

December 12, 2002

Robert W. Healy
City Manager
City Hall
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Dear Mr. Healy:

We wanted to put in writing a summary of the thoughts behind the vote on November 20th of the Library Design Advisory Committee in favor of one particular scheme presented to us by William Rawn Associates for the new Cambridge library. Thirteen members of the committee attending the meeting voted in favor of this scheme. No one was opposed, although the member from the School Committee abstained, feeling he should not weigh in until having consulted with his constituency. Caroline Hunter, Assistant Principal from the High School and School Committee member, Nancy Walser also took part in the discussion.

We believe there are many pluses in this plan for the city, for the library, and for the high school. We highly commend William Rawn Associates for presenting us with seven alternative plans (when only asked for three). What that did for us was to allow us to wrap our collective minds around every possibility and to think more deeply about alternatives, to gage and compare a range of ideas on how to establish a new building on this particular parcel of land between Broadway and Cambridge Streets.

Early on, when the architects presented us with four schemes, a significant number of members were taken with scheme # 4 (sometimes called “the far-east plan”), but it presented difficulties with regard to the configuration of the automobile approach, the establishment of underground parking beneath Joan Lorenz Park, and the placement of the ramp for the parking. It also would have resulted in the elimination of one of the three tennis courts. The near neighbors were highly critical of this plan. When the architects came back with the proposal to move the vehicular access to the far west of the plot, that is to come in off Broadway near the high school and to put all the underground parking beneath the section of park that serves as an entrance garden for the present library, the difficulties just mentioned appeared to be solved.

Scheme 4, as amended on November 20, will offer Cambridge residents the following advantages:

- Of all the schemes it offers the clearest possibility for a creative design solution, one that will give the city a distinguished new building facing Broadway

- A new building composed of one long space making an operationally more efficient building than one that is intertwined and broken up by the spaces of the present building
- It is the plan that best addresses the historic preservation of the original building, for, although it will cover part of the exterior wall to the east (which we hope will still be a visual factor in the design of the interior of that wall), it will compliment and enhance the original building and bring more of the west side into focus.
- Once the 1950s addition has been removed, there will be a line of vision between Broadway and Cambridge streets, re-clarifying the urban plan of this part of the city.
- A further benefit of the removal of the 1950s addition will be to make the entrance to the high school more visible, more civic, and it will provide some kind of shared courtyard-type space (a place where students might eat lunch instead of on the library steps as they do now).
- The plan makes it possible to full integrate CRLS and the library, through the removal of the concrete wall that separates them and by providing shared space in the underground parking.
- The removal of parking from Ellery Street and the lowering of the tennis courts will greatly benefit to the look of the Ellery Street edge which is now visually blighted by a massive concrete wall and a vast rectangular opening giving you a view into the below ground parking.
- Preserves the park in front of the library. The underground parking will force the removal of some of the big trees, but this also provides an opportunity for a totally new design of a garden entrance and for greater visibility of the original library from Broadway.
- The entire sweep of the park in front of the library will read as one open green area unbroken by a drive as it is now. Also the look and legibility of the park will be improved as the new addition will hide the blank back of the high school field house.
- Since the existing drive will be eliminated, additional green space will be added to the park
- The walkway beside the high school can be redesigned to incorporate landscape elements with the access walk to Broadway. It is important to separate this area from the descending vehicular ramp and this might be done by some kind of large work of art in metal or concrete that would serve as a safety barrier.

Cambridge Public Library Design Advisory Committee:

Ruth Butler and Elizabeth Gibb, co-chairs; Janet Axelrod, Eric Bird, Roger Boothe, Carla Bosco, Ted Carpenter, Margaret Crawford, Alex Duval, Fred Fantini, John Gintell, Arlyne Jackson, Emily Norris, James Roosevelt Jr., Hugh Russell, Lynn Shirey, Victoria Solomon, Carole Sousa

cc: Susan Flannery, William Rawn Associates, Rich C. Rossi, Caroline Hunter, Nancy Walser Alan Burne, Cambridge Chronicle, Mid-Cambridge Conservation Commission, and members of the Cambridge City Council