

8

City of Cambridge

CIVIC UNITY

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Chair

Vice Mayor Henrietta Davis

Councillor E. Denise Simmons

In City Council June 9, 2003

The Civic Unity Committee held a public meeting on Wednesday, May 28, 2003 beginning at five o'clock and forty-five minutes P.M. in the Sullivan Chamber.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the community schools.

Present at the meeting was Councillor Marjorie C. Decker, Chair of the Committee, Councillor E. Denise Simmons, Mayor Michael A. Sullivan, Ellen Semonoff, Deputy Director of Human Services (DHSP), Eileen Keegan, Director, Community Schools, Louis DePasquale, Assistant City manager for Fiscal Affairs, David Kale, Budget Director and Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk.

Councillor Decker opened the meeting and stated the purpose. This meeting, she said, came about from the budget process. The City Manager has proposed to eliminate two positions from the Community Schools. Community Schools is a community-based program, she said. This meeting would better identify the role that the Community Schools plays in the city. Two schools are being closed and the programs that were in these schools need to be housed elsewhere.

Councillor Simmons stated that this is an opportunity for the city leaders, residents and neighborhoods to have on the record what people feel so that a decision can be made about Community Schools.

At this time Councillor Decker opened the meeting to public comment.

Marie Crowley, 53 Rindge Avenue, member of the Fitzgerald Neighborhood Council, stated that the Community Schools is housed at the St. John's Convent. After school and Cambridge programs are held at this site. The first pre-school program was started here. She spoke of all the different programs held from the ELS program to collaboration with the Arts Council. A subcommittee was also formed known as the "Friends of Gately".

Pat Daley, retired Community Schools Director, Fitzgerald School, stated that she has been involved with Community Schools for thirty years. She asked that these programs be saved for the neighborhood.

June Hites, 50 Haskell Street, stated that Community Schools has been a part of her life for seven years. Her children have been in the after school program and have attended

karate classes. She wanted Community Schools not disturbed. She urged the committee to save Community Schools.

Councillor Decker stated that she did not want the two Community Schools programs eliminated. Community Schools benefits neighborhoods; it builds strong neighborhoods. The City needs to anchor programs that foster neighborhoods.

Sharon Kenney, Community School Director at the Kennedy School stated that the Kennedy School is not supporting senior programs. Seniors programs have not been housed because the school has two programs so the seniors programs have gone to other locations. She expressed her hope that the senior program will return to the school.

Stephanie Sender supported the Peabody Community Schools program. All three of her children were involved in the program.

Daniel Debee, member of the Peabody Neighborhood Council, stated that he was a Harvard University student who volunteered at the after school program at Peabody. This program unifies the community. It provides a sense of community for both the Harvard University students and the Peabody students. Volunteerism, he said, would be shut down if the program were eliminated. He stated that he wanted the after school children to remain at the Peabody.

Clair Koen, 150 Webster Avenue, member of Wellington Neighborhood Council, stated that she could not imagine what the community would be like without a Community School. Seniors, she said, get exercise by walking to a spot in the community. Some seniors cannot travel to Central Square. She can find out when things are being done in the community, like renovations to Donnelly Field. This information is found out through the neighborhood council and Community Schools. People are brought together on many different aspects through the Community Schools program.

Deb Doucette, Tobin Neighborhood Council stated that the children of the city go to all different schools in Cambridge. Her daughter attends the Longfellow, but has an opportunity to return to the community school at the end of the day.

Amy Meltzer, 45 Antrim Street, stated that her children attended the Longfellow after school but went to the Cambridgeport School. There is more flexibility to have a program in the neighborhood. Community Schools is a separate entity of the Longfellow School. She has not heard any reason why the program should not be continued.

Carolyn Shipley, 15 Laurel Street, Graham and Parks Neighborhood Council, stated that the neighborhood councils brings to the city a sense of safety to the neighborhoods as well as brings the neighborhood together. The neighborhood councils and Community Schools actually saved the city money. She is asking to save the two community director positions and to save the programs in the city. Fees, she said, could be raised to pay for space for the programs. The fee structure should be reviewed. The neighborhood councils hold their programs in the parks.

Kevin Hill stated that he is glad the City Council wanted to save the Community Schools program in the city. The future of Community Schools is impacted due to the budgetary situation. He urged that these programs be kept because the programs are unique to Cambridge. If these programs are not funded there will be an effect on families due to the economic crisis. Keep doing what needs to be done for Cambridge, he said.

Judy Fu stated that she supported Community Schools. Her children benefited from the King Open School. She read a prepared statement.

George Fossier, 4 Antrim Street, stated that he was Longfellow Community Neighborhood Council member for twenty years. This has always been a neighborhood council. It is not a Community Schools; it is a program put on by the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. If the preschool is moved out there will be no children's program in the neighborhood. He urged continuation of the Longfellow Community Neighborhood Council.

Robert Winters, 366 Broadway, stated that the neighborhood councils do not need to be tied to school buildings. He is sympathetic with the position of the city manager. The Longfellow should be preserved during the transition period, he said. He suggested moving the school administration to the Longfellow building. The Thorndike Street site is leased yearly. Moving the administration to the Longfellow could save the lease fee. He did not agree with the position that it would be too difficult for the school administration to be moved. This move would be done after Labor Day, he said.

Maureen Carey, 3 Fayette Park, stated that she supported the Longfellow Community School. She has home schooled her children but has had access to the after school programs. The Longfellow is also a neighborhood center that provides access to baby sitting.

Paul J. Levine, 25 Antrim Street, stated that he has been a resident of Cambridge for seven years. His daughter attended Community Schools programs where she took music classes. The Community Schools program should be continued, he said. The program has value and it is cost effective. The City Council should protect this valuable program in the city.

Barbara Hayes, President, Fletcher/Maynard Neighborhood Council, stated that there is a proposal to move the preschool from the Longfellow to the Fletcher/Maynard. The Fletcher/Maynard cannot afford the displacement of Head Start to place a city program. She liked Mr. Winters' idea of moving the school administration. Needs must be met by the individual neighborhoods, she said.

Bob Binstock, 157 Hamilton Street, stated that it is a question as to what the Community School and the neighborhood council would do in the city now. He wants his program to continue. The programs are needed now more than ever, he said. The Graham Parks

School is a vital part of the neighborhood. The last thing the neighborhood needed is to take away the school. He urged retrofitting Linnaean Street.

Dennis Friedler stated that the city budget is \$341 million; \$33 million is in unrestricted reserve; the property tax was increased and the commercial tax was decreased. Fostering community is a goal of the City Council and the city administration. Cambridgeport and Mid Cambridge neighborhoods are underserved. When the Cambridgeport building was closed there was an increase in crime. There has been an increase in housing in the area with a decrease in services and resources.

Bob Richards, 76 Antrim Street, stated that he is a sixty-year resident. His four children attended Longfellow. He chaired the Longfellow Neighborhood Council. He wanted the City Council to urge the City Manager to put back the funding in the budget for Community Schools. He wanted the entire neighborhood council budget restored. He suggested using the left side of the Longfellow building to continue the programs in the neighborhood. The neighborhood council programs bring all the children back to the Longfellow, all public, private and home-schooled children.

Wendy Squires, Peabody Neighborhood Council, stated that she was a member of the neighborhood council for many years. She stated that so much could be made better. Three schools have lights on at night because there are Community School programs going on in the buildings. These programs offer a safety net for children. She urged keeping the neighborhood council and the Community School programs going to keep all residents feeling safe.

Michelle Borden, 46 Reed Street, member of the King Neighborhood Council, stated that the neighborhood is not closing. Residents still need the programs, the director and funding. Children still need enrichment and programming. The director cannot be taken away from the community. Churches, she said, could help in the interim with the programs.

Decia Goodwin, 175 Chestnut Street, urged restoring the Community Schools budget to current level, but do better things. There would be more back up resources as more moving is done around the city. Information should be available in a database and needs to be better publicized.

Ruth Walsh, 7 Fayette Park, Longfellow Neighborhood Council, stated that she was a member for twelve years. There are 1100 children in Mid Cambridge. The community does not want an empty school building in the neighborhood. There is more need now, she said.

At six o'clock and fifty-five minutes p. m. public comment ended.

Councillor Decker stated that Community Schools means different things for different people. She stated that two director positions and programs were eliminated in the budget. The City Council could send the budget back to the City Manager. The goal of

this meeting was to hear the impact of the elimination from the residents. The City Council will need support from the residents on this issue.

Councillor Simmons stated that the comment from residents reminded her of the breadth and depth of what the Community Schools does in the city. It is not a childcare program; it is a program that offers neighborhood programs. A conversation is needed to strengthen and enhance the Community Schools program. There is no other program that has the breadth and depth of services of this program, she said. This effort will require work on all sides to continue this program that has built community. The Human Services Committee has also discussed Community Schools, but primarily the issue of space.

At this time Councillor Decker informed the audience that she would be submitting an order to the City Manager at the June 2, 2003 City Council meeting requesting that funding and positions be restored to the budget for Community Schools, space be provided for the programs and an evaluation of the scope of Community Schools be undertaken.

Councillor Decker asked Ms. Semonoff, Ms. Keegan and Ms. Shipley to come forward to give their comments. She asked Ms. Keegan to state her concerns both short and long term.

Ms. Keegan thanked all nine neighborhood council representatives. Two programs are impacted but nine councils saw this as an important issue to come to this meeting. Some neighborhoods have focused their comments on seniors, adults and families; this is not a mistake. Community Schools is not a one size fits all. One of the fee-program distributes surveys to parents every twelve weeks. She would welcome an evaluation of the Community Schools program but felt that the feedback of the users is paramount to the evaluation. There are partnerships with agencies, such as the Y and the Kid's Council. The staff is committed; resources are small, she said. She welcomed an opportunity this year for an evaluation. She urged including the neighborhood councils in the program shaping.

Councillor Decker stated that Community Schools is seen as a school program and should not be eliminated. This is a policy decision to not have Community Schools be a school-based program. A discussion is needed about Community Schools, she said. She asked that Ms. Keegan and Ms. Shipley be included in the decision regarding the space issues. She wanted the community to be least impacted.

Ms. Semonoff thanked all neighborhood council representatives who attended this meeting. Human Services Department will work to accomplish the best outcome possible.

Ms. Shipley stated that there is no equality or justice within the city budget to eliminate a program for children. Any chief financial officer would look at Community School numbers and would see that Community Schools is handling a large number of people for

the least amount of money. She would not cut a profitable program. Childcare programs were not closed in the two schools that were closed so she does not see the logic in this decision.

In conclusion Councillor Decker stated that she would work with the City Manager to appoint a task force to work on these issues. She would be happy to look at the City budget to see where other areas could be cut, not Community Schools. There are no ill intentions on this matter, she said. However, there is a difference of opinions. The City Council cannot make decisions as to who can keep their job under Plan E form of government. The City Council's role is to create public policy and to build strong communities. The elimination of two positions in Community Schools is a policy matter in her opinion.

Councillor Decker thanked those present for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at seven o'clock and twenty-four minutes p. m.

For the Committee,


Councillor Marjorie C. Decker
Chair by 

SS-208

Committee Report #8

A communication was received from
Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk,
transmitting a report
from Councillor Marjorie C. Decker,
Chair of the Civic Unity Committee,
for a meeting held on May
28, 2003 to discuss the community
schools.

In City Council June 9, 2003

**REPORT ACCEPTED.
PLACED ON FILE.**