

This Fax is for The City Councilors

From: Rebecca Shrigley Hall, resident of Cambridge, 868-0014
Subject: Bicycles on the Common

I understand that the process I and others participated in, solutions to conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians on the Common, is being threatened. If you interfere with the process you, yourselves set up to work through this conflict, I, for one, will not trust your sincerity enough to offer my time and caring for another city committee. It is totally irresponsible to encourage consensus and deliberation on any issue, come to conclusions, appropriate money and then bail out. As you can tell, I am extremely disappointed.

498 Green Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02139
April 10, 1997

Henrietta Davis
Cambridge City Council
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Dear Councillor Davis:

I cannot attend the meeting this evening regarding bicycling on the Cambridge Common, due to prior commitments. Please accept these comments as testimony on the subject.

As a member of the Pedestrian Committee, I was on the subcommittee that worked on the plan for renovation of the Cambridge Common. We considered the various options for reducing pedestrian-bicycle conflict. We decided that banning bike riding in the Common is not even a viable solution unless the city is prepared to dedicate the resources to provide effective policing throughout the day on a regular basis. We thought that bicycles could be routed around the common if the city were willing to eliminate a lot of the parking spaces around the common to make way for live bicycle traffic, but that the city council probably would not take this step. We studied maps for alternative routing of bikes.

The plan that was drawn up was the one that we thought best for managing the problem of pedestrian-bicycle conflict within the common. I thought the City Council had already accepted that plan when you approved funding for the design.

I want to register my continued support for this plan and want it to go forward. Unless the city council is willing to eliminate many parking spaces in order to accommodate bike routes bypassing the Common, I don't understand the basis upon which you are reconsidering your decision at this late date. And I hope the council is careful not to jeopardize the funding for a project that will enhance our use and enjoyment of the Common.

Thank you for the opportunity to register my thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,

Tom Reisz
Chair, Cambridge Pedestrian Committee

City of Cambridge

The Traffic and Transportation Committee held a public meeting on Thursday, April 10, 1997 at five o'clock and twenty-five minutes p. m. in the Sullivan Chamber.

Present at the meeting were: Councillor Henrietta Davis, Chair of the committee; Councillors Francis Duehay, Michael Sullivan, Katherine Triantafillou, Vice Mayor Born; Donna P. Lopez; Deputy City Clerk; Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager; Susan Schlesinger, Assistant City Manager for Community Development; Rosalie Anders, Susanne Rasmussen and Cara Seiderman, Environmental and Transportation Planning Division of the Community Development Department; Sue Clippinger, Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation; Lauren Preston, Deputy Director, Traffic, Parking and Transportation; Lieutenant Steve Williams and Sergeant Paul Sugrue from the Police Department and Charles Sullivan, Historical Commission.

Councillor Davis opened the meeting by stating that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the issue of bicycle riding on the Cambridge Common.

The committee heard from Mr. Rossi, Deputy City Manager, who stated that the discussion was to clarify what was being proposed. He stated that there was an appropriation of \$50,000 in the Capital Fund Budget which would be used to hire a project designer who would help the city create a plan for improved pedestrian enhancement and bicycle facilities throughout the Common. He emphasized that the \$50,000 expenditure would provide the city leverage for a \$500,000 grant from Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) funding.

The committee heard from Ms. Schlesinger, Assistant City Manager for Community Development who stated that if the city intends to go forward with the project the state needs to know as soon as possible. There is a lot of competition for the state funding. She stated that the Cambridge Common Ad Hoc Committee was comprised of members from the Pedestrian Committee, Bicycle Committee, Committee on Public Planting, representatives from Harvard University and the Office of Tourism. This committee reported recommendations to the City Council to accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists on the Cambridge Common and to improve landscaping. She stated that even if the City Council banned bicycles on the Common there still would be bikes ridden on the Common.

Mr. Rossi stated that individual City Councillors have asked whether or not they could have another public review of the plan after the \$50,000 was expended. He recommended that if the city expended the \$50,000 it should be clear that the city intended to move forward with the project.

Vice Mayor Born questioned the original process. Ms. Schlesinger responded that the plan received unanimous consent, but when the report was received by the City Council there was not unanimous support for this plan.

Vice Mayor Born asked if the City Council could stop this process. Councillor Duehay stated that the City Council could stop bicycles from riding on the Cambridge Common through the ordinance process.

City of Cambridge

- 2 -

At this time Mayor Russell stated that she is opposed to bicycles on the Cambridge Common.

A question arose regarding the committee. Ms. Seiderman stated that the committee was formed at the request of the City Council to work on a plan.

Councillor Duehay stated that the Cambridge Common is too small to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians. The Common should be a pedestrian oriented place, he said. He stated that many people he has spoken to have been hurt by bicyclists on the Common. Councillor Duehay stated that he is willing to review the plan, but he is not willing to say that he would approve it and the money may have to be sent back to the state. He stated that he has gone on record trying to get bicyclists off of the Cambridge Common. He stated that there is not enough enforcement being done.

Councillor Davis read communications received from Tom Reisz and Rebecca Shrigley Hall into the record. (ATTACHMENTS A & B).

The committee heard from Astrid Dodds, 73 Wendell Street, member of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee, who stated that she did not think the city could just legalize bicycle riding on the Common and call it a day. Bicycle riding on the Common must to be reviewed with the city wide bicycle riding process, she stated. She stated that there are no signs in Harvard Square indicating that bicycle riding on the sidewalk was prohibited.

Councillor Duehay stated that if the city does nothing, bicycle riding will occur on the Common. Asking bicyclists to go slow on the Common is a foolish idea, he said. It would be easier to have a city-wide ban, he said.

Councillor Sullivan inquired if Harvard University would be educating the students about bicycle riding in the Cambridge Common because many of the bike riders on the Common are Harvard students. The committee heard from Mary Power, Director of Community Affairs, from the Government and Community Affairs Office of Harvard University, who stated that she was a member of the Pedestrian Advisory Committee and understands the importance of education. She informed the committee that Harvard University would be involved with the education of the students. Lieutenant William Donaldson, Harvard University Police Department, informed the committee that the Harvard University Police have worked with the Cambridge police and will communicate to the Harvard community so that they will know that these ordinances are in effect in Cambridge.

City of Cambridge

- 3 -

Councillor Duehay asked why shouldn't the Cambridge Common be a pedestrian friendly place when the Harvard Yard is a pedestrian friendly place. Lieutenant Donaldson stated that it is only the old Harvard Yard where bicycle riding is not allowed.

Councillor Sullivan stated that there have been rumors that the students will be giving false names if they are stopped. Lieutenant Donaldson stated that the students will be informed that they are to follow the motor vehicle laws and if they fail to give their true name they may be subject to arrest.

Councillor Duehay stated that May is not a good time to start a new policy because that is when the students take exams. The city should start the new policy in the fall, he stated. Lieutenant Donaldson stated that Harvard would be starting the implementation process in mid April. In the fall, he stated, the freshmen would be introduced to this system. Harvard University would make a good faith effort to reach the students, but Harvard has summer students in June, he stated.

Ms. Schlesinger stated that the plan should contain elements that allow both pedestrians and bicycle riders the use of the pathways in the Common in a safe manner and that different pavement material could be used to achieve the goals of safety for both. Councillor Sullivan stated that the use of speed bumps could be in violation of ADA regulations.

The committee heard from Charles Sullivan who stated that the Historical Commission had a hearing and agreed to support the proposal as long as the historical aspects of the Common are preserved. The Common he stated was in the Old Cambridge Historic District and a Certificate of Appropriateness must be issued by the Historical Commission. He stated that it has been twenty years since the Common was renovated and there has been a deterioration of the paths and the turf.

The committee heard from Doug Willen, 183 Spring Street, Bicycle Committee member, who stated that it is not safe to go around the Common on bikes. Councillor Duehay agreed that this is an area that is unsafe. Mr. Willen asked if the City Council would be willing to reduce the number of vehicle lanes around Harvard Square. Councillor Duehay stated that he would be willing to look at this issue but that the traffic in this area is always congested. Mr. Willen stated that if the lanes on Massachusetts Avenue were reduced the use of Massachusetts Avenue would also be reduced. Councillor Duehay stated that the traffic in Harvard Square is unbearable now and reducing the lanes would drive people to public transportation.

The committee heard from Michael Halle, Chair of the Bicycle Committee, who stated that all concerned want to be sure the plan will work. He stated that the city looks to citizens groups to provide advice and the Ad Hoc Committee looks to the city staff to implement the plans. He further stated that the city should now make sure that the plan works and not move backwards. He urged continuation of the process.

City of Cambridge

- 4 -

Councillor Davis asked if this process would maintain citizen involvement. Ms. Schlesinger responded that the process has ongoing citizen involvement.

Councillor Duehay stated that there might not be a solution when the design people finish the process. He stated he would like to look at the plan, but the city cannot have the plan without spending the money for the design. Mr. Rossi stated that the plan requires that the pedestrian and bicyclists be accommodated and landscaping improvements along the bicycle paths would be made in the Common.

Councillor Duehay asked if the money could be used to have bicycle lanes around the Common. Ms. Seiderman responded that the project requires that pedestrians and bicyclist be accommodated on the Common. If bicycle lanes were proposed the project would have to be resubmitted.

The committee heard from Jane Marston, 1170 Massachusetts Avenue, Bicycle Committee member, who stated that bicyclists will still go through the Cambridge Common even if there is a ban because of the traffic pattern in the area. She stated that it is not just students, this is an area where bicyclists really want to go. Ms. Marston stated that the grant specifies a design as a way to reduce the conflicts between the pedestrians and the bicyclists. Councillor Duehay stated that he is not sure this is possible. Ms. Marston stated that just banning bicycles will not help pedestrians because bicycle riders will go through the Common unless a police officer is stationed at the Common. Councillor Duehay stated he does not agree.

Vice Mayor Born stated that the city needs to be pragmatic about this issue. It will be difficult to completely ban bicycles from the Common which is an open place with no permanent staff unlike the Harvard Yard.

Councillor Triantafillou stated that she is opposed to a ban of bicycles on the Common. She stated that riding a bicycle along the Common is dangerous. If the city made this area safer, she said, bicycle riders would not ride on the Common. She stated that there is no way to get from one part of the city to the other safely on a bicycle through Harvard Square. She further stated that maybe there should be more police in the area and if the area were designed better maybe it would work.

The committee heard from Ted Hamann, 106 Holworthy Street, who stated that the intent of the ISTE grant is to make a reasonable accommodation for a variety of modes of travel.

City of Cambridge

- 5 -

The committee heard from Walter Willett, 72 Chestnut Street, Bicycle Committee member, who stated that pedestrians should be able to stroll through the Common with bicyclists using the Common as well.

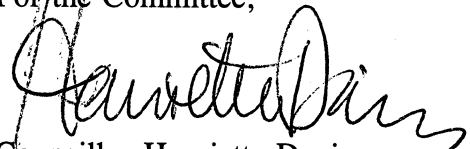
Vice Mayor Born stated that she does not want to meddle with the process. The \$50,000 is to hire a design consultant. Mr. Rossi stated that it will be an open process and will be advertised. Ms. Schlesinger stated that the city would work with the consultant and the public will be notified of the public hearings that would be held at various stages in the process. In response to a question by Vice Mayor Born, Ms. Schlesinger stated that there are seven proposals.

Vice Mayor Born stated that the client is the city departments and the Ad Hoc Committee who is acting for the people. She stated that she would prefer to entrust the decisions to the committee and city staff.

Mr. Rossi stated that he has confidence in the process. He stated that the city will move cautiously. The meetings will be advertised and held at various stages of the design. He stated that the Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee are connected to what is happening.

The hearing adjourned at seven o'clock and five minutes p. m.

For the Committee,


Councillor Henrietta Davis
Chair

A report was received from the
Traffic and Transportation Committee,
for a meeting held on April 10, 1997
for the purpose of discussing the
issue of bicycle riding on the
Cambridge Common.

In City Council April 28, 1997

Report accepted,
Placed on file.
Councillor Durbay
and Mayor Russell
opposed to bikes
in Common.