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Carol O'Hare

From: Carol O'Hare [c.burchardohare@att.net] ^{ebo}
Sent: Monday, June 03, 2013 12:53 PM
To: City Council (Council@CambridgeMA.GOV)
Cc: Donna Lopez (dlopez@cambridgema.gov); Robert W. Healy (citymanager@CambridgeMA.GOV); Richard Rossi (rrossi@cambridgema.gov); Elizabeth Lint, Esq.; Andrea Boyer (aboyer@cambridgema.gov); Ranjit Singanayagam (ranjits@cambridgema.gov); Jo Solet (joanne_solet@hms.harvard.edu); Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association (cportneighbors@yahoo.com)
Subject: City Council: Increasing, Extraneous, Intrusive and Ambient, Totally Unnecessary Noise – Committee Report #1 @ 6/3/13 Meeting
Importance: High
Attachments: NoiseControls-Motors,Radios,Etc-CityCouncil130603.doc; NoiseComments-SoletToCityCouncil130401.doc

Dear Mayor Davis, Vice Mayor Simmons and City Councilors:

Here are two memos (each 1-page) for your consideration and the record addressing the major and proliferating noise problem in our City. Mine is the first attachment; Jo Solet's is the second.

I respectfully ask you to consider these comments and take appropriate action.

Sincerely,

Carol O'Hare
172 Magazine St.
Cambridge

Memo

To: Cambridge Mayor Davis, Vice Mayor Simmons and City Councilors
Cc: Donna Lopez, Interim City Clerk, for the Official Record; Robert Healey, Richard Rossi, Elizabeth Lint, Andrea Boyer, Ranjit Singanayagam, Claude-Alix Jacob, Jo Solet
Fr: Carol O'Hare, 172 Magazine St., Cambridge
Date: June 3, 2013
Re: **Increasing, Extraneous, Intrusive and Ambient, Unnecessary Noise – Committee Report #1**

I've always been happy that I chose Cambridge as my home in the mid-1960's and well understand that our lively, urban environment can't be suburb-quiet. But, I've long thought increasing noise from many sources obviously and subtly affects our quality of life as well as our health.

Jo Solet, Ph.D. of the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School and also a Cambridge Historical Commissioner, who spoke and wrote to you in April, confirmed this. She provided dramatic, cautionary scientific/medical evidence about the deleterious physical and mental health effects of excess-noise emissions. Although Ms. Solet was then addressing anticipated noise emissions from HVAC systems of buildings planned for MIT's recently rezoned 26-acre Kendall Square area, her observations are more generally instructive and alarming. (Ms. Solet's memo is attached to my cover email.)

So, now, just please ask yourselves: How much more do Ms. Solet's warnings and public health alarms apply to the increasing, extraneous, intrusive and ambient, unnecessary noise (sometimes even beyond a nuisance) in many of our City's residential neighborhoods? Roaring motor cycles; blaring car radios; hovering or circling news, traffic and commuter helicopters and banner-ad planes above residential neighborhoods; some public, outdoor events blasting, booming bass tones to distant areas; etc. Of course, I know that federal and state agencies have primary jurisdiction over some of these noise-emitters, but that doesn't mean that City officials and personnel or our State Reps should just say, "Not my department." How about some affirmative advocacy and action?

This can't be Rocket Science. Even if it is, there are acoustical engineers and experts available to address the problem in a more comprehensive and effective a way, rather than piecemeal and, worse yet, after-the-fact? There just seems to be no will, as evidenced by the minimal funding, measuring instruments/tools and staffing or clear enforcement guidelines. (I have only praise for Andrea Boyer's responsive and diligent work). Police personnel have more important things to do, especially at night and on weekends, than pursue noise problems, especially without measurement equipment. How can they tell how loud and far away things sound at a distance from the noise source? Are they supposed to take time to chase the noise?

Cambridge has many bodies dedicated to improving our lives and environment, a Peace Commission, a Bio-Safety Committee, a Human Rights Commission, etc. And then there's our Cambridge Public Health Department which recognizes the "growing awareness of the negative impact that environmental exposures may have directly on the health of individuals and indirectly on their susceptibility to other illnesses." <http://www.cambridgepublichealth.org/services/environmental-health/> Yet, as a most elementary example, none of our City departments charged with addressing noise concerns seem to have an obvious link to the City's Noise-Complaints web page: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/livingincambridge/residentservices1/noisecomplaints.aspx>.

Bottom Line: A quality of life and public health problem simply cannot be controlled through a complaint-driven system. Therefore, I respectfully ask you to direct the City Manager to propose a comprehensive, effective approach to dealing with this, instead of noise-by-noise, building-by-building, etc. This would include obtaining expert advice and recommendations (including from local scientists and engineers), consulting with other municipalities that have experience in this area, updating our Noise Ordinance and seeking input City personnel and residents.

Someone needs to grapple with this proliferating and resonating (pun intended) problem and wrestle it down. And, we residents especially should not have to tolerate it.

April 1, 2013
City Council Meeting
Jo M. Solet, PhD
15 Berkeley St
Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School
Cambridge Historical Commissioner
Member HGRC, writing construction code for healthcare facilities

I am here tonight because I have heard concern from neighborhoods about the impact of MIT development and zoning changes, especially related to noise impacts on quality of life.

We need not trade quality of life and diminished health for prosperity in Cambridge. It would be ironic indeed if in welcoming innovators we failed to put in place the required innovations available to protect the health and quality of life of our citizens. The technology is available.

I note in his letter dated today the City Manager expresses some concern about the complexity and interpretability of the Noise Ordinance. This is noteworthy because noise enforcement is for the most part complaint driven in Cambridge. This means citizens must understand what it is written and how to exercise their rights. It would be preferable in cases of installation of permanent noise producing equipment for readings to be taken first before permission is granted by the city to run the equipment. Then in cases in which violations are encountered, mandated fines should be fully levied during periods when equipment continues to run. This will help fund enforcement.

With regard to actual decibels level maximums of 50 decibels at night cited in the Ordinance, I would like to bring your attention to grant funded research, for which I served as PI/senior author published last summer in the Annals of Internal Medicine with my research colleagues also members of the Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School. I have a copy to submit for the records. In our research protocol, we exposed sleeping subjects to a series of noises (recorded at a hospital site) at rising decibel levels in all stages of sleep, while tracking their arousals, brain waves and heart rate changes. In stage 2 sleep in which adults spend substantial parts of the night as many as 80% of sleepers were awakened by some noises as low as 45 decibels.

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There are several mechanisms through which noise can damage health and well-being. Along with sleep disruption, noise has also been implicated in delayed reading acquisition in school children, in decreased work efficiency, lowered moods, declines in helping behavior.

A growing body of research implicates noise in circulatory and cardiac problems including hypertension (elevated blood pressure), angina (heart-related chest pains), and increased heart rate. While not viewed as a direct cause of mental illness, noise stress may intensify and accelerate existing mental health problems.

Let me repeat:

We need not trade quality of life and diminished health for prosperity in Cambridge. It would be ironic indeed if in welcoming innovators we failed to put in place the required innovations available to protect the health and quality of life of our citizens. The technology is available.

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