



Councillor Henrietta Davisnews-in-a-letter

120 Chestnut Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
617.547.0877 or 617.349.4280
hdavis@cambridgema.gov / www.henriettadavis.org

Dear Friend,

As we look around us and see other cities, businesses and institutions making sacrifices and layoffs, we in Cambridge have much to be grateful for. We have been somewhat shielded from this difficult economy by city finances that are in excellent shape. For the tenth year, we have scored AAA ratings for the municipal bonds we issue. That means we are borrowing at 3.58% for projects such as the rehabilitation of the high school main building. It also helped that when the project went out to bid, the low bid came in at \$5 million less than expected. We also have stabilization funds set aside to shield us from unexpected costs. Still we are unsure of the final impacts of state cuts.



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What Does This Mean for You? ➤ An unprecedented municipal building boom: A new police station opened in January, a beautiful War Memorial Recreation Center opened in February, June brings the beginning of an energy-efficient rehab of the high school, a new West Cambridge Community Center is on track to be opened in the fall, and of course, the new main library will open in September. As for your city bills, for one year you may see a minor increase in your water bill; however, your real estate tax bill will remain one of the lowest in the state.

Water Rates and Discounts ➤ There continues to be good news for homeowners over 65. All homeowners over 65 qualify for a 15% discount and low-income older homeowners are eligible for a 30% discount. Call the City Treasurer's office at 617-349-4228 for information. Another way to save money on water is to have low-flow toilets: these are marked 1.6 on the back.

Save Money with Federal Energy Efficiency Tax Credits ➤ This is the year to do your insulation and buy new windows. Tax credits approved by Congress will credit any taxpayer 30% of the cost, up to \$1500, for certain home improvements such as insulation and new storm windows on next year's taxes if the job is done this calendar year. Check the Energy Tax Credit web site for more information by Googling "Energy Efficiency Tax Credits."

HEET ➤ HEET stands for **Home Energy Efficiency Team**. It is the successful volunteer corps that offers weatherization training and home energy improvements to households that volunteer to be training sites. The goal is to teach people simple measures that make a big difference in comfort and cost. I hosted a training site and 30 plus volunteers descended to caulk the exterior walls, apply plastic windows to the basement, and more. My house is truly less drafty now and those who participated, including my husband and myself, learned what old Cambridge houses need to be less costly to operate. To get involved, contact www.heetma.com.

DEVELOPMENT AND CITY PLANNING

Alexandria Properties ➤ Alexandria Properties, a national real estate company that specializes in biotech properties, proposed zoning changes for 1.8 million sq. ft. of property near Binney St. in East Cambridge in order to build biotech more densely. The City Council adopted an amended version of Alexandria's proposal. It has many community benefits, chief among them urban design elements to enliven that area on nights and weekends. Though an earlier version had more housing, there will be a new community building, a park, requirements for additional ground floor retail, plus clear pathways to the Kendall T station, elements I strongly backed.

Aging in Place ➤ I've been working with a group of people to assure that the future is brighter and brighter for people who choose to stay in Cambridge as they get older. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's new book highlights choices that people make in the "third chapter" of their lives: roughly from 50 to 75 years of age. I'm aiming to make this city the third chapter choice. As people age and need services I want Cambridge to have a robust helping network. For example, I'm heading an effort to prevent hoarding and to learn how to downsize.

Lesley/Art Institute of Boston ➤ Lesley College has purchased the 600-student AIB, currently located in Kenmore Square. Their plan is to relocate to Cambridge in Porter Square. In support of their plan, Lesley has proposed moving aside the North Prospect Church to make way for a new 100,000 square foot building and modifying Porter Square zoning to allow for further development. Concurrently, the Historical Commission is recommending that the City Council landmark the church, meaning that alteration to it would be subject to Historical Commission regulation. Look for multiple decisions on this matter by the City Council in the coming months, possibly before September.

ENVIRONMENT

Green Youth Corps ➤ Coordination between the City departments, non-profits and the Mayor's Summer Youth Program is leading to the launching of a Green Youth Corps. This will place students in environmental internships that they may be able to pursue over two or three summers. As one of the planners, I'm hoping this affords students the opportunity to earn a Green certificate or diploma that will also give credit for success in academic science courses.

500 New Trees ➤ The City Council has set a goal of planting 500 new street trees from July 2009 to July 2010. I held a hearing about the planting, care and maintenance of street trees, which about 25 people attended, many supporting this goal. In addition to planting, support was heard for City Arborist David Lefcourt's goal of mapping all our street trees, noting open spots for planting trees, and measuring the Cambridge tree canopy. Maintenance, especially if we experience drought, is a particular challenge and will require assistance from tree neighbors. See website www.cambridgema.gov/TheWorks/departments/parks/forestry.html for a list of trees to be planted this year.

Fruit Trees /Urban Orchard ► After informal discussions about adding to the city's fruit trees, the general consensus is that fruit-bearing (and dropping) trees do not make the best street trees, but that other locations may be found to add to the city's urban orchard. At one of the meetings I held, members of the public suggested the idea of an urban orchard spread across the city. Using GIS mapping tools, trees would be identified, and at the request of the owners, harvested by volunteers who would find uses for the fruit. This system is working in Jamaica Plain. If you are interested in this project contact my office.

LOCAL FOOD AND GARDENING

The move to go green includes local food. All across the country, people are rediscovering vegetable and fruit gardening. It's not only because it's healthier to eat more fresh vegetables and fruits, it's also more sustainable. Less carbon is generally used on food grown closer to home. As chair of the Health and Environment Committee of the Council I have begun an effort to support growing and eating more local fruit and vegetables. We've had four meetings so far and many great ideas have emerged, some of which have already borne fruit . . .seriously. Read on.

Community Gardens ► Last summer I learned that there were 80 people on the waiting list for community garden space in Cambridge and introduced a Council order that asked the City Manager to close that gap. To date 40 plots have been found and we're on the lookout for more.

Container gardening ► Public Works Commissioner Lisa Peterson has already held one workshop to teach people about container gardening. For many of us, a sunny plot of ground is harder to find than a spot to put a container. The Public Works Dept. has decided to teach people how to raise vegetables in large pots. The first session was held recently at the Citywide Senior Center.

What about a Cambridge Farm? ► When someone suggested that Cambridge have a farm, I was dubious. But, as you may know, Cambridge owns its own water supply and land to protect that water. The land is primarily in the western suburbs like Lincoln and Weston. Some of the land was formerly farmed or could be farmed. With city staff and others I am exploring that possibility. I hope that we could have a demonstration farm, involving students and providing fresh fruit and vegetables to the food pantries and after-school or summer childcare programs.

Landless Garden Shares ► Already in the offing are plans to connect gardeners with citizens who have backyards usable for planting. In a dense city like ours, it is hard to meet all the community garden requests. However, some persons who have land might welcome a friendly gardener to work it and share vegetables. Helen Snively has offered to coordinate this function with possible links to the city's website for information.

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

Healthy Children Task Force ► This year has been a study year for the HCTF, which is surveying health topics related to school success. Meanwhile we continue to pursue an emphasis on healthy eating and physical activity for kids. Survey presentations have centered around reducing TV or screen time, mental health and school climate, and the roles of training and supporting parents. After years of talking about parental involvement, these discussions are turning to helping parents to be more effective and supportive of their children, recognizing that this may not always be easy.

New Superintendent ► The School Committee has just appointed Jeffrey Young as the new Superintendent of Schools. He comes to us from Newton, where he has been superintendent for 11 years. After a search process that fielded two excellent finalists, the Committee agonized over who would get the job offer: Dr. Carolyn Turk, who has had a long and stellar career with the schools, or Dr. Young. After due diligence and a number of site visits, a majority of the School Committee chose Dr. Young. Now it is time for the School Committee and the community to wholeheartedly work with him in the service of the students.

School Enrollment ► Kindergarten enrollment is at its highest level in years, leading to the opening of at least three new kindergarten classrooms. Last year two others were opened. Contributing to this, no doubt, is the current economy, turning parents who had previously paid for private schools back to the public schools, where they will be greeted by many wonderful opportunities and a new superintendent.

Digital Divide ► A pilot project in Newtowne Court to provide computers and internet access to families who did not have it has been completed and the results have been evaluated. Among the 35 families participating, we learned that internet use dramatically increased, and uses included job hunting and connection between schools and families. More and more schools expect that parents will be contacting them about their children's progress through use of email. Of those in the pilot project, 57% reported that they now use the internet daily. The future of this project is not clear unless key donors or the new stimulus package help to continue and expand it.

HOUSING

Progress on Housing ► New residents are now living in affordable rental units at Archstone at North Point, and the City is now selecting tenants for affordable units for 303 Third St., plus homebuyers for inclusionary homeownership units at the "S" and "T" buildings at North Point.

Under Construction ► Using monies from the Community Preservation Act, more than 60 affordable units around the city will be under construction by non-profit organizations this spring. These include 24 on Harvard St. and 10 on Main St. Buyer selection for the Main St. units is underway, and will begin this spring for units on Harvard Street. CPA funds were also recently used to acquire a 12-unit building on Pine St. and a 16-unit building on Harvey St., which will offer affordable rental opportunities once renovations are completed. City and non-profit staff continue to pursue other affordable housing opportunities.

Are You Eligible for Affordable Housing? ► For information about renting or owning an affordable unit in the city, or applying for available units and to obtain information about Cambridge affordable housing, call the Community Development Housing Division at 617-349-4622, or visit www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/hsg.

TRANSPORTATION

\$100 Fine for Parking in a Bus Stop ► MBTA buses have been hampered in their efforts to safely serve the public and keep to their schedules by car drivers who block bus stops. As of April 1, police officers, including MBTA police, have had the power to issue \$100 tickets to those who park in bus stops all across the state.

Accelerated Bridge Program ► After years of neglect, most local Charles River bridges are now included in a stepped-up program of repairing bridges. Work has begun on the BU Bridge. The Science Museum Bridge will be next. In addition, the Western Avenue, River St., and Lars Andersen Bridges will also be redone over the next five years. Boston and Cambridge will cooperate to see that the bridges will accommodate cars, bikes and pedestrians. Also, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation has committed to improving connectivity and pathways to the bridges.

TRANSPORTATION CONTINUED...

BU Bridge ► Final plans for the BU Bridge have not yet been approved, but the State has said that the bridge will not be widened. The existing width must be used to accommodate cars, buses, bikes and pedestrians. Pressure is building for dedicated bike lanes on the bridge, with the likely result that one auto lane could be eliminated.

Magazine Beach Pedestrian Overpass ► In the works for June reconstruction is the Magazine Beach pedestrian overpass, which had been hit by a truck. A temporary traffic light may be installed to safeguard pedestrians. FYI, park improvements should be completed at Magazine Beach by late Fall of 2009.

Urban Ring ► Already over 15 years in the planning stage, the Urban Ring transit project would move traffic around downtown Boston on the eastern end of Cambridge, generally following the railroad tracks from the BU bridge to near Union Square in Somerville and then on to Everett and the airport. The news here is that state environmental officials have recognized that this project will not begin anytime soon and are asking state transportation officials to describe segments that could see action sooner. In Cambridge, the route, most likely using long articulated buses, would include stops around Fort Washington, Main St., Binney St., and Lechmere Station.

Brookline Street Reconstruction ► This will be a two-phase project beginning soon on the section between the BU Bridge and Pacific St. The plan would shift all parking to the left side of the street and have a continuous bike lane from the bridge to Central Square on the right. This will make a dramatic improvement in safety and efficiency for bicyclists. Also, the light at Putnam and Brookline will be removed and many trees will be planted.

OTHER NEWS

Cambridgeport History Project ► An enthusiastic group of people is exploring ways for citizen historians to celebrate Cambridgeport history. Michael Kenney and I are co-chairs and expect there will be a celebration in September. The group is thinking of marking the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, the heroes of which are the inspiration for many of the neighborhood's streets names.

Cambridge War Memorial Recreation Center ► In January the city celebrated the opening of its beautifully refurbished recreation center adjacent to Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. The pool, locker room, gym and tile work are spectacular. The facility, shared between the school in the daytime and the public when school is not in session, offers new classes as well, including a Zumba class, challenging aerobics to a Latin beat. Check the website at www.cambridgezumba.com.

Robert W. Healy Public Safety Building ► In February, the city celebrated the opening of the new police station. Years of struggle over its location resulted in choosing a partially completed building fairly near Kendall Square. The police, who had been grossly underserved by the old building, are now adequately housed for the 21st century. The old police station in Central Square is an historic building and likely to be preserved, although its future use, public or private, is up in the air.

Adopt a Food Pantry ► Cambridge has 12 food pantries, each of which could use a good partner like a business, religious congregation or a neighborhood group to help with extras like coffee, tea, or condiments, or essentials like fruit and vegetables. For example, City Hall has partnered with the Senior Food Pantry across the street with the help of Deputy City Clerk Donna Lopez. Call my office if you would like to help. I am holding a meeting on this issue May 5th at 5:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber.

EVENTS

Save the Dates ► Cambridge Science Festival - April 25-May 3; Holocaust Commemoration - May 6; Fresh Pond Day - May 9; and the City Dance - June 26. Also save September 26 for Danehy Park Family Day. Dates for the opening of the new main library and the opening of West Cambridge Community Center are to be set.

Sincerely yours,

