

MEETING

**ROUNDTABLE MEETING  
Graffiti**

DATE

September 30, 2002  
5:40 P.M.

PRESIDING  
OFFICER

Mayor Sullivan

PRESENT

Mayor Sullivan, Vice Mayor Davis, Councillors Davis, Decker, Maher, Murphy, Reeves, Simmons and Toomey  
Also present were City Clerk D. Margaret Drury, Deputy City Clerk Donna P. Lopez, and Sandra Albano City Council Assistant

City Administrative Staff present: Robert W. Healy, City Manager, Commissioner of Public Works Lisa Peterson, Police Commissioner Ronnie Watson, Police Superintendent David Degou, Police Lieutenant Michael Walsh, First Assistant City Solicitor Nancy Glowka, Julia Bowden, Assistant to the City Manager, Mary Ellen Carvello, Administrative Assistant to the City Manager, Robert Angelo, Department of Public Works.

See attached summary of discussion points

AJOURNMENT

6:50 P.M., on motion of Councillor Murphy

## Summary of Discussion and Issues Raised

Roundtable meetings of the City Council are informal meetings held six to eight times per year pursuant to Rule. No votes are taken at these meetings. No matter may be finally considered. The meetings are preliminary information and policy discussions of particular issues that are of concern to the members of the Council. The record of roundtable discussions consists of brief notations of the issues that were raised and any requests for further information or follow-up that were made.

The meeting began at 5:40 p.m. City Manager Robert W. Healy and Police Commissioner Ronnie Watson distributed written material on the subject. The distributions included the following:

- ?? A report entitled "Anti-graffiti Program Plan Components,"
- ?? A list of laws and ordinances relative to graffiti,
- ?? A list of definitions, a report on graffiti hot spots in the major Cambridge squares (Central, Porter and Harvard) from January 1, 2002 to September 26, 2002, including color pictures of several "tags,"
- ?? A report resulting from an incident search for graffiti in the police records data base from the beginning of January, 2002 to the present,
- ?? Cambridge Police Department Policy and Procedures for investigation of graffiti,
- ?? A table entitled "Graffiti Hot Spot Analysis January 1, 1997 to June 11, 2002,
- ?? A table entitled "Summary of Responses to Graffiti,"
- ?? A sample agreement between the City and a property owner to be used in the new pilot program in which the City will remove graffiti from private property,
- ?? A brochure produced by the Department of Public Works entitled "Fighting Graffiti."

Mr. Healy and Commissioner Watson, both made brief presentations. Commissioner Watson, Superintendent Degou and Lieutenant Walsh focused on the issues of enforcement of the laws against graffiti. Their presentation included a video that was made by juveniles of them engaged in graffiti activities and later confiscated by the police.

Several City Councillors urged the City Manager to look into the possibility of civil actions for damages for the costs of the cleanup. Where the perpetrators are juveniles, the City could seek compensation from the parents.

The importance of enforcement was emphasized. When there is an arrest in a particular location, the incidences of graffiti go down dramatically in that location for months after the arrest. The police try to work with the court system to get sentences that are appropriate, for example, when community service is assigned, to have the community service be the cleanup of graffiti.

There was a request that the City re-inform hardware store owners of the ordinance prohibiting sale of spray paint to juveniles.

Most graffiti taggers are from middle and upper class backgrounds.

Mr. Healy and Commissioner Peterson described the City's efforts to clean up graffiti. They stressed the importance of removal of graffiti as soon as possible. The longer the graffiti stays there, the more graffiti will accumulate.

The DPW will pilot a program for private property owners in which the City removes the graffiti and repaints the area. The owner will get a clean wall, fence, etc., along with information about how to remove the graffiti if it reoccurs. The program will operate for six months and will provide an opportunity for the collection of data about what adjustments are needed for success. The annualized cost for such a program is expected to be \$150,000-175,000. Mr. Healy would like to see a program that assists a particular owner one time by city cleanup with the expectation that the owner will keep his or her property cleaned up in the future. Ideally, the program would be combined with an ordinance that allows the city to fine property owners who know they are responsible for removing graffiti, know how to do it, have the resources and just do not comply with the law.

There was a suggestion that, along with tough enforcement and quick graffiti removal, the City consider allowing a couple of public walls to be "legal walls" where kids can showcase their work, not because the walls would dissuade the worst offenders from illegal activities, but because it would allow the police and city to develop lines of communication with the kids who are on the edge of that world and thus help enforcement efforts.

There was acknowledgement that some property owners are shirking the law and their civic responsibility by allowing graffiti to accumulate without even trying to clean it up. It was also suggested that white walls present an attractive target, so perhaps some of the worst locations should be painted another color after the graffiti is removed.

Members of the City Council thanked the police, the City Manager and the DPW for an excellent report and presentation and for their hard work on this issue.

On motion of Councillor Maher, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.