

Fresh Pond Residents Alliance Meeting
Tuesday, June 16, 2015
Tobin School, 7 PM – 8:30 PM

Present: FPRA Board members Jan Devereux (President), Doug Brown (Vice-President), Langley Keyes, Peggy Barnes Lenart (Secretary), Jay Yesselman; (Vice President) City Councillor Marc McGovern, and Councillor Dennis Carlone’s aide Mike Connolly.

1. Announcements – by Jan Devereux, FPRA President

- A. June 17th – New zoning proposal to expand car-sharing parking presented at City Council Ordinance Meeting.
- B. June 25th – Presentation of Harvard’s plans for construction of new campus and welcome center (*Forbes Plaza*) at Holyoke Center to the Planning Board. The proposed plan eliminates much of the open-air dining at Au Bon Pain, claiming about a quarter of the Holyoke Center plaza that is currently open to the public. UPDATE: Harvard’s requests for variances to build “Forbes Plaza” have been continued until the BZA Meeting scheduled for Thursday, July 20th.
- C. June 30th – Neighborhood meeting at the Tobin School was arranged, by the initiative of Jan, with DPW and Cambridge Public Health Department to discuss how they are monitoring and managing environmental risks posed by sewer and road construction along Bay State Road, New Street, and adjacent Mass DEP sites with contaminated soil and/or groundwater.
- D. In response to FPRA neighborhood reports to the city engineering department that the recently installed sidewalks on Lakeview Ave. and Lexington St. are crumbling, the city investigated and the sewer separation contractor will replace them this summer.

2. Presentation and discussion of the proposed development of the Tokyo

Restaurant site that is located at the intersection of the Fresh Pond Parkway and Vassal Lane - by Hans Strauch, architect and principal of HDS Architecture, Inc. offices at 625 Mt. Auburn Street. The owner of the Tokyo property and manager of the adjacent Mobil Gas Station, Mr. Elie Al-Lakkis, was also present at the meeting.

A. Mr. Strauch presented basic drawings and gave an overview for the proposed building renovation, the use being 10 auto repair bays. The design is “a marrying building,” meant to match the adjacent auto repair building also owned by Mr. Al-Lakkis. The proposal is for the new façade to have brick and metal siding similar to the building next door (metal siding to be better quality with “tighter weave”), height raised from 13 feet to 16 feet (not including the rooftop mechanicals), and parking lot with 18 spaces. Mr. Al-Lakkis said the spaces would be used primarily by employees.

B. In addition, they are proposing to add some landscape plantings to the Vassal Lane side, a solid fence along the rear lot line next to the Tobin School driveway, similar to

the Bank of America development that is next to the National Guard on Concord Avenue (which HDS designed). Although the Vassal Lane side would have a curb cut as required by law, Mr. Al-Lakkis said that cars would enter from the Fresh Pond Parkway, not from Vassal Lane, and drive through the existing auto repair building into the proposed new one.

C. When asked about any environmental features, Mr. Strauch said there would be more insulation than in the building next-door, recycled steel in the construction, and the current parking lot “reused” as is. No water management or LEED standards in design.

D. Residents asserted that the proposed development is located in the Parkway Overlay District, which has stricter standards, and should be reviewed by the Planning Board prior to coming before the BZA. The owner and the architect could not answer our zoning questions and said the developer’s lawyer, Joseph Noone, could be contacted to discuss these issues. (Follow-up: discussions with Mr. Noone have occurred, with request that any revised designs be presented to the next FPRA Meeting on July 22nd before the BZA Meeting which is scheduled for August 13th).

E. Neighborhood suggestions and concerns expressed at the meeting included: 1.) Sidewalk on Vassal Lane needs to be widened next to the Tokyo site, and safe bike and car pathways designed – the sidewalk is a very busy route to Fresh Pond Reservoir, Tobin School, shopping areas. Note: Mr. Strauch and Mr. Lakkis said that the sidewalks would be cleared of snow in a timely manner, which we noted was not the case most of last winter. 2.) Attractive tall fencing and a lot of plantings would be needed to block the very exposed view of the parking lot. 3.) In response to neighbors’ question about any possible intrusive bright night lighting, Mr. Strauch said there would be just two “down lights” on the side of the building. 4.) With regards to questions about possible increased traffic flow from customers and employees onto Vassal Lane from the parking lot, Mr. Strauch said cars being serviced would enter through the Parkway side. 5.) Residents expressed disappointment with another auto business that doesn’t offer any amenities for residents and with the potential for it to become a nuisance so close to a school and a residential neighborhood. Some amenities were suggested, e.g., bench for passersby, bike repair, coffee/ice cream, post office. The owner did not seem interested in including other uses in his plan but might consider a bench.

3. The Watertown Greenway Path – Doug Brown, FPRA Vice-President, gave updates on this bike/pedestrian path, which DCR and Cambridge are undertaking together. The path is Phase II of a project to connect the Charles River near the Watertown Arsenal to Fresh Pond/Alewife and beyond. The survey has been done for the next leg through Cambridge and the next step is design. A public meeting was held in early June to show the planned route along the former rail line within Fresh Pond Reservation and behind

Aberdeen Ave, and a follow-up meeting will be held in September when the design is 25% complete. Doug stressed the need for more public access points to the path. DCR was accepting comments on the plan through June 26 and Doug and Jan wrote a letter with suggestions for where access is most needed and feasible.

4. Friends of Alewife Reservation – Alice Heller (FPRA member) and Christine Heady (FAR staff Coordinator) spoke about a proactive plan to help preserve what is left of the wildlife habitat in the reservation area. Development has begun, and businesses may begin to ask for more pedestrian pathways. Alice and Christine asked residents for support in proactively preventing construction of more pathways as sufficient paths already exist and there is no need to disrupt further the wildlife that remains. People signed a petition and letter to this effect that they circulated at the meeting.

5. Cambridge Lighting Task Force update by Charles Teague, a North Cambridge resident who is a member of the city's Lighting Task Force, presented on proposed changes to the lighting ordinance that he and other members of the task force believe would have a detrimental impact on residents.

6. City Master Plan to begin with Fresh Pond/Concord-Alewife Area in the Fall - Langley Keyes and Doug Brown urged the neighborhood to become involved – our opportunity to have input into the substance and process that will impact our own area and rest of the City.

Notes submitted by Peggy Barnes Lenart