



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

To Mr. James L. Sullivan
City Manager

Date May 2, 1974

From William J. Cremins
Chief of Fire Department

Reference

Subject Council Order #18 dated April 8, 1974, re: Outbreak of Multiple Alarm Fires. Manager's letter of April 17, 1974

Sir:

It must be remembered that any large rash of fires in the City of Cambridge is not too unusual. According to National Fire Protection Association statistics, the Cambridge Fire Department ranks at the top in responses per 1000 capita in Cities of over 50,000 population.

Although we have had a great number of multiple alarms this year (1974), it is the same as this period last year (1973). It is a busier period than the same period in 1972 but the same period in 1971 showed the greatest number of multiple alarms.

Number of alarms has been increasing by approximately 7½% in most recent years for at least the last 10 years. No one single pattern of fires seems to predominate. No doubt some are arson, prompted by financial reasons as well as reasons of revenge. Some are a pattern of theft, followed by severe vandalism and finished off by arson. Some are the result of pyromaniacs and others by mischievousness. In the East Cambridge area some serious fires and other attempted fires have been as a result of youths with evidently a large assortment of railroad flares available. Many are the result of carelessness, defective wiring and an assortment of other causes.

It does not come as any great surprise that we are having more fires and I believe that this rate will progressively increase.

Cambridge has not been selective as to what types of business comes into the City and the Fire Department has no input in this regard. For example, a business moved into a building at Mass. Avenue and Day Street. Previously they attempted to move into Arlington but were refused by the Fire Chief there because of a background check. After being in Cambridge a short time a serious fire of suspicious origin occurred on January 30, 1974 which resulted in the loss of the building and now the loss of taxable property there.

The Triple A Plastics Fire on Valentine Street, February, 1973. This business was moved from a sprinklered building in East Cambridge and allowed to move into a non-sprinklered building without the knowledge or advice of the Fire Department resulting in loss of building and loss of taxable property. Even after this, there were those who were still trying to locate them in Cambridge.

Many fires that might be held to minor damage, spread rapidly because of building renovations that do not take into consideration the means to restrict fires. This occurs in all types of structures in which the fire department has no jurisdiction. This is particularly true in blocks of stores, commonly called "Taypayers". Ceilings are lowered, sometimes several times. Fire resistive partitions between the stores is often lacking as are fire stops. A common cockloft, or a common cellar without adequate fire resistive protection allows a fire to spread rapidly in a few minutes, thus engulfing the entire property or the fire spreads into the area of multiple ceilings where it is almost impossible to reach. This type of construction and this type of building renovation should not be allowed, but it is.

Cambridge has also become a microcosm so that the old family type of a community is fading. People of all types and temperments are moving in. Communal living is commonplace. With it, the candle has regained its prominence, with an increase in fires as a result.

High rise buildings have resulted in an increase number of fire calls. In the future we can expect serious fires with a potential large loss of life in these high rise buildings that are constructed without sprinkler protection.

It is shocking to think that hospitals have been constructed in recent years in this city with inadequate fire protection. Where codes have sometimes called for proper protection, variances have been allowed to circumvent them. In other areas where interpretation of the code would provide proper protection, the code has been interpreted otherwise, in spite of my vigorous protests.

As I have said many times before this lack of built-in fire protection in high rise buildings not only is a serious threat to life, but will eventually require the City to provide more manpower, equipment, fire stations, fire apparatus, etc., at an added expense to the tax payer.

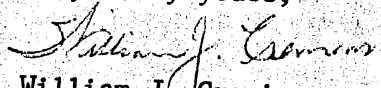
The sum total is that the City of Cambridge is extremely vulnerable to serious fires and authorities within the City seem bent on making it more vulnerable.

It is however, my opinion, that arson is on the increase not only in Cambridge but also at least in the greater Boston and North Shore area. I would recommend an Arson Squad composed of policemen and fire fighters but under the jurisdiction of the fire department.

The reason for this is that the office of the Fire Marshal does not appear to have the necessary manpower to adequately cover the Commonwealth.

As far as the result of the Marshals investigation into the fire at Gorham and Museum Streets, it is a policy of the Marshal not to forward the result of such fires to the Fire Chiefs. However, I am requesting such a report from his office and will keep you informed of the result.

Very truly yours,


William J. Cremins
Chief of Fire Department



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
INTEROFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

To Mr. James L. Sullivan
City Manager

Date May 5, 1974

From Chief William J. Cremins
Fire Department

Reference

Subject

Council Order #18 dated April 8, 1974
Cause of Fire - Gorham and Museum Street 11/6/73

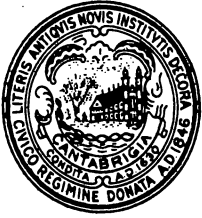
This correspondence is an extension of my partly completed report dated May 2, 1974 relative to the above subject.

I have just received the report from the Marshal's Office and the cause of this fire and four other fires which occurred after midnight on the same night is "Indendiary by person or persons unknown. Case open".

One of these other fires was underway on Scott Street, very close by, at 3:54 A.M. and was a working fire. Just 6 minutes later at 4:00 A.M., Box 614, Gorham and Hammond Street, came in. It was a very windy night and all fire buildings were involved with fire on the arrival of the first fire apparatus. This neighborhood is very congested and the fact that under some adverse conditions the fire was confined to and not allowed to spread out of those 5 buildings is a credit to the Cambridge Fire Department.

Also referring to my May 2nd report, I would report that the presence of so many old and vacant buildings left standing for long periods has been another reason for the increased fire rate.

William J. Cremins,
Chief of Fire Department



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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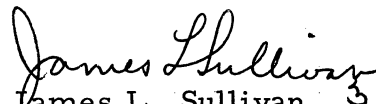
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
JAMES L. SULLIVAN
City Manager

May 6, 1974

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I transmit herewith a communication from William J. Cremins,
Chief of the Cambridge Fire Department, relative to Council Order #18,
dated April 8, 1974, re: Outbreak of Multiple Alarm Fires.

Very truly yours,


James L. Sullivan
City Manager

JLS/f

Agenda #14

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Communication from Chief Cremins
re: Order No. 18 - Multiple Alarm
Fires

5/6/74

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