put Neville Manor in an uncompetitive position vis a vis Medicaid, which pegs its rates to the statewide median. There is currently a loss of over \$2 million per year at Neville Manor. Of the City's payment to the Cambridge Public Health Commission, about \$500,000 goes to Neville Manor. The rest of the deficit is funded from Cambridge Public Health Commission funds. The prediction is that the deficit will continue to climb and will consume resources that could be better used.

Mr. O'Brien then described the redevelopment proposal, which is summarized in Attachment A.

Mr. O'Brien noted the importance of the water quality issue. He stated that the Cambridge Public Health Commission has had studies done with regard to this issue and is confident that this project can be built in a manner that will not damage water quality.

Mr. O'Brien then reviewed the possible options that have been considered for Neville Manor. (Attachment B). He then noted that both zoning relief from City Council and legislative action is required.

Councillor Reeves asked whether there can be a preference for Cambridge residents. Mr. Feloney, Cambridge Housing Authority, stated that there can be a preference in the assisted living. Mr. O'Brien stated that over time he believes there could be a preference for Cambridge residents in the nursing facility as well. Councillor Reeves stated the importance of a preference.

Councillor Born asked whether the Board of Zoning Appeals approval that will be requested is for a comprehensive permit. Mr. O'Brien answered in the affirmative. Councillor Born asked what other permits will be required. Mr. O'Brien stated that they must obtain a permit from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for constructing a nursing home. Obtaining this permit will not be a significant burden. There may be some other state agencies that must approve the project as well. The sequence is City Council approval of a home rule petition, State Legislature approval of the home rule petition, Board of Zoning Appeals issuance of a comprehensive permit, then the determination of need approval from the state.

Councillor Born asked whether a MEPA permit was needed. Mr. Feloney stated that it is likely to be required, and typically that happens at the time of schematic drawings. There is also an environmental needs form (ENF) as part of the MEPA review.

Councillor Born stated that she would like to see the ENF before she votes on the home rule petition.

Mr. Healy stated that site control is required for the MEPA review and site control will come with the City Council's home rule petition.

Councillor Davis asked what the content of the Home Rule petition will be. Mr. Hollings said it will contain authorization to apply for the comprehensive permit and clarification that the proposed use is a permitted use.

Councillor Davis then asked what a comprehensive permit is. Mr. Feloney explained that it allows all zoning issues to be addressed in one proceeding and requires an expedited process.

Councillor Davis asked where the comprehensive permit is used. Mr. Feloney stated that the Cambridge Housing Authority has used it in all of its projects.

Councillor Davis asked if the home rule legislation is a way of clarifying the role of the Water Board. Mr. Healy stated that the Water Board's role and powers are advisory not binding.

Councillor Davis asked who owns and controls the land. Mr. Healy stated that it appears differently on different maps. Councillor Davis stated that she would like to hear more about the Water Board's concerns.

Mr. Healy stated that Dr. Harrington, Chair of the Cambridge Water Board is present at the hearing. Mr. Healy stated that there is some suggestion from the Haley Aldrich studies that the construction may result in changing the site to the betterment of the water quality. He noted that there is also public concern with open space. A policy judgment will need to be made in trying to balance the need for open space and the need to care for the frail elderly.

Councillor Davis stated that she concurs that care for the elderly is a very important need. She also has a concern about the "slippery slope" of use of this open space.

Councillor Russell stated that there are other uses and proposals for the land by the pond; there is proposed art, a soccer field, a youth center. She would be willing to do away with all of these uses and site the nursing home/assisted living project as the only project at Fresh Pond.

Councillor Triantafillou then invited testimony from those present.

Carol Cerf, member of Cambridge Public Health Committee, stated that they are very concerned with preserving within the city limits a nursing home and affordable assisted living for elderly residents.

Dr. Joseph Harrington, President, Cambridge Water Board, described the process by which the Water Board began its considerations of this matter. He stated that the Water Board has passed a clarification of existing policy that the Water Board is responsible for the entire water system. The Water Board has been actively promoting watershed protection activities around its upland reservoirs which are located in other municipalities and believes it should be consistent in its policies to promote the same protection in this watershed.

Dr. Harrington stated that the Haley and Aldrich report incorrectly states that the proposed plans are outside of the watershed. Ground water is also involved. When the water level in the pond is lower, ground water flows into the pond. The Hobbs Reservoir has a relatively small watershed. Stoney Brook has a relatively large watershed, water is spilled at Stony Brook into the Charles River when Fresh Pond which holds 1.4 billion gallons of water is full. The ability to operate the pond at lower levels can prevent spillage at Stony Brook and thus save water for the city. This capability may be needed in the future.

Councillor Reeves asked whether there is any danger of not having enough water. Dr. Harrington said there is not. Councillor Reeves asked then what is the risk. Mr. Harrington said that it relates to both quantity and quality. Increased activities lead to increased stress on the water supply.

Theresa Hill, 46 Holworthy Street, stated that she is concerned about the open space issues. One concern is about Black's Nook, which is a thriving ecological environment. She stated that she would support Councillor Russell's concept of trade offs, particularly the soccer facility. All of these proposals should go on hold until the Fresh Pond Advisory Committee issues its report.

Neil Rosenberg, 9 Murdock Street, Neville Manor Governing Board, stated that the Board's number one goal is to meet the needs of the 97 current residents. He is also chair of the Finance Committee for the Cambridge Health Alliance and he is acutely aware of the financial losses that are being incurred on account of Neville Manor. There will be a continuing need for skilled nursing facility beds. Historically, 75% of the residents of Neville Manor have been Cambridge residents and it is expected that this will continue. There will be a net "give-back" of open space with this project.

Ann Roosevelt, 14 Meadow Way, stated that she is a member of the Cambridge Water Board, a life long Cambridge resident, a real estate agent in Cambridge and past president of the Massachusetts Environmental League. Her views are informed by all of these perspectives. She stated that she is very uncomfortable with the notion that this is the Water Board versus the elderly. This is a siting issue. The Massachusetts water supply is becoming more and more stressed. As a real estate broker, she believes there are other suitable sites. She met with Susaki Associates, who are doing the siting study for the library. Some of the sites they have found would be possibilities. Part of the MEPA process is examining the alternatives, so this should happen before there is a vote on this particular site.

Ms. Roosevelt stated that there is also the need for approval by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. She asked where in the permit process that approval comes.

Councillor Reeves asked Ms. Roosevelt what part of the proposal she supports. She said that the Water Board supports the existing building whatever it is used for. The Water Board does not support the new addition because it will have too much effect on the watershed. This new building would require that the water level at Fresh Pond be kept at 14 feet to ensure water quality. The Water Department should not take on this additional burden.

Jim Barton, 130 Appleton Street, stated that his father is 106 and lives at 116 Norfolk Street. He appreciates the city's concern for its elderly citizens. He said that a very thorough site selection process is necessary. He would like to be part of it.

Louise Weed, 109 Avon Hill Street, Co-Chair, Fresh Pond Advisory Committee, stated that the Advisory Committee was not told about this project. She urged that all plans be put on hold until the committee completes its report. She urged the Health and Hospital committee to listen to the Water Board, even though it is advisory.

Craig Kelly, 6 St. Gerard Terrace, stated that a new nursing home is needed but it should not be put on open space. Fresh Pond is not that huge. Cambridge has a fair amount of money; if we want to provide housing for our elderly, we should do it without using open space. There are tremendous costs associated with it even if the land does not "cost" the city.

Stash Horowitz, 12 Florence Street, stated that he is Co-Chair of the Cambridge Neighborhood Initiative and a member of several organizations that treasure open space. He agreed with Ms. Roosevelt that the city should seek its MEPA and DEP approval first. Mr. Horowitz stated that he is concerned about the loss of nursing home space and concerned about whether the federal funding involved will ultimately preclude favoring Cambridge residents. He said that he is also concerned about the privatization of medical care in general.

Janice Snow, 60 Reservoir Street, member of the Fresh Pond Advisory Committee, read a statement of Patricia Pratt, 11 Brown Street, who requested that all projects be deferred until the Fresh Pond master plan is completed. (Attachment C).

Ms. Snow stated that the soil around Neville Manor is a very porous soil, which drains quickly. She recommended that the numbers in the Haley Aldrich report relative to this issue be studied carefully.

Ms. Snow stated that Fresh Pond is an ancient glacial pond that deserves protection. She observed that there have been previous proposals to build affordable housing, the Tobin School, etc., at Fresh Pond. She read from a Community Development Department report 20 years ago that recommended no further development of the reservation. Ms. Snow stated that serious site analysis is crucial.

Mary Martell, 2 Mount Auburn Street, stated that she is a member of the Friends of Neville Manor and a concerned senior citizen. She stated that she needs to know for sure that there will be a strong preference for Cambridge residents. She is concerned about the \$2 million deficit and how it will be turned around.

Councillor Triantafyllou requested that John O'Brien respond.

Mr. O'Brien stated that he feels very confident about the preference for Cambridge residents but he is not sure that they can completely exclude non-residents. With regard to the deficit at the nursing home, he said that the wage and benefit package will be different in the new facility, more in line with what is paid at other skilled nursing facilities, and there will be fewer beds.

John Good, 30 Normandy Avenue, spoke in support of the Neville Manor proposal. It is a wonderful opportunity for the city to provide for its elder citizens.

Joel Eigerman, 60 Reservoir, urged protection of the open space and taking this opportunity to remove an inappropriate use from the open space. He suggested a closer look at the issue of the city remaining involved in the nursing home business. He noted the declining demand and declining federal support. He pointed out that in his testimony, Mr. O'Brien explained that one of the factors in eliminating the deficit in a new nursing home would be paying wages and benefits comparable to those paid at other nursing homes instead of higher wages as is the current practice.

Joe Joseph, 20 Columbus Avenue, stated that the issue is complex. He raised the need for clarification of the use Chapter 40B, the comprehensive permit law, when there is more than 10% affordable housing in the community, and suggested a longer forecast of planned health facilities in Cambridge, in light of Health Commission written material calling Neville Manor a "campus." He noted that Haley & Aldrich's mapping of ground water at the Alewife site was called into question by the DEP.

Ann Tennis, 71 Griswald Street, asked about the criteria for affordable housing. Taking care of our elderly is a very important need and value.

Margaret Callahan, Blanchard Road, urged support for a facility for the elderly and for Neville Manor. Cambridge elders deserve quality of life and security.

Councillor Triantafillou thanked all those present for their attendance. She noted that there will be many more opportunities for public input and dialogue on the plans for Neville Manor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

For the Committee


Councillor Katherine Triantafillou
Chair

Committee Report #1

S-434

Communication was received from
D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk,
transmitting a report from
Councillor Katherine Triantafillou,
Chair of the Health and Hospital
Committee, for a meeting held
on May 12, 1998 to discuss plans
for Neville Manor.

In City Council June 8, 1998

Report Accepted
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