



# City of Cambridge

36.

## IN CITY COUNCIL

June 25, 1979

COUNCILLOR DUEHAY

- ORDERED: That the City Council goes on record accepting the recommendations of the Lowell School Neighborhood and the City Manager is hereby authorized to lease the Lowell School to a non-profit educational organization and accept from that organization payment in lieu of taxes with the further provisions that the organization would maintain and keep up the building and make it available as the meeting place for the community, and be it further
- ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to appoint a Neighborhood Advisory Council to advise him on the tenant selection process and further that the City Manager advise the City Council on the results of this process, and be it further
- ORDERED: That temporary arrangements for the leasing of the Lowell School provide an adequate and reasonable time frame, and be it further
- ORDERED: That the City of Cambridge temporarily turn over the Lowell School Building to the Library Department or the Community Schools Program for preventive custody and maintenance until such time as the city, Lowell School Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Advisory Council reach an agreement on a permanent future use.

In City Council June 25, 1979.

Adopted as amended by a yeas and nays vote:-

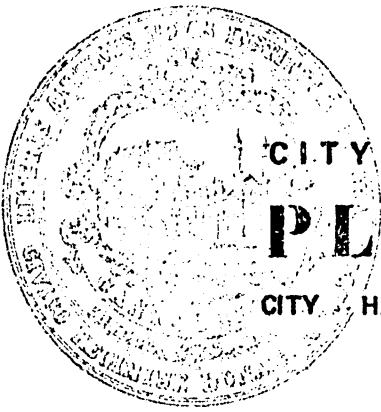
Yeas 8; Nays 0; Absent 1.

Attest:- Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

A true copy,

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paul E. Healy".



RECEIVED BY  
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
JUN 20 1979  
CITY HALL ANNEX, 57 INMAN STREET, CAMBRIDGE, MASS 02139

June 20, 1979

To the Honorable, the City Council

Re: Reuse of the Lowell School Site

Dear Councillors:

Under Cambridge Ordinance No. 733, the Planning Board is required to study and report to the City Council on the sale, lease or rental of City-owned land. The Planning Board has reviewed and evaluated options for the disposition and reuse of the Lowell School site at 25 Lowell Street.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Board recommends that the Lowell School site should be used for congregate elderly housing with at least some units assisted by public subsidies. Although the neighborhood clearly expressed support for a non-profit educational use, the Board feels that the need for innovative solutions to the housing problems for elderly citizens is too important to dismiss. Since the Housing Authority stated that it was not interested in developing the site for public elderly housing, the Board is suggesting that the site be used for private elderly housing instead, with a possibility for public assistance through subsidies for individual units. This is consistent with the City's ongoing Housing Assistance Plan, with the recent analysis of elderly housing need, and with this Board's recommendation for the reuse of the Russell School site.

The Planning Board supports the neighborhood consensus to retain the Lowell School building because of its importance to the community and its contribution to the streetscape. However, the Board feels that the reuse of the building for an innovative elderly housing arrangement is preferable to leasing or selling the structure to a nonprofit educational group as the neighborhood committee suggested.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PROCESS

An ad hoc group of area residents, the Lowell School neighborhood group, met almost weekly during March and April to discuss the reuse of the school site. These meetings were organized and run by the neighborhood residents and attended by a member of the Community Development Department staff. Several reuse options were discussed including open space, various types of housing and institutional uses. Early in the process the group decided that keeping the building, the only remaining wood frame school house in the city, was its first priority. The option for privately developed congregate elderly housing was presented at the neighborhood meetings by Unihab Renovate, Inc. Mount Auburn Hospital and the New School of Music made proposals for non-profit educational use of the school building. After considerable discussion, the neighborhood group voted to support a non-profit educational use.

June 20, 1979

THE HEARING (Excerpts from Planning Board minutes attached)

On May 15, 1979, the Planning Board held a public hearing to discuss the disposition and reuse of the Lowell School. Mr. Ernest Kirwan of the Neighborhood Ten Association opened the discussion with a presentation of the findings of several neighborhood meetings. He submitted a petition to the Board, signed by 440 residents of the area stating their support for: 1) preservation of the playground, 2) preservation of the school building to be used for non-profit educational purposes and 3) the formation of an advisory committee to assist the City in the tenant selection process.

Two organizations, the Mount Auburn Hospital and the New School of Music, have expressed interest in the building and representatives from both organizations made presentations at the hearing.

David Vickery of the Community Development Department explained that should the City Council decide on the educational use, the City would advertise to determine what organizations are interested in the building.

Councillor Francis Duehay, a resident of Lowell Street, stated that the wood-frame school building would be a fire hazard if left vacant.

Jerry Bergman of SCEOC stated that he had hoped the Housing Authority would attempt innovative elderly housing on the Lowell School site. However, as the CHA has not pursued this option, Mr. Bergman stated he would support an educational use.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the testimony presented at the Planning Board's hearing, the Board received materials from Unihab Renovate, Inc pertaining to the concept of congregate elderly housing. After considering the neighborhood's proposal and citywide housing issues, the Board decided to recommend a congregate housing scheme for the school building. The Board's recommendation was based on experience with institutional expansion in Cambridge neighborhoods, considerations of the specific structure and site, and an assessment of elderly housing needs.

In the past few years, the Planning Board has been responsive to neighborhood desires to curb the encroachment of institutional uses in predominantly residential neighborhoods. Among the most frequently cited concerns has been the increased traffic and activity generated by such uses. This is clearly an issue on Lowell Street which is a narrow residential street already congested by overflow parking for Mount Auburn Hospital. Another concern with the non-profit educational option is the question of financial reliability. It is likely that a comparison of potential users would depend on evidence of financial strength to insure a long-term tenancy including adequate maintenance and repairs to the structure. This could make it difficult for small non-profit organizations to compete with institutions like the Mount Auburn Hospital. The neighborhood has previously opposed expansion of the hospital in their residential community and received the city's support. Unfortunately, initial good intentions are too frequently transformed by future institutional needs or conditions.

The compatibility of the playground with the proposed uses was another concern raised by the neighborhood. The Board does not feel that the playground is any more compatible with the educational uses than with housing. Furthermore, potential purchasers of housing units will be able to consider the proximity of the play area when they think about buying there. A well-conceived design

for the conversion of the building into housing units would provide interior spaces away from the play area for residents who want quiet, and access to the public open space for residents who want to view and enjoy the activities there. In no case should public access to the play area be obstructed.

The Lowell School site is suitable for elderly housing. It has adequate access to public transportation which puts it within easy reach of the commercial services in Harvard Square. It is also within walking distance of Mount Auburn Hospital.

Congregate elderly housing is an innovative housing alternative currently nonexistent in Cambridge. Many surrounding communities, including Boston and Lexington, have successfully developed congregate elderly housing. Such developments not only provide needed housing for a segment of the population with special housing problems, but congregate arrangements have other benefits as well. Frequently such development frees up underutilized housing resources. Many elderly citizens continue to live in the homes of their child rearing years long after their families have gone elsewhere. In addition, congregate elderly housing can provide a new use for existing institutional, residential or other buildings which have outlived their original uses. Congregate elderly housing also provides an interdependent living arrangement for people who aren't totally self-sufficient, but who do not require nor desire nursing home care.

Although privately developed congregate elderly housing would probably not be accessible to many low income elderly people, there are many elderly people whose financial situation does not qualify them for public assistance but who do have considerable housing problems. According to the 1975 Mid-Decade Census, there are approximately 10,000 elderly\* individuals in the city. Within this group, there are 3700 elderly homeowners of which 2000 might qualify for public housing assistance because they spend more than 25% of their income on housing or because their homes are in deteriorated condition. Some of these people though and the remaining 1700 elderly homeowners would probably be able to afford private congregate housing if and when individual homeownership became too difficult for them. It is not possible to determine how many elderly tenants might also be able to take advantage of private market congregate housing.

The preferability of the congregate elderly housing option would be increased if it could provide assistance to low-income elderly. The Lowell School could be developed by a private developer with public subsidies from the Cambridge Housing Authority to allow low-income tenants access to some of the units. The Housing Authority has expressed a willingness to do this.

The reuse of the Lowell School for congregate elderly housing would provide an important human service not readily available in Cambridge now. It would use the existing building without generating a lot of traffic for the neighborhood. It would also provide tax revenue for the city.

\* Elderly, according to the Census, includes people aged 65 and over.

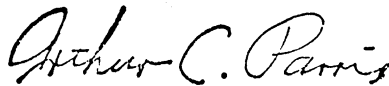
June 20, 1979

Leasing or selling the property to a non-profit educational institution would not use public property to fulfill public needs. Leasing would also leave the city as a landlord with a tenant of uncertain tenure. Among the difficulties of this arrangement is the possibility that the city might find it necessary to repeat this selection process in the near future. Although as an interim solution, the non-profit educational use would be acceptable, it is the Board's feeling that a long-term solution exists with the option for elderly housing.

In the past few months, there has been considerable discussion about elderly housing in Cambridge and in particular publicly-assisted elderly housing developed and managed by the Housing Authority. The City is in jeopardy of forfeiting 80 units of such housing because of opposition to site choices. The elderly housing need in Cambridge has been substantiated by census data, by the Housing Assistance Plan and by housing studies done by the Community Development Department, in particular the report on the impact of condominium conversion in the city. If new developments by the Housing Authority are going to be discouraged, then the city has a responsibility to encourage alternative means of fulfilling the housing needs of its citizens. The use of the Lowell School building for congregate elderly housing would reflect the city's commitment to innovative approaches to meeting the housing needs of the community.

Respectfully submitted,

For the Planning Board



Arthur C. Parris  
Chairman

ACP:jp

Lowell School Site Reuse

Mr. Ernest Kirwan of the Neighborhood Ten Association opened the discussion with a presentation of the findings of several neighborhood meetings. He submitted a petition to the Board, signed by 440 residents of the area, stating their support for: 1) preservation of the playground, 2) preservation of the school building to be used for non-profit educational purposes and 3) the formation of an advisory committee to assist the City in the tenant selection process.

The Lowell School neighborhood is seeking a stable educational organization, with a proven track record, to occupy the building. They prefer an organization that can easily handle the maintenance and heating costs of the building as well as generate enough income to make a substantial payment to the City in lieu of taxes.

Two organizations, the Mount Auburn Hospital and the New School of Music have expressed an interest in the building and have the financial qualifications the neighborhood is seeking. Representatives from both organizations made presentations to the Planning Board.

John Kowal - Mt. Auburn Hospital  
Wendy Fink

Mr. Kowal and Ms. Fink described the various educational programs that the hospital offers both to professionals and to the community. They would like to obtain the Lowell school for urgently needed classroom space in which to conduct these programs. No administrative functions would be transferred to the building. Mr. Kowal stated that the hospital would provide free parking or parking for a minimal fee in the hospital garage in order to alleviate traffic problems on Lowell Street.

Mr. Parris asked if there were any questions.

Q. What is the percentage of day vs. night classes?

A. 20% of the programs are held during the day, 80% are in the evening.

Mr. Kowal explained that individuals attending the professional programs during the day use the parking garage or take public transportation. He does not anticipate that this will change.

Q. What happened to the nursing program facilities?

A. That space is being used by several departments including personnel, public relations, nutrition and women's health.

Arthur Wallenstein - New School of Music  
Judy Noy

Ms. Noy informed the Planning Board that the New School of Music is a small, community music school, teaching both children and adults. Their present facilities are not adequate and they are looking for a new location. Their preliminary proposal calls for 1) maintenance of the exterior structure of the building, 2) payment in lieu of taxes, 3) parking restricted to the south side of the property, 4) neighborhood participation.

Q. What about the other arts?

A. The school is a music school, but it would make its performance hall available to other arts groups.

Q. Would you prefer to buy the property?

A. The school would be willing to discuss the possibility.

Q. Do you now have a non-profit status?

A. Yes.

Mr. Parris noted that the Housing Authority had not make a presentation of its plans for the Lowell School site. Mr. Weunschel of the CHA informed the Board that the CHA has not aggressively pursued the notion of elderly housing on this site due to its size. At most, 9 units could be constructed. The CHA feels that a project of this size may not be feasible.

Q. What other uses were considered for the building?

A. The Cambridge Center for Adult Education, the Arts Council, a library, a museum and Project, Inc. have all been considered.

Mr. Vickery explained that the Planning Board would make a recommendation to the City Council within the next few weeks. Should the Council decide on the educational use, the City will advertise to determine what organizations are interested in the building. The City will consider and encourage neighborhood participation in the Selection process.

At Mr. Woolsey's suggestion, Mr. Parris asked if anyone was opposed to the educational use option.

No one was opposed.

Councillor Francis Duehay - Lowell Street

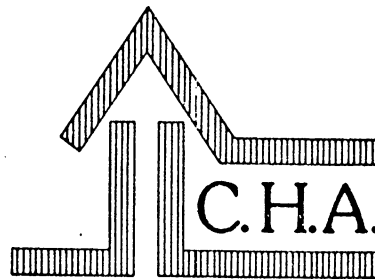
Councillor Duehay stated that the building will be vacated September 1st. He believes that the wood frame structure should not be left vacant as this would increase the possibility of fire.

Jerry Bergman - SCEOC

Mr. Bergman stated that he had hoped the CHA would attempt innovative elderly housing on the Lowell School site. However, as the CHA has abandoned the notion of housing on that site, Mr. Bergman stated that he would support the educational use scheme.

RECEIVED  
CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY

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C A M B R I D G E  
M A S S A C H U S E T T S  
02139  
(617) 864-3020

CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY  
DEVELOPMENT DEPT.

June 8, 1979

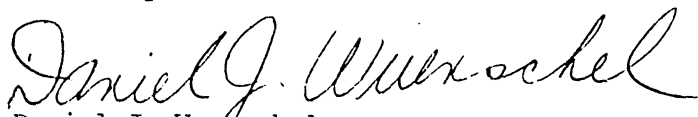
Mr. Arthur Parris, Chairperson  
Planning Board  
57 Inman Street  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Mr. Parris:

It has come to the attention of the Cambridge Housing Authority that the city's Planning Board has recommended that one alternative use for the Lowell School would be some sort of elderly congregate housing. The Housing Authority has been asked if it would be interested in supporting such elderly housing (presumably private) by subsidizing one or more units through leasing subsidies.

Provided that the various local approvals have been garnered, including that of the City Council, the Housing Authority would support such a use and would pursue subsidies under Chapter 707 or Section 8 in support of this use.

Sincerely,

  
Daniel J. Wuenschel  
Executive Director

DJW/mbh



S-385

24.

Comm. from Arthur C. Parris, Chairman of the  
Planning Board, transmitting report of the  
Planning Board re: reuse of the Lowell  
School site.

6/25/79 - Report  
Received - Placed  
on File

See order entered  
As introduced by  
In City Council,

June 25, 1979

Lawrence Dickey  
and

Approved by E. Kellner

P-0-1