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Harvard plans new 'science hub'

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Harvard University's [plans](#) to create a 'critical mass of scientific activity' in Allston, Mass., across the Charles River from its main campus, are coming up against some roadblocks, but not from the usual not-in-my-backyard suspects. Some members of Harvard's faculty have voiced concerns and feel out of the loop, while Allston neighborhood groups have been generally pleased with the planning process.

Life science laboratories would more than likely be part of the 'science hub' that Harvard President Lawrence Summers said in October that he plans for the new campus, and the university also hopes to relocate its School of Public Health from its current location in Boston, adjoining Harvard Medical School. The site would also include a relocated School of Education and housing for undergraduates and graduates.

Faculty members who are in favor of the project say it will foster interdisciplinary work. "I feel that this is the most exciting and forward development at Harvard to occur in many decades," said [Stuart L. Schreiber](#), chair of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology. "Science is undergoing a dramatic change towards cross-disciplinary activities."

[Venkatesh Narayanamurti](#), dean of Engineering and Applied Sciences and of Physical Sciences and a member of Summers' task force on science and technology, told us that there will be new linkages between engineering and biology, engineering and the medical school. "We are just beginning to think things through," he said. "There's only one thing certain about science: It's going to be different, and the facilities we are going to need are going to be different. I have very much of an open mind."

But what Mary Power, senior director of community relations at Harvard, characterized as "a lively discussion about the academic impact of a campus that is located on either side of the Charles River," has at times become acrimonious. At a [recent meeting of the faculty](#), Summers refused to allow a vote on the Allston project, the Harvard Crimson, the student newspaper, reported. Some faculty members are reserving comment at this early stage, while others are less than pleased.

In a November 10 letter, [Stuart M. Schieber](#), a professor of computer science, [criticized the plans](#) for splitting science between the Allston and Cambridge campuses, according to the Crimson, although he acknowledged that life scientists feeling a space crunch might benefit from the expansion into Allston. Schieber's letter also criticized the planning process for excluding faculty input.

Another faculty member, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that while the university's science program needs revitalization, it isn't clear how to do that in a modern context. Summers, the professor said, is following a corporate model, "throwing away his most important resource, the teaching faculty" and "mortgaging the intellectual future of the university" by following a money and power-based model of development.

Community leaders, on the other hand, are more or less happy with the process. According to Harvard spokeswoman Lauren Marshall, the university has participated in the [North Allston Strategic Planning](#) process, along with community leaders and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Ray Mellone of the North Allston Working Group said that Harvard's planning process is now far more open than it has been in the past. Much of what Harvard owns are "areas we never were to thrilled about anyway"

because they did not make the main community gateway look good. "On one side you have Harvard Business School, with pretty nice looking architecture, and you looked across the street and you saw trailer trucks backed up to a broken-down chain link fence," Mellone said of the site Harvard is hoping to build on. "It made a sorry picture."

Mellone said that although many in the neighborhood will never trust Harvard, many will see that the process does consider residents. "Any construction in the area is governed by zoning and regulations, and they can't do anything unless they get approval anyway," he said.

Harvard is also planning an expansion of its [Arnold Arboretum](#), part of the 'emerald Necklace' park system in Boston designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Proposals include a building of up to 35,000 square feet of greenhouses, research laboratories, and offices, as well as nursery beds and parking spaces. Rather than rid the area of urban blight as in Allston, the arboretum project encroaches on open space that neighbors are quite proud of.

A local neighborhood association board member, Carter Wilkie, said he thought siting, design, and traffic issues around the arboretum property could be resolved. He notes that in 1954, Boston sold an entire 9-acre park that now has a "very massive, brutalistic, institutional facility that looms over the arboretum. I don't think anybody's frightened by the small proposal on the table; it's what comes next," said Wilkie, who is on the board of the Longfellow Area Neighborhood Association. "The trickiest question here is, what does the future hold for the whole 14-acre parcel? If the neighborhood is willing to change the zoning to allow this open space for institutional uses, is Harvard prepared to guarantee protection of the rest of the open space?"

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