

MIT'S HOUSING PROGRAM IN CAMBRIDGE

THE INNER BELT AND THE LBJ APARTMENTS

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THE HIGHWAY WAS A THREAT TO EVERYONE IN CAMBRIDGE
WHAT STARTED AS A MODEST CIRCUMFERENTIAL 4 LANE ROAD IN THE 1940'S STATE
TRANSPORTATION PLAN MORPHED INTO AN EIGHT LANE NATIONAL DEFENSE
INTERSTATE HIGHWAY BY THE 1950'S
THE STATE EMBRACED THIS NEW HIGHWAY PLAN BECAUSE THE FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT WOULD PAY FOR 90% OF THE COST.

BUT WE PAID A HIGH PRICE. FOR DANCING WITH THE 90 PERCENT DEVIL.

FROM THE 1950'S ON THE STATE AND CITY EXPLORED 5 DIFFERENT ALIGNMENTS FOR
THE HIGHWAY EACH WITH A MAJOR IMPACT ON ONE OR ANOTHER NEIGHBORHOOD
THEN , AS NOW, WE WERE DIVIDED ON HOW TO DEAL WITH AN ISSUE THAT
CONFRONTED THE CITY

THE STATE FIRST PROPOSED A ROUTE THAT WOULD CUT THE CITY IN HALF ALONG
RIVER AND LEE STREET . IN 1955 THE CITY COUNTERED WITH ITS OWN CONSULTANTS
PLAN THAT EXPLORED FOUR OTHER ALIGNMENTS FROM RIVER STREET TO MEMORIAL
DRIVE

EACH ROUTE WOULD HAVE A DEVASTATING IMPACT ON PEOPLE ,HOUSING ,
INSTITUTIONS AND INDUSTRIES IN CAMBRIDGE

IF THE IMPACT OF A POTENTIAL HIGHWAY WERE NOT ENOUGH , AS THE FULL BORE
MANUFACTURING AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE CITY THAT HAD SUPPORTED CAMBRIDGE
DURING THE WAR ENDED THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO THE CITY ENDED, THE LOSS
OF THE CITY'S INDUSTRIAL TAX BASE PROMPTED THE CITY LEADERS TO SEEK MORE
TAX SUPPORT FROM HOUSING AND THE WAR TIME RENT CONTROL STOOD IN THE WAY.
SO IN 1956 RENT CONTROL WAS ALLOWED TO EXPIRE IN CAMBRIDGE AND TAXES AND
RENTS STARTED TO RISE. BY THE MID FIFTIES , THE RISING COST OF HOUSING
CONTINUED BUT .NEW HOUSING CONSTRUCTION DID NOT KEEP UP WITH DEMAND

AT MIT , WE SAW THE COMBINATION OF THESE CONDITIONS AS A SERIOUS PROBLEM
BECAUSE THE HIGHWAY ISSUE WAS SO POLITICIZED AND THE HOUSING INITIATIVES SO
LIMITED ,IT WAS VITAL THAT THE CITY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS PULL TOGETHER AND TAKE
A HARD LOOK AT HOW TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES.

THERE WAS A GROWING SENSE ON OUR PART, AT MIT ,THAT THE STATE'S
TRANSPORTATION PLAN WAS UNREALISTIC AND OUTDATED AND WOULD BE
INEFFECTIVE WITHOUT A MAJOR COMMITMENT TO THE EXPANSION OF MASS TRANSIT

BUT THERE WERE OTHER FORCES IN THE CITY THAT HAD OTHER VIEWS..SO EACH
ROUTE PRESENTED WAS LEFT TO THE PEOPLE AND PLACES IMPACTED TO RESIST. WE
DID NOT HAVE A UNIFIED STRATEGY AGAINST THE HIGHWAY AT THAT TIME. BACK AND
FORTH IT WENT WITHOUT RESOLUTION

IN EARLY 1966 I WAS INFORMED BY ALAN MC CLENNEN THE CITY'S PLANNER THAT THE
CITY COUNCIL WAS PROPOSING THAT THE STATE BUILD THIS 300 FOOT WIDE HIGHWAY

ALONG THE GRAND JUNCTION RIGHT OF WAY..A PROSPECT THAT DID NOT BRING JOY TO OUR HEARTS...IT WOULD HAVE WIPED OUT THE LABORATORIES THAT WERE KEY TO THE COUNTRY'S SPACE PROGRAM AND WOULD HAVE DESTROYED THE FIVE YEAR EFFORT TO REBUILD THE CITY'S ECONOMY AT TECH SQUARE.

AS WE EXPRESSED OUR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS ROUTE, GOVERNOR VOLPE CALLED MIT'S CHAIRMAN JAMES KILLIAN AND ASKED TO MEET WITH MIT. HE ASKED IF WE WOULD PITCH IN TO DEVELOP REPLACEMENT HOUSING IF A ROUTE WAS CHOSEN THAT DISPLACED RESIDENTS..

WE INDICATED THAT WE WOULD BE MORE THAN WILLING TO WORK WITH THE CITY IN HELPING TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT IF THE HIGHWAY WERE BUILT.

WE BEGAN TO PREPARE FOR SUCH A CONTINGENCY BY SEEKING VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED SITES NEAR THE CITY'S PREFERRED ROUTE THROUGH CAMBRIDGEPORT AS WELL AS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE CITY.

AT THE SAME TIME A CHANGE IN CITY ADMINISTRATION BLEW SOME FRESH AIR INTO THE SITUATION. DAN HAYES THE NEW MAYOR AND FORMER CITY COUNCILLOR JOE DEGUGLIELMO THE NEW CITY MANAGER SAID THAT THEY WERE WILLING TO CHALLENGE THE STATE'S PLAN FOR ANY HIGHWAY THROUGH THE CITY. BUT THEY NEEDED THE UNIVERSITIES TO HELP. THEY ASKED US FOR HELP TO PUT TOGETHER A TEAM THAT COULD CHALLENGE THE STATE'S ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE HIGHWAY'S FUNCTION. WE WENT TO WORK AND RECRUITED JUSTIN GRAY AN EXPERIENCED CITY PLANNER AND TALENTED NEGOTIATOR TO EXPLORE WAYS TO CHANGE THE STATE'S HIGHWAY PLAN.

AT THE SAME TIME THE EFFORTS IN THE CAMBRIDGEPORT NEIGHBORHOOD TO OPPOSE THE INNER BELT HIGHWAY WERE BEGINNING TO MAKE REAL HEADWAY. PEOPLE LIKE ANSTIS BENFELD AND BILL ACKERLEY HELPED BY MANY OTHERS INCLUDING A NUMBER OF MIT GRADUATES MOUNTED AN EFFECTIVE PROTEST MOVEMENT.

BY 1969 THE COMBINATION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S AND JUSTIN'S EFFORTS SUCCEEDED IN CONVINCING GOVERNOR FRANK SARGENT AND THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROAD TO ABANDON THE HIGHWAY PLAN

WITH ONE MENACE DONE AWAY WITH THE CITY STILL HAD THE GROWING CHALLENGE OF A NEED FOR HOUSING PARTICULARLY FOR THE ELDERLY.

IN 1969 THE CEOC HOUSING CONVENTION FURTHER HIGHLIGHTED THE PROBLEM.

IN SPITE OF THE REINTRODUCTION OF RENT CONTROL IN 1970 THERE WAS A SERIOUS DEFICIENCY IN THE CITY'S HOUSING INVENTORY.

IN THE FACE OF THIS CHALLENGE WE PUT TOGETHER A TEAM AND A PROGRAM TO BUILD 700 UNITS OF ELDERLY HOUSING ON SEVERAL SITES THROUGHOUT THE CITY

SOME OF THIS HOUSING WOULD USE SOME LAND THAT MIT HAD ACQUIRED FOR RELOCATION HOUSING IF THE HIGHWAY WERE BUILT. ONE OF THOSE SITES IS HERE ON ERIE STREET, THE BUILDING WHERE WE ARE MEETING TONIGHT.

WITH MANY NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS AND THE WONDERFUL COOPERATION OF HENRIETTA JACKSON WHO ALLOWED US TO MOVE HER HOUSE AND OTHERS WHO PLAYED IMPORTANT ROLES IN THIS EFFORT WE WERE ABLE TO NEGOTIATE THE

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LBJ APARTMENTS FOR THE CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY AND PROVIDE A MUCH HAPPIER CONCLUSION THAN WOULD HAVE BEEN THE CASE IF WE WERE DEALING WITH AN 8 LANE HIGHWAY....

AS I LOOK BACK ON THESE EVENTS I COME AWAY WITH A COUPLE OF LESSONS AND THOUGHTS.

THIS IS A CITY THAT IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING AND IT HAS A HARD TIME DEALING WITH CHANGE IN A CALM AND RATIONAL WAY. INSTEAD OF ANTICIPATING ISSUES AND PREPARING HUMANE PLANS TO DEAL WITH THEM, WE HAVE A PENCHANT FOR FOCUSING ON CRISIS ISSUES AND EVERYONE HAS A DIFFERENT IDEA OF HOW TO SOLVE THE CRISIS OF THE DAY.

WE ARE NOT AS GOOD AT FINDING COOPERATIVE AND CREATIVE WAYS TO IDENTIFY AND SOLVE PROBLEMS WITH THE MANY TALENTS WE HAVE . WE ARE USUALLY NOT GOOD AT ANTICIPATING PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPING RATIONAL SOLUTIONS FOR THEM. THIS RESULTS IN ACRIMONY AND FRUSTRATION FOR ALL. BUT SOMETIMES, JUST SOMETIMES ,WE ARE SUCCESSFUL IN WORKING TOGETHER TO COME UP WITH A GOOD SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM . I HOPE YOU THINK THE LBJ PROJECT WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES.