

12

ENOUGH ROOM
ROY BERCAW, EDITOR
PO BOX 400297, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02140 USA
617-491-0433 bercaw@justice.com

The Honorable City Council
City of Cambridge
795 Mass Avenue
Cambridge MA 02139

2002 OCT 24 P 3:30
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Re: Public Meetings

This regards a frequent inability of members of the public to see or hear what transpires at public meetings. Under the Massachusetts Open Meetings Law any interested party may attend any public meeting. I am aware that some public officials have a relaxed idea of when the requirements of that law are obligatory.

Nonetheless even when the meetings are recognized as governmental bodies, interested parties are not able to see nor hear what goes on at those meetings. The latest example was the meeting of the "Design Review Committee," for the Main Library Expansion Project held on Tuesday October 22, 2002 at the Senior Center at 806 Mass Avenue.

I arrived at 6:45 PM for the meeting scheduled to begin at 6:30 PM. The Committee was assembled in a huddle around the architect's models in the center of the committee's u-shaped tables in the front of the room. It was neither possible to see nor to hear what they were doing.

Although Warren Messina of the city's electrical department has as his regular duties providing audio capabilities for public meetings at the senior center, he installs audio equipment only when asked. It is the obligation of the committees and boards to request sound equipment for their meetings.

There was only one microphone for the 15 members of the committee on October 22, 2002. It was passed to one another as they spoke during the Committee comment period of the meeting. The microphone was used also by the architect who made the Design Team's presentation.

But the committee members did not always speak into the microphone and several members of the audience were unable to hear what they said. At one point about six members of the public were standing near the committee in order to hear what was being said. There was no microphone for members of the public to use during public comment period.

At one point during a pause I spoke with Assistant City Manager and co-chair of this committee, Richard Rossi about the lack of audio enhancement for the meeting. He was less than enthusiastic about my concerns.

I spoke also with co-chair Alan Burne about this. He said "We have a microphone."

I said, "You need to use it. I pointed out that during one comment by committee member Ted Carpenter, the architect was holding the microphone. The audience was unable to hear what

Letter to City Council from R Bercaw October 24, 2002

Carpenter said. Mr. Burne became upset and told me he did not have to listen to this. I asked him three times to calm down. He was unable to do so.

I said I would write a letter. He said, "You don't have to do that."

This committee is not the only one which either does not plan for having the electrical department install audio capabilities for their meetings, or does not use the equipment properly. This is not cutting edge technology. It is common ordinary microphones and speakers which must be asked for and the committee members must be taught how to use them. Otherwise the purpose of having meetings open to the public is thwarted.

Roy Bercaw

S-314

Consent Communication #12

A communication was received
from Roy Bercaw, regarding public
meetings.

In City Council October 28, 2002

PLACED ON FILE.