

City of Cambridge

HUMAN SERVICES**COMMITTEE MEMBERS***Councillor E. Denise Simmons, Chair**Councillor Marjorie C. Decker**Councillor Anthony D. Galluccio*

In City Council June 9, 2003

The Human Services Committee held a public hearing on May 14, 2003, beginning at 8:10 a.m. in the Ackermann Room for the purpose of discussing what will happen to the afterschool programs in the schools that are closing due to the consolidation of eliminating schools.

Present at the hearing were Councillor E. Denise Simmons, Chair of the Committee, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present Robert W. Healy, City Manager, Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, Ellen Semonoff, Deputy Director of the Human Services Department (DHS), Nancy Walser, School Committee Member, Carolyn Turk, Interim Superintendent of Schools, James Maloney, Chief Operations Officer, Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), Judy Bibbins, DHS, Roslyn Shoy, DHS, Eileen Keegan, DHS, Jackie Neel, DHS, Carolyn Shipley, Community Schools, Susan Richards Scott, Agenda for Children, Mary Wong, Kids' Council, Maryann MacDonald, CPS, Jo Sullivan, CPS, Angie Cacciola, Director of Peabody Afterschool, Laura Sheffield, Laura Breneton, George Bossarte and John Pitkin.

Councillor Simmons convened the hearing and explained the purpose. She said that she wants the committee to look at the question of space and where there is space for all of these programs. She read a list of questions considered at the last Kids' Council meeting with regard to these programs.

Councillor Simmons pointed specifically to Community Schools, which were started with the idea of providing services to the neighborhoods in which they were located.

She invited Interim Superintendent Turk to begin. Ms. Turk said that programs in schools include Cambridge Public Schools programs, Department of Human Services programs, and other non-city programs. There are also evening and weekend programs. She said her staff is working on an inventory of all the programs. It is not complete, because the focus in last month has been on summer programs.

Councillor Simmons noted the issue of a conflict of school art programs with afterschool programs held in class. She invited comments from the DHS perspective.

Mr. Healy said that there are two pieces, Community Schools and childcare. With regard to Community Schools, the early retirements last fall left two vacancies for

Community Schools directors. The directors of the Community Schools programs in the two closing school buildings will move to fill those vacancies.

Regarding afterschool and space availability, Ms. Herold and Ms. Turk are continuing their discussion. The issue is complicated by the fact that the school enrollment figures are not and cannot be known at this time. Mr. Healy asked Ms. Herold to further explain the current situation and discussions.

Ms. Herold listed the affected programs in addition to the Community Schools programs: Longfellow Preschool, seventeen children; Graham and Parks School afterschool two classes with 24 children and the independent Peabody afterschool program, with 39 children. As Mr. Healy noted, they will not have final answers until they receive the enrollment figures for schools.

Councillor Simmons said that some choices are based on location. For example, a single working parent of Graham and Parks students, who are also enrolled in an afterschool at Graham and Parks and live in Central Square, if afterschool will be run at the Peabody, must now find a way to get her children home from across town at 5:00 p.m.

Ms. Herold said that there are many variables as to how these choices will be made. For instance, parents' location preference, parents' staff preference and the physical available space, and many others. It will really come down to assessing the needs and addressing as many as possible.

Mr. Healy added that all must recognize that there are not perfect solutions. The Morse and King schools will have programs and are in the same geographic area as the Graham and Parks School.

Ms. Simmons emphasized that she is not concerned with particular buildings, the replacement programs could be anywhere as long as they are on the same side of Cambridge, and not in North Cambridge. She asked if there are more programs than the space available for them, what will be the priority?

Ms. Turk said that as CPS completes the inventory, it would be good to include information about whether there is space available in each of the programs. Ms. Turk said that by the end of this month she will have the inventory completed. She said that there are two problems in creating an accurate inventory:

1. Accurately identifying existing programs
2. Being able to identify where the programs in the closing and moving schools will be located and if all can fit.

The second will not be fully resolved until mid – late June.

Councillor Simmons noted the problem of all the rumors about what will happen and the frantic activities of worried parents, especially in light of the rumors flying around.

Ms. Walser said that in the issue of where parents want their children afterschool, the same ambiguities arise as with the issue of neighborhood schools and choice. Especially as schools have become more concerned with achievement, the schools have more relationships, needs and programmatic involvement with the afterschools. Community Schools started as a community service, and has now become very much a part of school programming. She believes that if a school is moved, there is the need to bring the afterschool.

Councillor Simmons noted that this doesn't hold true for everyone. There are many parents who want their children in afterschool in the neighborhood. Also, Community Schools and afterschool have similarities but are not the same.

Ms. Walser said that if the DHS is operating Community Schools and childcare programs independently and separate from any school to which they were attached before the change, why would they not remain in the same place. The schools are moving but the buildings are still there.

Mr. Rossi said that there is an issue of different definitions – Community Schools means different things to different people. We need to be clear about whether programs are connected to the school or the neighborhood.

Councillor Simmons said that for her, Community Schools is more linked to the community. Seniors in neighborhoods farther away from senior centers depend upon the Community Schools activities and trips. Community Schools has programs for families and for all ages.

Ms. Herold stated that the Community Schools program is community-based and afterschools are in the schools. The relationship among staff reflects these connections. Community Schools and the afterschool programs have strong relationships. Community Schools has a relationship with the community. Afterschools have a strong relationship with the schools and Community Schools also has a relationship with the schools. Ms. Wong said that the Kids' Council is also addressing the issue and has drawn up a set of questions to assist in identifying and addressing the different needs.

Carolyn Shipley, Director of Community Schools, provided a brief history of Community Schools. Community Schools programs are programs of the neighborhood councils. It became convenient to house them in schools, but it was not considered essential to have the Community Schools programs located in the schools. Some Community Schools programs have been held in church halls. She sees that the current plan for Community Schools at the schools being closed will mean that neighborhoods in the heart of Cambridge will have no community programs. There should be space found in each neighborhood. The City will leave a big hole if no space is found for the

Community Schools programs have been held in church halls. She sees that the current plan for Community Schools at the schools being closed will mean that neighborhoods in the heart of Cambridge will have no community programs. There should be space found in each neighborhood. The City will leave a big hole if no space is found for the programming. The City should be looking at other spaces. Community Schools programs are neighborhood council programs. If they are not continued, the City is taking their votes away, disenfranchising the neighborhood residents.

Councillor Simmons summarized the next steps that have been discussed:

- 1) Inventory of all the programs that reside in school buildings and whether they have openings for additional childcare.
- 2) Mapping the neighborhood-based programs and programs for families that deliver programs within neighborhoods.
- 3) As noted by Mr. Rossi, there is a need for common language, common definitions.

Councillor Simmons then invited further comments from those in attendance.

Lauren Sheffield, 219 Brookline Street, said that she is a Graham and Parks parent and a member of the Graham and Parks Community Schools neighborhood council. She stated that she is most concerned that everyone involved in out-of-school programming really try to get together and communicate. There are only five weeks of school left. Parents need this information. Parents of young children see the director of Community Schools as a mother. There is also a need to look at the economic repercussions of where afterschools are located. The Graham and Parks School is not closing; it is moving. She is also concerned about how the renovations of the Peabody building will disrupt the summer programs and the school. Ms. Sheffield said that the consolidation plan asked a lot of parents and communities. Programs that are part of the perceived school programs should be seen as part of the whole.

Jose Wendell said that she is the parent of Peabody School children who attend Peabody Community Schools and afterschool. Both have very strong ties to the neighborhood. They should stay in the community. If Graham and Parks Community Schools integrates with the King Community School, there still will be proximity to the Cambridgeport neighborhood. It is very nerve-racking for her as a working parent to not know in May if she can keep her job in September due to school schedule changes. Parents choose afterschool programs based on location and the quality of programming.

Councillor Simmons reminded speakers to address comments to the chair. Testimony is not rebuttal. The purpose of the testimony is to collect as much information as possible so that the decisions can take all views into consideration.

Ms. Keegan said that the Community Schools program hopes to be able to offer opportunities for the part-time staff to move with these children to the Peabody site.

feel welcome. Thirty-six of thirty-nine kids in her program are affected by this change. So many parents ask her what will happen every day; she urged a quick decision.

Ms. MacDonald said that the school has a preliminary list of programs and will work with City staff to confirm the information. Mr. Healy said that school staff should talk to Ms. Turk and Ms. Turk will talk to Jill Herold.

Councillor Simmons emphasized that it is important to talk to the person with the information and proper authority. Principals do not have the authority to make a final decision. She is worried about the amount of misinformation that parents are receiving. She praised Ms. Neel's information session on Graham and Parks School.

Susan Richards Scott said that the Agenda for Children has been providing assistance/support to forty-seven programs, thirty City programs in school buildings, seven independent programs in schools and ten in community spaces. She has been working with these programs in clusters based on neighborhoods, and these clusters are trying to support each other.

John Pitkin, 17 Fayette Street, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association, said that neighborhood councils really are a partnership between the neighborhood and the City. The Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association wants to keep the neighborhood council active in the neighborhood and has some ideas on how to make it work.

Ms. Walser said that part of the ambiguity is that although the City says Community Schools are not linked to the schools in which they reside, they take the name of the school. The system is way too complicated for anyone to readily understand. It must be simplified. Her priority would be making sure that there is childcare available for all who need it. She has given up trying to get her children into the afterschool at their school. She is lucky that she has the flexibility to make other arrangements for them. The City should change the name of the Community Schools if they are not really attached to the schools.

Ms. Shipley said that there has long been confusion about Community Schools. Community Schools programs are enrichment programs, not childcare, but they are OST programs. They are a group of neighborhood children getting together for various reasons. The City has made a mistake to treat Community Schools programs the same as all the schools. Community Schools programs can be housed anywhere. She feels personally that it would not break the City's budget. Community Schools is cost effective.

Councillor Simmons thanked all those present for their attendance. It was agreed that the next meeting will be scheduled on May 28 at 8:30 A.M. It will be a working meeting, probably without public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 A.M.

For the Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Denise Simmons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "E." and last name "Simmons" clearly distinguishable.

Councillor E. Denise Simmons, Chair

S-206

Committee Report #6

A communication was received from
D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk,
transmitting a report
from Councillor E. Denise Simmons,
Chair of the Human Services
Committee, for a meeting held on
May 14, 2003 for the purpose
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**REPORT ACCEPTED.
PLACED ON FILE.**