

The article suggests that one of the factors that makes Cambridge a less healthy community is the number of hazardous waste sites per capita within the city. While it is relatively easy to obtain total numbers of “oil or hazardous materials release sites” from the State of Massachusetts for each city or town, the implications of those data should be clarified. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) lists 566 sites in Cambridge onto which some state regulated material (oil or chemical) has been released. The overwhelming majority of these “sites” resulted from spilled home heating oil and many more resulted from used motor oil that leaked or was spilled. So the number of releases that represent chemical exposure risks posing a demonstrable hazard to the community is quite small. Furthermore, the DEP lists site according to the risk posed by that release with an assigned Tier Classification. There are no site in Cambridge representing the highest risk level (Tier IA) and only a handful at the second highest level of risk (Tier IB).

Air pollution is another factor that the article used in its assessment. Air pollution data for Cambridge reflects the entire Greater Boston air basin (roughly within Rte 495). DEP and EPA only collect this data at a limited number of monitoring stations and none are within Cambridge. While air quality in an urban community is very likely to be poorer than in a rural area (with some exceptions), the relative quality of Boston air ranks it among the best for a major metropolitan area in the United States. This is the result of little heavy industry and the air turnover caused by sea breezes. Boston was listed as the second highest average downtown wind velocity in the country in a study conducted several years ago (after San Francisco). Major sources of concern that remain are related to a small number of “point sources” (stationary polluters) like out-dated power plants and to “non-point sources” (automobiles, buses, trucks, trains, airplanes).

Open space is also listed as a factor in community health, though this discounts the quality-of-life or lifestyle benefits associated with living in an urban community.

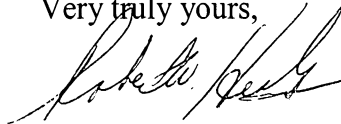
One question is why those involved in designing the analysis chose the factors that they did. In technical terms, there is the concern that the model chosen to assess health was misspecified – the choice of predictors was incorrect and other important factors were excluded. In addition, why was there no one from a health-related field, such as an epidemiologist or a biostatistician, involved in the analysis.

The results of the Cambridge-Somerville Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFSS) done by the Institute for Community Health in February through July 2002, show that Cambridge is generally a healthy community. Only 6% of Cambridge women and 7% of Cambridge men did not have health care coverage in the past year compared to 9% of Massachusetts’ women and 11% of Massachusetts’ men. Eighty percent of Cambridge residents had a personal health care provider. Only 16% of Cambridge residents have high blood pressure compared to 22% of Massachusetts’ residents and 24% of US residents. Tobacco use is lower in Cambridge (17% of males compared to 20% in Massachusetts and 11% of females compared to 20% in Massachusetts), and moderate physical activity is higher for women in Cambridge (30%) versus 23% in Massachusetts.

Cambridge has a slightly lower overall mortality rate than Massachusetts (802.0 vs. 809.5, 1999-2000, age-adjusted rate). However, the breast cancer mortality rate, one of the indicators used in the article, is slightly higher (24.0 vs. 19.6 in Massachusetts, 1999-2000). Cancer incidence (number of new cases) is one indicator of the environmental health of a community and Cambridge cancer incidence, in general, is about the same as that of Massachusetts.

As in any community, there are health issues in Cambridge. Mental health (including suicide and suicide attempts), substance use, asthma, and immigrant health are some of the continuing challenges.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy", written in a cursive style.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec

Agenda #1 & Order #6

651 Green Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
April 14, 2003

Cambridge City Council
City Hall
Cambridge, MA 02139

To the Honorable, the Cambridge City Council:

re: City Manager's Agenda #1 (lack of open space), Council Order # 6 (build on MDC parkland)

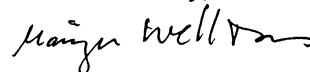
The Manager's response to Cambridge's low rank for quality of life asserts that the "quality-of-life or lifestyle benefits associated with living in an urban community" offset the city's dismal record on open space. Combined with tonight's Council order eyeing MDC state parkland here for affordable housing, and the Council's prior request that the Manager propose open space rezoning, it is clear the Council is on the verge of consigning all open space in the city to development. Is the only question how high the FAR?

The logic is clear: if housing always outranks public open space, all public open space will disappear, whether by massive assault or salami tactics—depending only on the strength of public reaction. Waving the affordable housing bonus, developers and the Council, looking at the little open space left here, are poised to destroy it all.

Is there no one on the Council who understands the value of public open space, both passive and active, its contribution to city dwellers' physical and mental health? The entire city could be torn down and redeveloped at three, or five, or ten times the current density, and even so the crisis in affordable housing would still be unresolved. All current open space is an irreplaceable treasure given us by previous generations who, knowing the "lifestyle benefits associated with living in an urban community," nevertheless (or because of them) also knew the "lifestyle benefits" of air and light, enjoyment of the natural world.

Please remember the Council has voted \$1.5 million of city money to destroy wetland habitat, the passive open space at Magazine Beach, where hundreds of thousands of dollars will pay to remove wet dirt and replace it with dry dirt. This is money that could pay for affordable housing, schools, and other public services. Instead, the Council is squandering it on the destruction of passive open space. Please do not follow through on these ill-advised actions.

Yours sincerely,



Marilyn Wellons

City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council 4/14, 2003

City Mgr's Agenda

YEA	NAY	ABSENT	PRESENT	
✓				Vice Mayor Henrietta Davis
③ ✓		✓		Ms. Marjorie C. Decker
②		① ✓		Mr. Anthony D. Galluccio
✓				Mr. David P. Maher
✓				Mr. Brian Murphy
✓				Mr. Kenneth E. Reeves
② ✓		① ✓		Ms. Denise Simmons
✓				Mr. Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.
r				Mayor Michael A. Sullivan

① 6 0 3

② 8 0 1

③ 9 0 0



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager

Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager

April 14, 2003

To The Honorable, The City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report Item No. 03-47, regarding a report on reasons for low rating of Cambridge as a healthy place to live, Chief Public Health Officer Harold Cox and Senior Epidemiologist Lise Fried report the following:

The goal of the article was to “find the healthiest of the healthy—the cities and towns in and around Boston in which the air and water are the cleanest; the streets, safest; and the tumors and heart palpitations, fewest” (page 78). The methodology involved 13 indicators divided into three categories (general health, environment, and safety).

Public safety indicators:

- Violent crimes;
- Structure fires;
- Motor vehicle deaths; and,
- Public spending per capita.

Health indicators:

- Incidence of HIV and other STDs;
- Leukemia, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, prostate cancer, and lung cancer grouped into a standard incidence ratio;
- Heart disease deaths per capita; and,
- Overall death rate.

Environmental indicators:

- Percentage of open space;
- Air pollution sources per square mile;
- Number of contaminated site per square mile; and,
- Presence of radon.

Given the choice of indicators, the smaller, more rural communities did better in the rankings. Most of the issues that are more of a problem in urban areas, like crime and lack of open space, counted against Cambridge. The indicators target more quality of life issues than specifically health issues.

S-144

Consent Agenda #1

Awaiting Report Item Number 03-47, regarding a report on reasons for low rating of Cambridge as a healthy place to live.

In City Council April 14, 2003

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