

Riley, Kate

From: John Pitkin <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, January 3, 2020 4:38 PM
To: Riley, Kate
Cc: City Manager; Peterson, Lisa; Sara Mae Berman
Subject: Comment on Tobin School Project

Dear City Staff,

Please accept the following comment on open space in the Tobin School Project.

In 1962, as a new resident in Cambridge, one of us, Sara Mae, joined a committee looking into whether the amount of recreation space in our city was sufficient. A Mr. Hainsworth of the National Recreation Association was a consultant. As a new young member of the group, Sara Mae volunteered to serve as Secretary. She figured that was a good way to learn about the situation. One fact stuck with her---to this day: that our city had less than one-quarter of the nationally-recommended amount of park space for a city of our size.

Since then, Cambridge has continued to use park space on which to build its schools.

The Harrington (now many buildings) School on Donnelly Field, the newest additions sharply decreasing the park.

The Fitzgerald (now Peabody) School on Rindge Field.

The Kennedy (+Longfellow) School on Ahearn Field.

The Morse School on State owned open park land by Memorial Drive.

The (Houghton) ML King School on Putnam Ave. on part of a neighborhood park.

This continues an earlier habit:

The Longfellow School on Broadway was built on Harvard Park.

And there may be more.

Now Callahan Field, which has 3 ball fields, and other open space, is proposed to be consumed by a huge building complex, with little bits of space around the edges. This continues a very short-sighted planning approach---and must be completely reconsidered.

It's time we learn from Cambridge's record of treating parks and public open space as an expendable resource and avoid repeating this mistake on the Tobin School site. Quality open space provides benefits for the public and neighbors, including the kids. It's just as important for children's welfare and development as quality school buildings.

We need to get this project right, and the way to do this is through the right process and thoughtful planning. The project seems to be headed to the Planning Board for a Special Permit or variance because of the proposed reduction of open space on the lot under all three options. This review should happen as early as possible in the process. The Planning Board not only is responsible for decisions about the development of public open space but is uniquely qualified and has the tools to evaluate critical planning issues such as the quality of open space and project siting.

The Cambridge Zoning Ordinance (Sec. 5.54.2) specifically calls for the Planning Board to "make a determination that the Proposed Recreational Open Space shall provide benefits to the public that are at least commensurate with the existing Public Open Space on the lot," before allowing any reduction in the quantity of public open space on the lot.

The Zoning Ordinance (Sec. 4.25) also requires the Planning Board to receive and evaluate "An analysis of alternative sites for the development outside of the district."

The finding of the Planning Board on the quality of replacement open space will be directly relevant to the Home Rule petition to the State Legislature that will be needed for relief from the provisions of Article 97 which protects 5 acres of the site. To get the TMVLUS project right, the City should refer the plans to the Planning Board for review and approval of open space issues *before* filing this Home Rule petition.

Our experience with the City's Article 97 Home Rule Petition for another project (the Inman Square Redesign, in 2018) is that the State will not independently evaluate the quality not quantity of replacement open space but instead accepts the accuracy of information and evaluations provided with the City's application. In other words, the Article 97 process requires a formal approval but does not provide for a substantive review of open space impacts by any State agency or committee of the Legislature. Once this State process is completed, the Planning Board's ability to require consideration of alternatives that truly maintain the quantity and quality of public open space will be greatly impaired.

Cambridge is decimating its park space, because it already "owns" the land. What we really needs to consider is what the lack of open park space does to the quality of life for our citizens of all ages.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sara Mae Berman
Cambridge School Committee 1976-1984



John Pitkin

