

the Whistler

Newsletter of the Agassiz Neighborhood Council

October 2016

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ANC News

NOTES FROM THE SEPT. 13 MEETING

Update on Sacramento Field Renovations and Residents' Concerns

Continuing an ongoing discussion about proposed renovations to Sacramento Field, Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning with Cambridge Community Development, attended the September 13th ANC Meeting and provided an overview of the planning and community-input processes up to this point, as well as described recent updates. Additionally, Council members recounted organizing and research efforts that took place during summer 2016, and discussed two outstanding concerns: lighting and the currently unpaved walking path/track located within the field.

Background

Plans for Sacramento Field have been in the works for the past year and a half. Having secured funding from capital budgeting and the Community Preservation Act, the city initiated a park renovation process. Community meetings, with approximately 50 people in attendance at each, were held at the Maria L. Baldwin School in December 2015 and May 2016, as well as two city-hosted open houses at Alden Park

(“tot lot”) and Maud Morgan Arts, respectively, in June 2016. Additionally, the city staff and residents living near the field connected directly, and the city sent direct mailings.

With community input and under the direction of park designer Rob Steck, Cambridge Community Development (CDD) proposed features they believed represented both the community’s wishes and current design standards. Follow-up discussions covered a wide range of uses, needs, and neighbor and abutter concerns, including, among other items:

- Maria L. Baldwin School and childcare program use of the field: frequency, preferred play structures, and ease-of-access in terms of entering the field
- Creating safe and inviting entrances to the field, including working with Harvard University (owner of the property that includes The Guidance Center/ Riverside Community Care and a parking lot) to improve the existing entrance in the Guidance Center lot
- Engaging the Sacramento Street Community

NEXT ANC MONTHLY MEETING(S)



OCTOBER 2016

Maud Morgan Arts
20A Sacramento Street

Thursday, Oct. 13, 7:30 PM

- Special Meeting – Sacramento Field Update

Tuesday, Oct. 18, 7:30 PM

- Introduction to the Cambridge Residents for Responsible Elections group
- Neighborhood Visioning

Garden about installing a path along the garden's edge to improve access; acknowledging the disruption to the garden; and replacing displaced garden plots as well as making other improvements

- Ensuring that changes to the field won't negatively impact youth sports or the basketball court
- Adding features such as a water fountain, benches, community posting board, tables and chairs, and swings while also respecting a desire to keep the majority of the space a grassy playing field
- Piloting off-leash hours for dogs

Community Efforts

Prior to the summer, a Neighborhood Council working group sought advice from Mayor E. Denise Simmons. In July 2016, the working group met with city staff, including City Manager Richard Rossi, Asst. City Manager Lisa Peterson, Stuart Dash, Ellen Kokinda, Owen O'Riordan, and Iram Farooq about concerns around lighting, paving the path/track, programming, and the historic significance of Sacramento Field as a natural space.

Council working group members, who opposed increasing the amount of pavement within the field, cited that their research indicated Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) standards don't necessitate a paved path in the interior of Sacramento Field. They reported potential negative health and safety impacts, particularly for children, related to asphalt and spoke on retaining the field's 'untouched' appeal.



Following the summer meetings, CDD agreed to revise the toddler play area and consider how to reduce the potential impact of lighting in/around Sacramento Field.

Recent Design Updates

Mr. Dash provided the most recent design updates:

Lighting:

- Because the field is dawn to dusk, CDD wants to add enough lighting to support people entering/exiting and walking around the field at dusk
- This installation would be the first use of LEDs in a city park
- The quality of the lights is warmer than Cambridge's new LED street lamps
- The city believes the fixtures will throw very little light in the direction of houses
- CDD can alter the lighting as needed, with season-appropriate changes

"We're not looking to encourage activity," Mr. Dash reiterated. "Just make it feel safe for people."

Sacramento Field Tot Lot:

- Plans now include gates, a sand area, and toddler-appropriate play structure(s)

Paved Path/Track:

- CDD reviewed pathways in other parks and at Fresh Pond
- Earlier in the process, CDD looked into permeable track material. However, due to the soil type in the field, permeability is not a concern
- CDD is considering a rubberized surface for the proposed paved path/track. No final decision has been made

"People at the initial community meeting said they liked using the path at the perimeter, so we saw an opportunity to do something that's welcoming to the elderly, families with strollers—everyone in the community," explained Mr.

Dash. "From the disability point of view, accessibility is important, but we weren't looking for the path to be legally supported. The City believes it's important to plan for Universal Access, and we think more people would use Sacramento Field and the path/track if it was comfortable in all seasons and weather.

"Yes, I think there will be more activity in the field. We're trying to balance different issues, and we've seen outcomes where parks [like this one] sort of bloom."

Other Items:

- The city plans to add more native species to the plantings planned for the edges of the field
- The city plans to install a standard half-court and replace one of the current basketball hoops with a shorter one that can be lowered/raised
- The current permanent baseball backstop will be removed. (However, if desired, CDD may be able to provide a portable backstop)

Reactions to Field Renovation Plan Updates

Below is a selection representing a range of reactions expressed by residents, Council members (including the field-specific working group), and representatives from the Friends of the Baldwin School. Please be aware that the article's author has edited the quotes for clarity.

Taylor Milsal and Danny Hills, Garfield St. residents:

We polled the neighborhood and community, and found that more than 95% want the field to remain open. Neighbors worked together to collect hundreds of signatures and letters asking the city NOT to build the planned five-foot wide asphalt track. Together, we're committed and passionate about preserving this bespoke, historical property.

City officials promised to consider alternatives, however, as of now, there is no evidence that they are willing to make any changes to the

original plan, other than installing a one-inch-thick unidentified "rubber" on top of the asphalt pavement. We do not have any information about this type of product, or its durability, safety, and maintenance issues. In the past, parks have installed synthetic surfaces that were later found to be hazardous.

City officials are aware that under the Americans with Disabilities Act, an unpaved dirt path is acceptable. There are many examples of state and federal properties with dirt hiking and running trails.

Lighting: First, as background, during the August 4th meeting with community members, former City Manager Richard Rossi promised that the lights would be turned off after the city's standard park hours, dawn to dusk. Then at a follow-up meeting at City Hall, he revoked his promise, and stated that a new type of LED light on 14' poles will be installed. He said that neighbors could decide to turn the lights off after-hours, but when we asked how this process works, and how this decision is made, he did not provide any answers. We asked Stuart Dash the same question, (during the September 13th meeting), and he did not have any answers. We requested, at a minimum, that a written process for controlling the lights be approved prior to installation.

Commitments from city officials have all been verbal, and they make changes at-will without respecting our desire to participate in the process. We don't know what will happen when the next city manager is hired.

Resident:

"People might like a little light when coming home from work and walking dogs after dark. Dusk is a variable time around here. Sometimes it gets dark by 4:00 PM."

Molly Juhlin, Director of Children's Programs at Agassiz Baldwin Community:

"We serve 150 children every day and the field

is a big part of our active space. I'm excited that the path permits people with a limited mobility to use the whole field. The City has helped us and responded to our questions related to licensing. We hope that this process that doesn't get stalled."

A Baldwin School parent:

"The Baldwin School wants this plan to move forward. MA State law requires short recesses so one of the most important things for the school is the second entrance into the field, which would cut down on travel time. [Friends of the Baldwin School] is fairly agnostic about the path."

A parent and Agassiz resident:

"Our kids use the field to ride their bikes in the current iteration, as well as use it during school hours. The current field is quite usable and I speak in favor of its rustic charms. It seems that the fundamental contradiction regarding legality needs to be answered by an impartial observer."

Cynthia Smith, Crescent St. resident:

"A lot of good work has been done in the community around this field. It seems the design is really loved by people. The school seems to like and want the programming. What if CDD installed the footings, but didn't yet install the lights? Can the city start with a soft, stone-dust path? There are other granular path materials available, though there may be a bit of extra maintenance."

Mary Jo Clark, owner of a childcare service on Crescent St.:

"I think we need to have a path around the field. There used to be a stone dust path. It's just gotten smaller and smaller over the years."

A Council member:

"The people who use the field during the day have been heard; I think the abutters need to be heard. Communication is a large part of the problem. We especially need a process [that informs the community] when ideas and plans change."

Astrid Dodds, Agassiz resident:

"Putting in the capacity for lighting would permit future use. Also, I would like the path around the field so that I can walk on it. People who are mobility-impaired deserve access to the field and smooth surfaces without trip hazards. The field is not a backyard; it's a neighborhood park that's been under-utilized because it's a playing field and not very accessible to people who have mobility issues."

An abutter to Sacramento Field:

"Lights near windows might permit people to look into houses. Also, we don't want people in the park at night. We feel that the City's process hasn't been transparent."

A resident:

"There's a problem of trust. We don't think the city should start construction before people have seen the new design. We know that we'll need to compromise -it's a small field- but we don't have the information necessary to go forward. Lets stop the process until there are some basic things we agree on."

Conclusion

The discussion concluded with requests (below) from the Council and a final statement from Mr. Dash.

Requests:

- Please consider consolidating the lights. One example would be to remove the lighting planned for the new entrance path along the side of the garden since that area is well lit already by street lamps
- Some residents requested that the park be off-limits at night
- Some residents requested that basketball court be maintained so that people can play full-court games
- The Council requested that the city respond and report any changes back to the community

"Overall, the city expects the same kind of

activities to take place on the grassy field as do today,” Mr. Dash stated. “In general, the feedback has been positive. We’ve had an extensive process, an extensive extra process, and we’ll continue trying to achieve the best design possible. I’m still listening and the city is still listening.”

Q&A

Q: How large is the innermost section of the field?

A: Mr. Dash stated that the interior of the field is 32x55 yards. Some residents believe this number is unconfirmed.

Q: How tall are the light poles?

A: The light poles are fourteen feet tall.

Q: Can the city install a new gate on the Sacramento Place egress?

A: The city will look into that.

Q: Can the CDD make the agreed upon renovations, and then work on the items that are in dispute later?

A: The city won’t renovate just a portion of the park.

Q: Why do the lights need to be on after dusk? The field shouldn’t become a major cross through.

A: On the whole, lighting planned for the field is more refined than what the city was capable of in the past. The lights are intended to help people feel safe enough to walk but not encourage games. The plan to install

the lights, and begin using them at a dim level.

Q: In terms of abutters’ rights, will the city hear and respond to their requests?

A: We take abutters’ needs into consideration very strongly, but they aren’t determinant.

Next Steps

Mr. Dash will consult with the city staff, including the Department of Public Works, the Commission for Persons with Disabilities, the Lighting Commission, and other departments, relaying residents’ comments, concerns, and requests. The city’s response will be sent to Phoebe Sinclair, Community Liaison, who will share it by way of ANC’s communication channels.

Contact

Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning, at: sdash@cambridgema.gov, (617) 349-4640

Learn More

The Whistler, May 2016 and June-September 2016 editions: bit.ly/whistler-archives

Learn more at Cambridge Community Development:

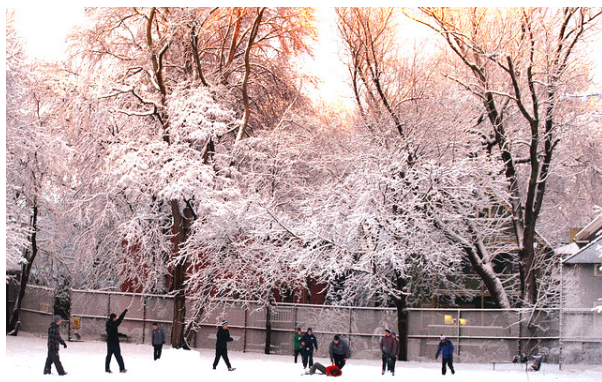
www.cambridgema.gov/sacramento/field
bit.ly/sac_field_map_102016

City Memos by Manager Richard Rossi:
June 9, 2016 Memo to City Council:
bit.ly/sac_field_memo

September 29, 2016 Update:
bit.ly/sac_field_update_rossi

Addendum

A special meeting to discuss community response to finalized plans for the field has been scheduled for Thursday, October 13th at 7:30 PM in Maud Morgan Arts. See page 1 of *The Whistler* for more information.





Community

ANNUAL THANKSGIVING POTLUCK FEAST - SAVE THE DATE & VOLUNTEER

Save the date for ABC's 45th Annual Thanksgiving Potluck Feast.



When: Tuesday, November 22, 5:30-7:30 PM

Where: Maria L. Baldwin School Dining Hall, 28 Sacramento St.

We welcome everyone from the neighborhood, Agassiz Baldwin Children's Programs, Living Well Network, Maud Morgan Arts, and Maria L. Baldwin School communities to come together for an evening of celebration, good company, and delicious food.

Volunteer

This November, help make Thanksgiving memorable by volunteering to cook a turkey or bringing a side dish ample enough for your family and a few more to share.

To learn more, contact Phoebe Sinclair at psinclair@agassiz.org or (617) 349-6287 x10.

NORTH MASS. AVE. ZONING OVER-LAY DISTRICT PASSED

Prepared by Peter Kroon, Neighborhood 9 Resident

The existing North Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District, which runs from just north of Porter Square up to just south of the Arlington line, was recently extended to include the parcels south of Porter Square that are zoned Business A-2 (roughly from Roseland St., excluding Lesley University's Lunder Art Center, south to Shepard/Wendell).

Here is what this zoning change accomplished for our surrounding MAPOCO (Mass. Ave. from Porter Sq. to Cambridge Common) neighborhoods:

1. The purpose statement of the overlay district was amended such that the #1 goal is to "protect and promote the retail and service ecosystem". Before now the zoning ordinance was silent on retail, whereas we neighbors care very much about fostering a vibrant retail street-scape.
2. It is now a requirement that there can be no ground floor parking except behind a minimum of a 40' required non-residential use (such as a retail or service establishment). This should effectively prevent a stilt building such as the proposed development so many of us were upset about last summer.
3. We should get more interesting building designs in the future because developers now have an incentive (in the form of "free" floor area ratio) to design buildings with bump-out features such as bay windows.
4. We should get more attractive ground floor retail spaces since the building heights may now be increased up to 5' (from the existing 45' limit to a maximum of 50') to the extent that the clear height of the ground floor space is increased to make the retail space more attractive.
5. Over time, we should get a widening of the sidewalks by up to 5' which will ease



pedestrian use including for people with strollers and those who are disabled, also for table seating for restaurants, benches, bike racks, trees, etc.

There were a number of other, lesser enhancements and fixes.

We stopped a particular project that proposed a half a parking space per dwelling unit, half the current standard, which if approved would have most likely flooded interior streets with overflow cars, and would have set a precedent such that all future new buildings would have wanted to do the same. The world may change in ten or twenty years, but for now we need/want to keep our neighborhoods livable, with parking for residents as we have today.

Numerous other projects are currently underway that conform to the current zoning requirement, so we are confident that this re-zoning will not in any way diminish the development of housing, including affordable housing.

We are grateful for the assistance of city officials, including Jeff Roberts, Iram Farooq, Stuart Dash, and Liza Paden.

The Planning Board led by Ted Cohen slowly warmed to our inchoate initial petition, and shaped it into something workable, and approved it unanimously, twice. We thank them.

The City Council passed it unanimously (Councillor Cheung was absent). We also had letters of support early on from Dennis Carlone, Marc McGovern and Craig Kelley, all of whom have some connection with our neighborhoods.

Charlie Sullivan and Sarah Burks of the Cambridge Historical Commission helped evaluate buildings that deserved special exemptions. We appreciate their time and attention.

The petition committee represented both sides of the Avenue and a variety of perspectives.

Bill King
Stephen Diamond
Dennis Carlone
Nicole Caplan
Frank Kramer
Rosemary Porter
Dominick Jones
Mike Bentley

Fred Meyer
Charlotte Moore
Allen Sayegh
Steven Beaucher
Peggy Kutcher
Robin Kelly
Ruth Ryals
Jo Ann Citron

If you want to register a suggestion for what MAPOCO neighbors should work on next, take this online survey: bit.ly/mapoco_survey_2016



Maud Morgan Arts

SPIRIT AWARDS 2016: A MAGICAL EVENT

On September 18th, guests at the Spirit Awards Benefit, our annual fundraiser for Maud Morgan Arts, enjoyed gorgeous artwork, sumptuous hors d'oeuvres and the smiling faces of friends. Thanks to our engaged and supportive community members, we raised over \$54,000 that will go directly to Maud Morgan Arts programs, outreach and scholarships.

We wish to thank Spirit Awards honorees Joe Moore and Wendy Prellwitz, our event co-chairs Fran Cronin and Sarah Wainwright, our hard-working volunteers, and our generous donors and sponsors for creating such a beautiful celebration of art.



Community Calendar

October 2016

Thursday, October 13	7:30-9:00 PM	ANC Special Meeting (see page 1 for agenda) Maud Morgan Arts, 20A Sacramento St., 2D Studio All are welcome, please join us!
Tuesday, October 18	7:30-9:00 PM	ANC Meeting (see page 1 for agenda) Maud Morgan Arts, 20A Sacramento St., 2D Studio All are welcome, please join us!
Wednesday, October 19	6:00-7:30 PM	ABC Board Meeting, 20 Sacramento St, 2nd Floor Public welcome
Saturday, October 29	10:00 AM-12:00 PM	Sacramento St. Preschool Open House, learn more at: bit.ly/preschool_open_house_2016

The Whistler is published monthly September - June by the Agassiz Baldwin Community, distribution 2,000. Call (617) 349-6287 to receive by mail or email. The newsletter is also posted each month online at www.agassiz.org. Items of interest to the neighborhood should be submitted for consideration no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication date.

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