

City of Cambridge

The Special Committee on Relocation of CASPAR held a community meeting on Thursday, December 10, 1992 beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the Cambridge Y.W.C.A., 7 Temple Street.

Present at the meeting were Mayor Kenneth E. Reeves and the following members of the Committee: Councillor Jonathan S. Myers, Chair of the Committee; Councillor Sheila T. Russell; Councillor Alice K. Wolf; Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services; Greg Miller, Executive Director for CASPAR; Winn Poor, Director of CASPAR Emergency Shelter; Judge Lawrence Feloney, CASPAR Board of Directors; Cathy Hoffman, Chair of Ward Five Democratic Committee; Scott Levitan, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association; Gary Stiller, Central Square Neighborhood Coalition; Reverend Willard Williams, Central Square Clergy; Frances Werta, Ward Four Democratic Committee; Tony Ciccariello, Somerville Mayor's Office; and Ron Suduiko, Assistant to the President, M.I.T. Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr. was also present.

Councillor Myers convened the meeting at 7:40 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance. He noted that the Committee was initially appointed by Mayor Reeves and introduced Mayor Reeves. Mayor Reeves assured those present that the site selection is a very dynamic process and no final decision has been made. He commended the entire committee, and particularly Councillor Myers, for the hard work they have done on this issue.

Councillor Myers then made introductory remarks. He reminded the group that this is a fourteen year problem and read a motion that was presented to the Committee today by Judge Feloney, Board Member of CASPAR to table the issue of the location of 380 Green Street and actively consider the alternative sites. He introduced Judge Lawrence Feloney to discuss the motion.

Judge Feloney reported that this motion was the result of a meeting of the CASPAR Executive Committee. He noted that there is a great deal of opposition to the Green Street site and the Board decided to request the removal of the focus from Green Street to refocus on all five sites. He said that he had seldom seen a group working so hard despite their differences with each other.

Councillor Myers outlined the evening's agenda and then turned the meeting over to Jill Herold for a presentation on homelessness in the City of Cambridge. She noted that the homeless population is as diverse as the entire community and the most rapidly growing segment of the homeless population is families. It is difficult to estimate how many people are homeless; people cycle in and out of homelessness. In the 1990 census, a shelter census was done, a one-night survey. That number was 250 plus 33 visible on the street.

Over half of shelter residents are veteran, one quarter are employed. There are ten shelters in Cambridge located in Central and Harvard Squares. Supportive services are provided as well as shelter. Services include placement, day programs for shelters that are not open during the day and health care. Ms. Herold discussed the Health Care for the Homeless Program at Cambridge Hospital. She added that meals are another important part of the services and there are lunch and dinner meals seven days a week. In addition, there is a child care program. Ms. Herold emphasized that the overall goal is to move people out of shelters and into permanent housing.

Ms. Herold noted that there are also services for the particular population served by CASPAR. Councillor Myers then introduced Greg Miller and Winn Poor of CASPAR. Mr. Miller said 80% of the shelter guests are documented Cambridge residents with another 12% from Somerville. He then described the lives of some CASPAR shelter guests and the many problems and losses they have faced in their lives. He emphasized that people do recover from alcoholism and lives are made worthwhile again. CASPAR is a network of services with a range of programs, most located in Somerville. CASPAR's drug education program has a national reputation.

Councillor Myers opened the meeting to questions about the presentation.

Lawrence Sims, 27 Williams Street, said that he has been a resident of CASPAR's facilities and CASPAR has detoxed him twice but he does not believe that CASPAR belongs in Central Square.

Susan Angier, 65 Pleasant Street, said that she agrees that Central Square needs to be saved. She is tired of the abusive drunks in Central Square. She asked whether CASPAR talks to its residents about their behavior during the day.

Mary Ellen Gardner, 62 Western Avenue, asked whether CASPAR has a security force and do they have security problems.

Winn Poor, CASPAR, said that the shelter has an excellent day treatment program with counseling. All of the problem people in Central Square are not guests of the shelter. On occasion, there is a problem with behavior in the facility and police have had to be called. CASPAR has an excellent staff and does a good job minimizing security problems.

Ned Block, 12 Bigelow Street, requested that there be a discussion of the sites at this point in the meeting.

James Williamson, Perry Street, said that it is important not to lose sight of distinctions among homeless populations. He asked what efforts are being made to involve the guests in finding out what their desires are. Mr. Poor said that all of the guest are very concerned about losing Albany Street without having a permanent location.

Margaret Laurenson, 169 Albany Street, said that one of her concerns is the issue of tuberculosis. Mr. Poor said that a public health nurse comes every three months to test everyone at the shelter. In the last three years, 3 tested positive and they were transferred to Middlesex Hospital and treated. Greg Miller added that a new shelter would have space for a clinic and better ventilation. Ms. Herold said that currently, none of the Cambridge tuberculosis cases are persons living in shelters.

Councillor Wolf noted that with regard to persons in the shelters, there is a considerable medical screening. Not all people on the streets are in shelters. It is important to have the shelters to get this medical treatment.

John Clifford, 57 Aberdeen Avenue, co-owner of Green Street Grill, asked why CASPAR didn't inform the neighbors before they decided on the Green Street site. Greg Miller said that there has been a process, with community meetings, CASPAR is committed to working with the committee.

Salim Kabawat, Bishop Allen Drive, said that Cambridge has a limited budget. If this program is set up in Cambridge, it will bring in people from all over the Boston area. What is CASPAR doing to coordinate with other communities. Greg Miller said that 7 of CASPAR's 12 facilities are located in Somerville. He added that CASPAR is mandated to remain at 55 beds and philosophically believes in small programs, not large warehousings. There is a van that transports people to other shelters when the shelter reaches 55. Eighty percent of guests are documented Cambridge residents.

John Buster, 12 Lee Street, said there are no homeless shelters in Arlington, Newton or most of Middlesex County. Cambridge provides 30 beds per thousand people, most of them in Central Square. One area of town does not deserve the burden.

Gerald Bergman, 82 Elm Street, said he has concerns of the relation of Central Square to the neighborhood and asked whether CASPAR knows the number of non-English speaking residents and what CASPAR knows about the Central Square Neighborhood. Materials should be translated. This committee is being racist and classist. Greg Miller said that CASPAR has several persons of color on its staff and does try to reach out to multi-cultural communities.

Peter Scheinfeld, Lee Street, asked where CASPAR gets its figures that 80% of residents are from Cambridge. Mr. Poor said that guests are asked for identification. Mr. Scheinfeld said that eleven people registered to vote and gave Albany Street as an address. Six of them said their previous address was elsewhere.

Vickie Cassara, 287 River Street, asked why Somerville wasn't considered for a site. Greg Miller said the problem is in Central Square.

Kathleen Moralta, 118 Kinnaird Street, said that she is insulted to be informed about the homeless. This is a neighborhood that is hanging on by the skin of its teeth.

Richard Ross owns a business on Albany Street across from the shelter. He was apprehensive when his business moved there, but he has had no problems. CASPAR has been a good neighbor.

Peter Bruckner, 3 Williams Street, requested that the meeting move to alternative site discussion.

Milton Kramer, 10 Laurel Street, said if he were a homeless person, he wouldn't go to West Cambridge; he would go to Central Square. He disagrees with this "not in our backyard" approach. Central Square is our downtown.

Susan Montgomery Grant, Putnam Avenue, said she has two school age children who walk through the neighborhood. If there is going to be a discussion of alternative sites, that should have been discussed.

Pam Moss, Bigelow Street, said that she feels very badly that CASPAR is having to explain itself. If the committee had really heard the community's concerns, it would not be considering other sites in Central Square.

Councillor Wolf said that in the issue of placement of Central Square, there are two issues each with two points of view. One is the impact on Central Square. Some feel strongly it will make the situation worse; others believe it will improve the conditions. The second issue is whether the shelter must be accessible to Central Square. Her position is that CASPAR will have to be somewhere where it is not very close to residences. If other sites are considered, the committee will work with those residents.

Councillor Myers then moved to the agenda item of committee updates. Reverend Williams said that a major purpose for being here is to build community. Ron Suduiko, M.I.T., said that M.I.T. is committed to working together with concerned citizens to

find a permanent location for CASPAR and listed public benefits it has provided to the City of Cambridge. Gary Stiller described the visits to other wet shelters in the state by members of the committee. He said that his two visits showed him that the shelter does not need to be in the center of town.

Bill Cavellini, Brookline Street, said that in twenty years, he has never had to sit through a speech that the whole room did not want to hear to get what everyone did want to hear. He agrees that the committee is working hard.

Robert LaTremouille, 348 Franklin Street, said that the police station needs to expand and 380 Green Street is the rational place for that expansion. M.I.T. does not have a good record.

Gerald Bergman, Elm Street, asked M.I.T. about the Volvo site, and is it consistent with Mr. Suduiko's profession of good faith. Mr. Suduiko said the site was being used for vehicles on a temporary bases. Commercial development is planned for the site.

Gloria Beeks, 130 Harvard Street, said that one of the sites is right near Newtowne Court. Her neighbors now expect it will be at that site.

Jackie Carroll, Co-Chair, Neighborhood Four Coalition, stated that she has no doubt that the shelter will end up being proposed for Area Four, like so many other things have.

John Clifford, Aberdeen Avenue, said that M.I.T. should withdraw its agreement with the owner of 380 Green Street.

Michael Grover, Green Street, read from the letter to the Globe from Richard Brescia, Robert Healy and M.I.T. in the Sunday Globe. He disagrees that there is substantial support.

Louise Olson, 49 Hancock Street, asked Ron Suduiko to address the December 31 deadlines. Mr. Suduiko explained that as of December 31, the option expires and the owner could sell to another, but the property may still be available. He also described the RFP process.

Karen Larsen, 7 Austin Park, said that fourteen years ago, CASPAR had found a site but M.I.T. bought it when the right thing to do would have been to relinquish it to CASPAR. Many are tired of watching M.I.T. and Harvard buy all the viable land.

Chuck Wisner, 5 Pleasant Place, asked why we have the problems we have in Central Square. Perhaps the Central Square and CASPAR problems cannot be separated. The assumptions should be questioned.

Councillor Myers then moved to the issue of alternative sites and turned the discussion over to Councillor Russell who has chaired the search for alternative sites. Councillor Russell described the alternative sites: the corner of Binney and Broadway, the firehouse at the corner of Main and Dock Streets, the corner of Windsor and State Streets, the former Volvo dealership at Massachusetts Avenue and the former Danica furniture building on Sidney Street between Emily and Tudor Streets. She said that the Committee would be happy to hear about other sites.

Bob Boulrice, 20 Soden Street, Treasurer of Central Square Neighborhood Coalition, presented a petition with 1400 signatures opposing siting of CASPAR at 380 Green Street. He suggested criteria should be established. One should be a less dense, non-residential setting. Another should be adequate square footage for CASPAR. The Coalition applauds the conciliatory efforts that the committee has made.

Salim Kabawat, Bishop Allen Drive, spoke in opposition to all proposed sites being close to Central Square. The shelter could be put in an industrial area and have a van like Bridge Over Troubled Waters. Scott Levitan said that this issue is important to the Committee and needs more discussion.

Tom Weed, 14 Foster Street, said that the City Council should find a way to get CASPAR money so that it can find its own site.

Louise Olsen, 49 Hancock Street, said that many realtors, including her, would be willing to help. She described a facility in New York City that helps alcoholics who have to travel far to get there. It can be done.

Phil Weinberg, Perry Street, spoke in support of establishing siting criteria that people could comment on, separate from particular sites. He asked if the community takes the site, is there anything on the table that it gets back.

Martha Mooney, 118 Kinnaird Street, said that there was inconsistency in what the committee said about the difficulty of transporting people.

Kyle Gayle, 56 Hancock Street, said that those who live around Central Square have many unpleasant encounters with inebriated persons. The committee should look at other sites that are not in Central Square.

John Buster, Lee Street, said that only in the last twenty or thirty years has Central Square slid downhill. Central Square is very much like Porter Square but house values are less because of all the disadvantaged people.

Margaret Lauritson-Lada, 169 Auburn Street, said that she lives near the Danica site and the city has just completed a planning process for that area. The shelter is inconsistent with these plans. She would like to help work on siting criteria.

Gerald Bergman asked whether the shelter could be built on any of the street M.I.T. wishes to purchase.

Bill Cavellini, Brookline Street, said that the Green Street for streets deal is an abomination and disgrace. M.I.T. is evicting CASPAR and has a special responsibility to site and pay for CASPAR without getting anything in exchange. M.I.T. bought out from under CASPAR the site that CASPAR was considering and is responsible for CASPAR's loss of \$2.5 million of state funds. This fall, M.I.T. spent \$5 million in two months to buy property in Cambridge. CASPAR is a great program. The alternative sites should be examined.

Bet McArthur, 29 McGee Street, is concerned about the condition of the current shelter and suggests that the shelter move to the Volvo site on a temporary basis. She encourages the city to attend to enforcement of existing laws about selling alcohol to inebriated persons and drinking in public.

Karen Larsen, Austin Park, asked CASPAR to commit to going elsewhere.

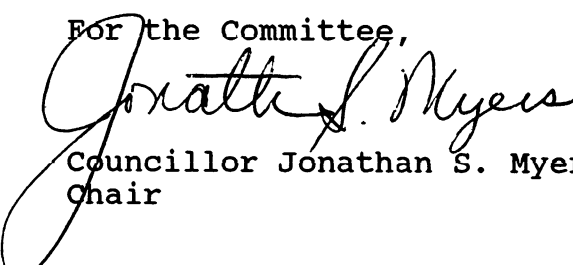
Jim Williamson, Perry Street, believes that the Volvo location is fine and the best of the sites presented.

Alan Steinart, CASPAR Board of Directors, said that CASPAR would take anyone of these sites with great pleasure. M.I.T. does not have an obligation to provide a shelter. The City of Cambridge may have a responsibility. Finally, there has to be a time limit. The conditions at the trailers are deplorable.

Councillor Myers thanked the public for attending and testifying. He said that the committee will consider the sites on the table carefully and will take back to the committee the concerns of residents of Central Square and discuss the appropriateness of siting CASPAR in Central Square or in other locations.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 p.m.

For the Committee,



Councillor Jonathan S. Myers
Chair

2.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Report from the Special Committee on the
CASPAR Relocation for a community meeting
held on Thursday, December 10, 1992 at
7:30 P. M. at the Y. W. C. A.

In City Council,

February 1, 1993

*Report Accepted
Placed on file*