

re 5/5 at meeting

651 Green Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
May 5, 2003

To the Honorable, the Cambridge City Council:

In the City Manager's report #3, the Manager states the city can't afford to install equipment to televise Planning Board meetings at a reopened 57 Inman Street. Compared to the \$231,000-\$331,000 the city will pay to remove dirt at the MDC's Magazine Beach and replace it with other dirt, any expenditure to televise Planning Board meetings has to be exceedingly minor, and, unlike the wanton destruction of wetlands there, would actually yield a public benefit, as do the televised sessions of the City Council.

It is difficult to see why the Manager chooses not to allow that. It is no secret that Board responds to the Manager and his staff in the Development Department rather than residents concerned with critical issues of development and the quality of life here. It is common knowledge the Board is the Manager's tool, and the Council has certainly laughed at one joke about his complete control of it.

It is also common knowledge the Board has contempt for the public. Some Board members, knowing how little our opinions matter, are visibly irritated at our presence. Ordinary citizens, knowing how little their work and opinions matter, have left the Board's hearings vowing not to return to waste any more time. Councillors who listen to Public Comment know how members of the public tell them, in the bitterest terms, examples of the Board's (and CDD staff's) utter cynicism.

Why would the Manager care if a larger public witnessed, for example, the Planning Board meeting tomorrow, May 5? At it, the Board is set to grant special permits for a theater/office development at Zero Arrow Street. Its Draft Decision, dated 04/10/03, presages a breathtaking example of favoritism, illegality, and design double-talk. The Draft likens the proposed "first-class performing arts theater and office building" to St. Paul's and the Old Cambridge Baptist Church, hence nothing new for the neighborhood. It massages the applicant's submitted Dimensional Form, the better to grant relief from on-site parking requirements. The Decision will allow the project to inject 100 cars into this overwhelmingly residential area, just when rush hour traffic tapers off, and again late at night when theatergoers, cast and crew leave. It finds the two interior loading docks required in the building for sets, office deliveries, and rubbish collections "inappropriate," "a permanent defacement of either of the building's façades." It admits the loading docks are necessary and their lack "disruptive," but asserts that without them the project is nevertheless "less disruptive to neighbors than virtually any other likely use of the site," including housing (of which there is none).

What would the Manager, or the Board, lose if such a decision were televised? Surely the modest sum to do so would be a wise investment, no less so than televising Council meetings, and for the same reasons. Although the Cambridge Planning Board is not elected, as in Brookline or Lexington, its decisions possibly have a greater effect on Cambridge citizens than the decisions of the City Council itself, our elected officials. If it is within the Council's power to fund this item, please do so.

Yours sincerely,

Marilyn Wellons

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Agenda #3



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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May 5, 2003

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report # 03-45, regarding the feasibility of televising Planning Board hearings and incorporating television broadcast equipment and capacity into the new building at 57 Inman Street, please be advised of the following:

The large conference room planned for the second floor of the renovated City Hall Annex at 57 Inman Street will accommodate 35-50 persons (depending on how the room is laid out). Conducting live broadcasts from this room will require a system and process similar to the one that the Cable Department operates at the City Hall production facility, where it broadcasts City Council meetings.

The costs of the equipment and staffing necessary to accomplish this request are not able to be included in the budget.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy".

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec

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Consent Agenda #3

Awaiting Report Item No. 03-43,
regarding the feasibility of televising
Planning Board hearings and
incorporating television broadcast
equipment and capacity into the new
building at 57 Inman Street.

In City Council May 5, 2003

**REFERRED TO CABLE TV,
TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND
PUBLIC UTILITIES
COMMITTEE ON MOTION OF
COUNCILLOR MURPHY.**

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