

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

Tel. 876-6800

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

JOHN H. CORCORAN  
City Manager

ROBERT J. LEBLANC  
Assistant to the City Manager

March 13, 1972

The Honorable, the City Council  
City Hall  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The Honorable, the School Committee  
1700 Cambridge Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Councillors and School Committeemen:

I am in receipt of an Order adopted by the School Committee on February 16, 1972 which reads in part -

"That the School Committee endorse the program of the Task Force on School Overcrowding, CEOC North Cambridge Planning Team, and to adopt their recommendation 'That as an immediate response to the overcrowding crisis at the M. E. Fitzgerald School, the School Committee recommends that the City Manager appropriate sufficient funds to build a prefabricated structure in the area of Russell Field to serve as a K-3 feeder school for the M. E. Fitzgerald School District; . . . . ."

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Pursuant to those two Orders, I have reviewed the report of the Task Force on School Overcrowding of the CEOC North Cambridge Planning Team and a letter from Paul F. Mahoney, Master of the M. E. Fitzgerald School, addressed to Mrs. Barbara Ackermann, Chairman of the Cambridge School Committee dated February 18, 1972, which suggests a redistricting study. I have met with representatives of the Task Force, with Mr. Paul Mahoney, have inspected the Notre Dame de Pitie School, and have reviewed the overcrowding problem in North Cambridge with the Director of Planning and Development who was responsible for the preparation of the "Elementary School Building Study".

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The essential facts of the situation are as follows. The Fitzgerald School is severely overcrowded with the result that rooms intended for certain specialized classes, such as remedial reading and music, have been converted to regular classroom use. The lack of space has impeded the development of departmentalized instruction in the school and the desirable pupil-teacher ratio has been exceeded in a number of rooms.

There are currently about 820 children located in the M. E. Fitzgerald building; the kindergarten, with an enrollment of about 115, is located in four rooms at the Notre Dame de Pitie School. In addition, 60 students in the Follow-Through program are currently bussed to newly opened Tobin School and about 79 children from the Rindge Towers Apartments are bussed to the Agassiz School. There are currently about 1075 children in the Fitzgerald district. Upon completion of the third Rindge Tower apartment building, perhaps an additional 25 children of elementary school age can be anticipated.

Thus there will be about 1100 children in the M. E. Fitzgerald School district who should attend that school. The building currently has a theoretical design capacity of about 778. If special facilities, either not now in the building or inadequately provided, were furnished by converting existing classrooms to that use, the theoretical design capacity would be 700 pupils. Since the theoretical design capacity assumes that each class is occupied by exactly 20, 25, or 30 pupils, depending upon the grade of instruction, some allowance must be made for the uneven distribution of children among classes and the scheduling requirements of the building. Using a figure of 90 per cent utilization, the effective capacity of the M. E. Fitzgerald School should be 630 pupils to provide the desired educational program. Thus we would seem to be deficient in space for about 470 pupils.

Building a new school in North Cambridge does not offer a solution to the immediate overcrowding problem. As a practical matter, at least four years are needed to choose a site, acquire the land, relocate the existing occupants (if any), prepare architectural plans, construct and equip a new building. The earliest a new school could be ready would be the fall of 1976.

In addition to those essential facts, there are other important current developments.

1. Closing of Notre Dame de Pitie High School -- Within the last few days an announcement was made that the high school part of the Notre Dame School would not be reopened in September 1972. The elementary grades are currently being phased out and in the fall of 1972, only grades 6, 7 and 8 will still be in operation; in the following year only grades 7 and 8 will be in operation, etc.

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\*Not including pupils now bussed from outside district.

As the information above indicates there is a substantial increase in the capacity of the school facilities in the City. I feel the School Committee and the School Department have an obligation to achieve a high degree of utilization of these expensive new facilities.

After completion of these three buildings, the projected design capacity for public school buildings in grades K-8 (not including classrooms for special classes) will be 8,423; there are currently 7,091 pupils enrolled in grades k-8.

I understand that a program of realigning the school district boundary lines is currently being prepared. I trust that program will address itself to achieving a high degree of utilization of our school buildings, and particularly of our three new schools.

<u>School</u>	<u>Current Design Capacity</u>	<u>March 1972 Enrollment</u>
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Total	3,180	2,328
Utilization Factor(90%)	2,862	

a. Children bussed from Rindge Towers

b. Follow-Through Program bussed from Fitzgerald district

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3. Space available in West Cambridge -- The Tobin, one of the three new schools, is adjacent to the Fitzgerald district.

As shown in the table on the preceding page, I think that with the use of Notre Dame School, there will be sufficient space in the districts adjacent to the Fitzgerald district to accommodate all of the children in West and North Cambridge with an adjustment of the district boundary lines.

I am aware that several housing developments now under construction will affect the enrollments in these districts in the next school year. In addition to the third Rindge Tower mentioned above there is the Walden Square housing and the development by John Briston Sullivan on Garden Street both of which have a large number of units attractive to families with children. The Huron Towers project in the Haggerty School district is a high-rise building comparable to the Rindge Towers.

It is difficult to predict how many children of elementary school age will reside in these new housing developments. It is a practical impossibility to predict how many families will move into these new housing developments from within the above mentioned school districts, thus producing no net change in the enrollment, or who will occupy the existing housing from which families will move into the new housing. I am further aware that a number of children now in parochial school or private school may transfer to the Tobin School in its first full year of operation, but those numbers cannot be predicted. We have no choice except to see what develops.

Two proposed housing developments with a large number of apartments attractive to families with children were included in the enrollment projections for 1972 and 1973 contained in the Elementary School Building Study. Neither project, the Blair Pond housing in Cambridge Highlands or Harvard's Shady Hill housing proposal, has begun and there is doubt as to whether either development will be built. In any event, they would not affect the elementary schools for at least two years.

Based on all the information submitted to me, I have concluded that the construction of a temporary prefabricated school would be an unnecessarily large expenditure of money in view of the other alternatives that are available. The estimated cost of \$500,000 would have an effect of about \$1.50 on the 1972 tax rate. With the assumption that arrangements can be made for the use of the Notre Dame de Pitie School, I am confident that by adjustments in the school boundaries among the Fitzgerald, Lincoln, Peabody, Agassiz and Tobin districts, that a satisfactory solution to the current problem of overcrowding at the Fitzgerald School can be developed.

I am aware that there is great anxiety among a number of parents that a redistricting program implies wholesale bussing of children. If bussing were necessary, the use of the brand new facility at Tobin should be a compensating factor. Nevertheless, the above mentioned school buildings are all within reasonable distance of each other, and it should not be too great a problem to delineate a new set of district boundaries in which practically all of the

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Therefore, I am referring the Order of February 22, 1972 back to the School Committee for these reasons:

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2. The large expenditure incurred by the tax payers of Cambridge for the construction of three new elementary schools dictates that a high degree of utilization of those three schools and of all schools in the City be achieved.
3. I am prepared to enter into arrangements with the Notre Dame de Pitie Church to expand our present arrangements to lease 13 classrooms for the school year starting in the fall of 1972, expanding to all 16 rooms in the building as they become available, until such time as a permanent solution to the overcrowding problem in North Cambridge is developed.
4. I request the School Department and the School Committee thoroughly investigate the feasibility of realigning the existing school district boundary lines to relieve the overcrowding situation.
5. We need wait to see what develops from the Walden Square and Garden Street housing developments, particularly as to the number of new children and the reduction of enrollments in other schools due to the moving of families within the City.

In sum, as far as the temporary solution is concerned, I do not feel that the proposed expenditure of \$1/2 million or more has been sufficiently justified, nor have other possible alternatives been fully examined.

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I recognize the solution outlined above is temporary and that in all likelihood, we will need to build a new school in North Cambridge.

The data on enrollment outlined above indicates there are about 470 children in the Fitzgerald District whom we should not attempt to accommodate in the existing Fitzgerald Building. Having been personally involved in the construction of the eight-room addition to the Fitzgerald School erected in 1964, I know that addition is designed to be structurally capable of an additional eight rooms on top of the existing wing. The potential for space for as many as 240 additional pupils still does not seem to solve the problem. Secondly, it would boost the design capacity of the school to 940-1,020, depending on the conversion of existing classrooms to special facilities. I am led to believe that the presence of 240 additional children may overtax the capacity of the cafeteria and other special facilities. A building of that size would then be the largest elementary school in Cambridge. Further, whether a building of that size is desirable for the elementary school age group is an educational question on which the School Committee will have to make the judgment.

I note that the orders passed by the School Committee call for the Neighborhood Task Force, in conjunction with the Planning and Development Department, to submit a recommendation on the location of a new school in North Cambridge which will provide a permanent solution to the overcrowding problem. Bearing in mind the long time period required to reach an agreement on a site, to acquire property and relocate the present occupants if need be, and to initiate and complete construction, I support the prompt start of such an investigation and am prepared to submit to the City Council a request for a modest amount of dollars to retain such technical experts as may be needed.

Nevertheless, I would like to restate several of the points I made in my letter to the School Committee of November 22, 1971, relative to new school building activity.

1. I have been in receipt over the last several months of several orders from the School Committee calling for the immediate appointment of an architect for: a) the construction of a new school in North Cambridge, b) a new school to replace the Fletcher School, and c) to proceed with the rehabilitation-reconstruction of the high schools. I would estimate the cost of these three projects to be at least \$30,000,000.
2. We are presently nearing completion on the construction of three new elementary schools costing in excess of \$16 million and are still paying bonds and interest on four recently constructed elementary schools costing a total of \$9,500,000. I do not feel that the taxpayers of this City should be asked to take on the burden of a new \$30 million school building program while we are still completing the existing \$26 million program.

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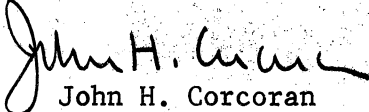
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3. As a result of the extraordinary effort made by Cambridge in the last fifteen years, about 75% of the students in the elementary grades can be housed in modern educational facilities, an achievement which I feel is unequalled by any other city in the country comparable in size or circumstances to Cambridge.
4. Even though it could be reasonably argued that the City of Cambridge has spent, and is committed to spend, an extraordinary amount on school construction, and that a moratorium on new school construction is warranted until some of the City's other pressing capital needs are satisfied, I have indicated, that I will go forward on further school construction projects if they are reasonable in scope relative to the City's other major spending needs.
5. There is simply too much money at stake and too many interconnected problems to deal with school building needs in a piece meal, individual fashion; they must be part of a well-conceived building program that identifies needs according to priority. It will be my policy not to respond to individual requests for school building projects which are not in the context of a comprehensive program. It will be my policy to deal only with the number one priority project, and when that is under way, to then deal with the number two priority and so forth.

Therefore, with respect to the construction of a new school in North Cambridge, I would want to be assured that such a building is justified as part of a comprehensive program covering each elementary school in the City. I am most interested that such a comprehensive program achieve a high degree of utilization of our existing school facilities and particularly our expensive new buildings.

If, as part of a comprehensive City-wide program, the School Committee decides that a new school building in North Cambridge is required, I will act on that matter according to its place on a priority listing of the school building projects throughout the City.

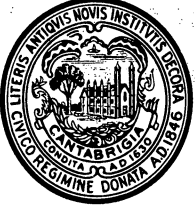
Respectfully submitted,

  
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JHC/rab/b

Copies to:

North Cambridge Task Force on  
School Overcrowding  
School Department



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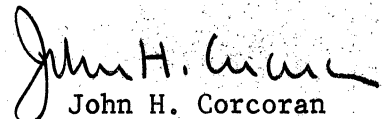
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