

CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT  
CAMBRIDGE ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL  
54 HUNTINGTON STREET  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139  
LEONARD SOLD, ED. D., MASTER  
492-8000

October 11, 1977

TO: Buildings Subcommittee, Cambridge School Committee  
FR: C.A.P.S. Building Committee  
RE: A Permanent Facility for C.A.P.S.

We would like the School Committee to consider a permanent site for the CAPS program as soon as possible. The reasons for this request are:

- (1) CAPS is eligible for 75% funding for a new or renovated building because we are a "magnet school". Clearly, without CAPS, several Cambridge schools would be racially imbalanced.

At this point, we are most interested in renovating a building instead of new construction. Roughly, the renovation of the building that most interests us would cost about \$1.7 million, of which Cambridge would only have to pay \$430,000. But this cost would be entirely offset because of a variety of factors.

**WE ARE SAYING THAT THE COST OF A NEW SITE FOR CAPS WOULD BE ENTIRELY OFFSET!**

- (2) This may be the last year for Chapter 636 funding for magnet school construction. Hence, there is a need to act fairly quickly.
- (3) The current building that houses CAPS (St. Mary's Elementary School) is terribly inadequate. It is old and in bad physical condition. It is not a flexible building, and does not really fit the needs of a flexible, open classroom program. If the criteria used in Mr. Brown's study of elementary school facilities were used on the current CAPS building, we would clearly come out on top as the neediest school.
- (4) Additionally, it seems clear that St. Mary's Parish will be closing their high school after this year. They will then need to rent or sell their buildings and we could see the current building sold out from under us.
- (5) Finally, we pay rent money that over a period of years would more than pay the city's part of a renovated building for CAPS. Rent money is clearly money down the drain.

What we propose is a CAPS program, K-8, that would serve from 280 to 300 students (including those from the Open School at King starting at the 5th or 6th grade). We propose purchasing the St. Mary's High School

building to house our program. That building is large enough for us, can easily be renovated to fit our needs, is centrally located, and is in a neighborhood that we like. We have spent two years examining possible sites and we think this is the best place for CAPS.

Please refer to the two attached reports on cost factors and a building analysis for more details.

We hope these and the previous materials we submitted will help to persuade you that the decision to establish a permanent site for CAPS would be a sound, good decision.

We are not unmindful that other Cambridge schools need to be renovated--the Roberts, Agassiz, Haggerty, etc.--and that these schools have been around much longer than CAPS and, therefore, deserve to be renovated first. We, too, think these other buildings should be renovated. But, because of the reasons advanced above, we think CAPS should be placed with the first group of schools to be renovated.

## COST FACTORS

We are assuming CAPS to be a K-8 school of approximately 300 children, with one hundred in grades K-4 and two hundred in grades 5 through 8. The School Building Assistance Bureau guidelines allot 115 sf/child in elementary grades and 135 sf/child at the middle school level. This data yields the following square foot estimates for CAPS: K-4 with 100 children x 115 sf/child = 11,500 sf; grades 5-8 with 200 children x 135 sf/child = 27,000 sf for a total of 38,500 sf.

The site that most interests us at this time is St. Mary's High School. Currently, it has a basement plus 4 floors above grade. Each level contains about 7,000 square ft for a total of 35,000 sq. ft.

This is not enough to meet the requirements noted above; however, it had a fifth floor until a recent fire. That fifth floor could be again added to the building, giving a total of 6 floors and 42,000 square feet of space, which meets CAPS's needs and the State's requirements.

Assuming an acquisition cost of \$3.00/sf (\$129,000) and renovation cost of \$33.00/sf (\$1,419,000), the cost of acquisition and renovation would be \$1,548,000. Other fees (lawyers, architects, etc.) would add approximately 11% for a total cost of about \$1,718,000.

As a "magnet" school, CAPS is eligible for 75% funding from the SBAB. Thus, SBAB would provide \$1,288,500, with the city's share being only \$429,500.

With a 20 year bond at 5%, the cost to the city for the renovation plus the cost of the bond would be \$658,411 at the end of twenty years. (These calculations represent terms of a bond which are probably less favorable to Cambridge than that which the city can actually negotiate.)

CAPS is renting space from the Archdiocese at \$35,000 yearly. This rent has increased from \$33,000 a year ago and represents an increase of 5.7% per year. If CAPS were to continue to rent from the Church under the present arrangements, the cost in rent for the next twenty years would be approximately \$1,317,790.

Therefore, THE NET SAVINGS TO THE CITY OF ACQUIRING AND RENOVATING the St. Mary's school would be the rent saved (\$1,317,790) minus the cost of the bond (\$658,411). THIS EQUALS A SAVINGS TO THE CITY FOR THE COST OF HOUSING CAPS IN A NEW SITE OF \$659,380.

\*\* In addition, the School Department would then own real estate valued on today's dollar at approximately \$1,750,000.

## SITE SEARCH

The CAPS Building Search Committee over a period of about 2 years has done an extensive search for a permanent location for the school. This has involved existing buildings that could either be renovated or demolished, and vacant sites suitable for new construction.

We have looked at existing and vacant elementary school buildings, church property, warehouses, vacant lots, vacant buildings in housing projects throughout Cambridge. Each lead has proven unworkable.

One prospect was to house CAPS in 2 buildings at Washington Elms. Considerable interest was expressed by numerous city department heads. The SBAB had approved the concept and actually urged the Superintendent to submit a request for funds. The project was dropped when considerable opposition developed among CAPS's parents and residents of the Elms. Vacant Russell School, a source of conflicting interests, was dropped because it was too removed from the neighborhoods CAPS has been appealing to and because the politics involved in one group getting that building seemed insurmountable.

It has been suggested that we look at existing schools where declining enrollment exists with the idea in mind of sharing a space with a neighborhood school. Again, we felt the politics of this issue would not be easily resolved; indeed the politics of such an issue belong in the domain of the School Committee and not CAPS.

Our conclusion, supported by most of CAPS's staff and parents, is that the best location is the present one (or, more accurately, just next to the present one). St. Mary's is located in a neighborhood that favors CAPS, it is within easy access of Sennot Park and Central Square and public transportation, and it is centrally located. The St. Mary's facilities (elementary and high schools and the gym) have served the community for years. If these buildings are lost to the private market, they will no longer be available for educational and recreational purposes. The City should purchase these valuable facilities, make use of state renovation money and house CAPS and other educational and recreational services in them--central administration, a teen center, etc.



# City of Cambridge

IN CITY COUNCIL  
October 17, 1977

MAYOR VELLUCCI

**ORDERED:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to investigate the contents of the attached letter of the School Committee regarding a request of the CAPS School.

In City Council October 17, 1977  
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 9 members.  
Attest: Paul E. Healy, City Clerk

A true copy,

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul E. Healy".

Order #2 F-308

M. Vellucci re: request of the CAPS School.

In City Council,  
October 17, 1977

*MV*  
*A*

*Adopted - unanimous*

*A*