

15 YERXA ROAD
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02140
495-9033 (o) & 864-8694 (h)

May 10, 1995

12
RECEIVED BY
OFFICE OF CITY CLERK
1995 MAY 11 PM 3:22
CAMBRIDGE MA.

Communication for the Records of the City Council
%D. Margaret Drury
Cambridge City Hall
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 01239

Dear City Council:

As recommended by Mayor Reeves, enclosed for the record is the complete statement that would have been made during the public comment at the meeting on Monday evening, May 8 if the remark period had not been shortened. Enclosed also is the "Unanswered Questions and Answers List" that was presented at the May 4th meeting that was held at the request of the Board of Zoning at the M.E. Fitzgerald School and indicates their disposition.

For your information, many Fitzgerald School Educational Planning Committee meetings were held during the first phase of this project that were necessary to meet the state requirements for submission of the educational plans. Those were not completed until late summer.

The architect was not hired until late summer and the first neighborhood meeting held was in October and another in November where four plans were discussed. Please realize these two meetings were not just with abutters and neighbors but were attended by others including parents. During this period all other factions, except the abutters and neighbors, sat down with the architect and discussed their needs with regard the progress of the plans and made changes according to their needs. We were never given that same right. The plans were unveiled in December which included a large expansion. It was stated at the School Department Budget Hearing on Tuesday evening that "MANY" meetings were held. If two meetings define "MANY" meetings, I am sure the parents and staff of the Fitzgerald School would not have been satisfied or had their concerns adequately addressed. The decision makers go home and we live with the product. The abutters and neighbors do not feel they were given the same inclusionary process.

Mr. Quinn and I took a tour of the M.E. Fitzgerald School in April of 1993 and made an account of the room usage, which I have on file and was submitted to the principal, Mr. Ferrari for verification. This assessment concluded there were 30 "classrooms" which included a computer, media and science room.

We have been told that a six room expansion is necessary to accommodate the enrollment indicators of system overcrowding. In the architect plans dated March 16, 1995, the count for "classrooms" are 29 plus a computer, media, science and art room for a total of 33. In the expansion, 20 plus rooms are added that are not designed or sized for a "classroom". This information indicates that even if the calculations are off, the expansion does not appear to configure to six additional "classrooms".

Although appreciative of the concessions made on Monday evening, many more matters are in dire need of discussion and equitable resolution. We are looking forward to the beginning of that process.

Sincerely yours,



Carole Lee

Enclosures

cc: Cambridge School Committee

PRESENTATION AT THE CITY COUNCIL
RE CONSENT AGENDA #9
May 8, 1995

My name is Carole Lee and have lived at 15 Yerxa Road for the past 28 years. This presentation is to give you a thumbnail chronology of why many of the abutters and neighbors of the M.E. Fitzgerald School are **opposing the expansion but not renovation**. It is with great trepidation that we have come to this conclusion, but we feel we cannot handle the impact of further educational, community or social programs being added to the Fitzgerald School and feel that with the reduction of two classes for next year and the questions concerning the possibility of declining enrollment, that an expansion of this size is not necessary.

Personally, I thought I was dealing in good faith in the process of the planning for this project because for over two years I have been the neighborhood and North Cambridge Stabilization Committee representative on the Renovation Committee, including being a member of the architect hiring committee. I also made the recommendation that the Gately Shelter be considered as part of the renovation. Through attendance at these meetings I became aware of the great need for the renovation. Our decision is very unfortunate because if this process was handled properly during the early meetings, our concerns may have been timely addressed and this decision may not have been necessary. Because of this indifference to us and a process, we are being unduly criticized for reacting to decisions made without our input that affect our every day life.

Another example of the abutters and neighbors being the omitted group is evident in the flyer circulated for the meeting last Thursday May 4. In mentioning the representatives of the various groups who would be present our group is conspicuous by its absence. We had to ASK to be included. **This meeting was only arranged because the Board of Zoning recognized the concerns and fears of the abutters and neighbors and postponed voting on the requests of the School Department until later this evening advising that they had to meet with us to see if a compromise could be reached.** I had naively believed that a meeting would be held to see what could be put on the table and attempt compromise. This was not the case. When the Agassiz School abutters and neighbors raised concern about the size of the new school proposed for their neighborhood, the project was put on hold until their concerns were adequately addressed. Talk about lack of process and inequity.

In October you received a mailing from me indicating my opposition to expansion because I did not believe in the philosophy of housing schools within schools, so opposition was expressed early on but never acknowledged. Many heated discussions were held at the October and November meetings that never came to fruition. For the first time at the December meeting the architects presented a single design for the school which included a 200 student expansion and we noted that a substantial space had been allotted to a new program. We became aware that this program went through a process with all other factions **but not the abutters and neighbors.**

The Cambridge Schools have won many awards for the "Choice Program" that was implemented many years ago but Cambridge schools are no longer neighborhood schools. This change has had a large impact on our neighborhood which brought many more cars, buses and traffic. Besides the every day noise that is generated by any school, such as students arriving and leaving in buses and cars; children playing before school and at recess; a preschool program; the M.E. Fitzgerald has many after school programs -- for the past two years the "Compass" summer program and the facility rents to private groups in the evening and on Saturdays and Sundays. Also we have had for twenty four years a very active and wonderful community schools program that has a summer camp and we are the only school that houses a teen center that operates 6 days a week and most evenings until 9:30-10:00 p.m., backup of this material is available upon request.

As you are aware, the Fitzgerald neighborhood is small and many homes do not have driveways, which naturally makes parking a premium. We have always been very accepting neighbors and have not complained about the impact the many educational, community and social programs that have been added to the school over the years has had on our lives and this is not a complaint. Maybe the reason our concerns have not been recognized is because we have always been too accepting. The issue of the major impact that an addition to house 200 more students and another program, that their grant proposal projects the possibility of servicing 400 people a year, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year has definitely not been adequately addressed. This program could be moved for example to the Notre Dame School that is now being rented by the Cambridge School Department or further down Rindge

CITY COUNCIL PRESENTATION

May 8, 1995

Page 2

Avenue to the Head Start building or the Neighborhood Health Clinic. We are not judging this program and **WE HAVE NOT ASKED THIS PROGRAM TO DISAPPEAR -- JUST MOVE TO GIVE US RELIEF!**

At a meeting on February 23 with city officials our recommendations to reach a compromise were met with insensitivity and indifference. The failure also to advise us that evening of pertinent facts relevant to proposed specific changes at the M. E. Fitzgerald School that were announced on Monday, March 13 only reinforced our feelings of frustration and cemented the feeling we have had for some time of distrust and that we are lied to by omission. We are only told what the officials want us to know at that time and when the rest of the information eventually is revealed and we react, we are criticized and the one at fault.

It was announced at the March 13 meeting that there were more additions, one to the front of the school and a larger addition to the gymnasium wing. Also two programs that are currently in the Gately Shelter had also been given dedicated space in the renovated school. We were not told at this meeting of an announcement that was made at a PTO meeting the very next evening with regard to that fact that because of decreased enrollment one first grade was to be eliminated and possibly a grade six. We recently became aware that enrollment is down citywide including the Head Start Program, with projections being that this trend will continue. There are two other unknown factors that may possibly affect enrollment, one being the Charter Schools -- the approval for one for the City of Cambridge has already been received and more are proposed for the future. The other is how the demise of Rent Control will affect the number of school-aged children in Cambridge.

As stated earlier, the M.E. Fitzgerald School has always been the home of more human service programs than any other public school in Cambridge before the addition of another that has the potential to grow larger than all the others. This program is an unproved entity in Cambridge, and is being implemented at a time when a *Boston Globe* editorial dated April 11 stated that "More experiments are not what the nation's public elementary schools need now", according to the Carnegie Foundation, "A hard focus on basic subjects, resting to show what works, discipline . . . are among the guidelines recommended for schools across the country". "Although the new Carnegie report says education success can't be bought, it does call for a maximum class size of 20 and a maximum school size of 500." The enrollments for schools under construction and the proposed Morse construction are under 500, maybe one being a little over, but none close to the projected 770 for the Fitzgerald.

This has been a very discouraging, dismaying and demoralizing experience I sincerely thought that by being involved from the beginning we could avoid what is happening. On Thursday, May 4, It was obvious by the format presented that it was never intended to have our concerns addressed, as this meeting was in no way conducive to accomplish the concession and compromise needed. The process that has taken place since the fall has in no way been equitable and inclusive -- it reminds me of my children, they do not outright lie, they lie by omission and only reveal what they want you to know.

The school needs renovation and we as the abutters and neighbors would like to see this happen, but again we feel that our concerns have not only not been adequately addressed but not given any credence. This project will not only take away dedicated open-space, but will affect our quality of life for many years to come. The decision makers return to their homes and neighborhoods at the end of the day and on the weekend and do not have live with the impact and results of their decisions, as we the abutters and neighbors do. Even the parents, who want the best for their children as they should, go home and the Fitzgerald School is no longer an important focus in their lives when their children are no longer students, but it is always remains important to our quality of life.

For the afore reasons stated and for the disrespect, indifference and insensitive attitude by which the people who have to live with these decisions have been treated and have been left out of the process, we have to the oppose this project and request that a meeting be held to **address our issues sincerely** because we wholeheartedly want to see this resolved and have the project can go forth with consensus. Thank you for your time, attention and the opportunity to address you..

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS & CONCERNS
Fitzgerald School Renovation/Expansion Project

With regard to this project, we wholeheartedly agree that the school should be renovated but not expanded to accommodate 200 additional students. The following unanswered questions and concerns indicate some of the reasons why the abutters and neighbors are not consensual consumers:

- 1) Has an *Environmental and Traffic impact study been done?
- **2) In order to obtain the open space behind the school, is it necessary to go before the Legislature with regard to the Frederick Rindge Will for the two areas in question -- part of the bullpen on Haskell Street and the open space on Yerxa Road?
- *3) What is being requested before the Board of Zoning? And how did the original parking request become moot?
- **4) With enrollment projections down and a grade 1 and 6 being eliminated in the fall, why is this large expansion necessary?
- 5) The Even Start Program and a Chapter One class that are presently in the Gately Shelter and are configured into the renovated building, what will take their place in the Gately Shelter?
- 6) **How will the overall decline in the enrollment figures for Cambridge affect the possible funding proposals by Fitzgerald School to the State Department of Education?
- 7) During the renovation, where will the staging area be for the trucks and equipment?
- 8) Will parking be provided for the construction workers?

The Fitzgerald School abutters and neighbors tolerate more human service programs than any other area in the city, 7 days a week **without complaint**, including a Tecn Center. At this time, the Fitzgerald School is the only school with a Tecn Center and now a Center for Families. More unanswered questions:

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- *3) At the present time, the Center for Families is looking to rent approximately 2,000 sq. ft. for their program and will only have an office at the Fitzgerald. If the main objective of this program is for outreach/referral as they infer, why is such a large space necessary? **This effort is not being done to appease the concerns of the abutters, there is no room in the Fitzgerald School to accommodate their needs, now or during the construction.** As the grant proposal indicates, the Center for Families has the potential to grow and we feel we do our fair share and that this program should be housed elsewhere. There is alternative space to house this program and give us relief, such as the Notre Dame DiPirio School (now being rented by Cambridge School Department), the Head Start or Health Center building on Rindge Avenue and the city owns the VFW building on Massachusetts Avenue near Russell Street.

Presented May 4, 1995 - Updated May 9, 1995

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Two Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

Date 5-11-95

Time 3:15 pm.

To: Jack Flynn

From: Carole Lee

Destination
FAX Telephone: 949-4307

Harvard
FAX Telephone: 617-495-9703

The following document consists of 5 pages including this cover sheet.

If the entire document is not received, please call (617) 495-4955.

MESSAGE: _____

S-174

Consent Communication #12

Comm. was received from Carole Lee, 15 Yerxa Road regarding the complete statement that would have been made during the Council Meeting of May 8, 1995 if the remark period had not been shortened re: Board of Zoning, M.E. Fitzgerald School.

In City Council May 15, 1995

Placed on file.