

Dear Cambridge City Clerk.

12-11 -97

Most New England towns glorify and preserve their Common. In 1976 Cambridge did give a face-lift to ours for the Bicentennial. But only 21 years later the City's CCDD seems bent on destroying ours by splitting it into three small parts, solely for the benefit of a few lawless cyclists, whom no one dares to confront. A former cyclist myself, I am well aware of the danger of cycling on Cambridge's busy street. I also am a fervent believer in the Clean Air Act. Nor am I against bicycles on the Common, -- if they do not interfere with the other users of the Common, which is really a multi-purpose-park. However, although the CCDD describes the Common as our "most cherished and beloved Park", their solutions only include the Harvard student cyclists "preferred route." Their proposed "corridor" would soon be accused by rollerbladers and mopeds as well. This high speed traffic would transform the Common into but another Harvard bridge, for fragments on entire side of the "corridor" would be too small to survive as parkland.

Just five years ago, Follen St. and little Concord Ave were told by CCDD we must close off our access to Arsenal Square to help the traffic situation. None of us liked the idea, because this exit to Arsenal Square was our "preferred Route." We complied for safety reasons and a promise from CCDD to help us use the alternative exit back onto Waterhouse St. This promise was never kept, and at times it is virtually impossible to exit from Follen St. The heavy Garden St. traffic involves long waits, both to exit or enter. When the Hotel Sheraton puts its 60 car parking lot into effect, we will never be able to get out. If we try the left turn route, we will have to drive all the way around the Common through three lights. (Actually only one car can turn left at a time because of the 30 second light, the shortest I've ever heard of. If I walk I have to make two long detours. I must take a Z route. In short, although we pay among the highest taxes in the City, none of these are our "preferred routes."

It is clear that Healy's Committee, by excluding abutting residents, has no idea of how the Common is currently used. Nor does the Committee seem to understand that those who really enjoy the Common, the passive users, avoid the areas by the heavily-traveled streets, Mass Ave and Garden St. for good reason. They and the children need the relative quiet of the Common's center. The Garden St. route would keep the active traffic away from the heart of the Common. It would ensure safety for the children and allow the beauty of the linden allee to remain unspoiled, a place to be enjoyed by the many who seek peace, not exercise.

So what it's not Harvard students' preferred route? I cannot get to the Square by my preferred route either, even though I am often in just as much of a hurry as the cyclists. Why the needs of the majority should be considered as less important than the demands of a minority of lawless students on wheels, who reside here only 8 months a yr. for 4 years?

In the past few years a large number of the streets in West Cambridge have been reduced to one lane by bicycle lanes. Cars are prohibited by law from using these lanes. Little Concord Ave has such a lane, -- placed on the wrong side of the street, so that Follen residents forced to negotiate a sharp turn here can not see a bicycle coming. Yet none of these had made the cyclists obey the rules. They still bicycle all over the Streets, go through stop lights as well as on both sides of the streets. One virtually needs a PhD to drive safely in Cambridge.

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Whose fault is this? I think it belongs to Harvard University, not CCDD. I do not accept the idea that Harvard students cannot be made to consider the needs and the rules of their host City. Ten years ago Follen Street residents felt that the loud parties put on by Lincoln' Inn was insoluble. A combined effort on the part of the City and Harvard, -- plus some carrot and the stick education carried out by myself and the adjoining neighbor the Reeds, we have reached a solution and now are friends.

Why should Harvard's students be above the law? Before the CCDD goes any further, I would suggest that area neighbors meet with Harvard. Making the students obey the law should be Harvard's responsibility. The College should insist on license, bells, just courtesy, and even impound the bikes of those who continue to break our laws. Any solution should be one, which considers all our needs. A \$500,000 Federal Transportation Grant is tempting, but there are more than transportation issues here.

Why the hurry? Is it to allow the City to raise the Parking ban? If so, the CCDD Proposal is not just a travesty on integrated City planning, it is dishonest. Nor will this Grant even cover expenses. I cannot believe that the Boston Fdn. or some other organization could not be persuaded to help fund a more intelligent and appropriate solution, one which would consider the interests of all the City's citizens, not just those of the cyclists who represent only 23% of the Common users.

What we do in January on the Common will remain with us for a long, long time. Our solution should be one that benefits all of us. Caving in to a few lawless transients bodes poorly for the future of democracy. Our decision should enhance both democracy and our historic Common, not destroy both

Sincerely, *Sheila G Cook*

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Consent Communication #32

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Communication ws received from Sheila G. Cook, transmitting her concern for the Cambridge Common remaining a multi purpose park.

In City Council December 15, 1997

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