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Expansion: The Growing Pains Harvard Might Suffer

Running Out of Elbow Room

By Richard H.P. Sia,

Vociferous Cambridge City Councilor Alfred E. Vellucci recently called Harvard administrators "conspirators behind ivy walls," causing his audience at a September City Council meeting to stand and roar with approval.

Vellucci had just delivered another one of his long, impassioned speeches about the evils of Harvard expansion in Cambridge. This time he said he was incensed over a 1965 land deal between the city and Harvard that allowed the University to obtain public land for the construction of the pedestrian overpass over Broadway.

He charged that the parcel of land allowed Harvard to link the Yard, Memorial Hall and Law School properties and to create a valuable land holding.

Harvard has a flair for making suckers out of city officials, Vellucci continued. "By 1984 Big Brother in this city will be sitting in Massachusetts Hall."

The mere suggestion that Harvard might "expand" never fails to arouse Vellucci's emotions and to provoke the ire of local tenant and neighborhood groups who fear the University will somehow infringe on their privacy. Several prominent Cambridge citizens interviewed recently demanded "greater sensitivity" from University officials who might be considering expansion in the next five to ten years.

City Planning Director Robert A. Bowyer said that he expects Harvard to eventually use all the land and residential properties it now holds.

"It looks inevitable," Bowyer said. "This [view] is based on an extrapolation of more than 50 years of history. If you look at Cambridge in the early 1900s, you'll find only little houses here and there."

The University's Interim Long-Range Plan, issued in June by the University Planning Office and Office of Government and Community Affairs, outlines all potential projects now on the horizon, including possible construction of new undergraduate Houses and living space for graduate and married students.