100 Years of Town Gown Relations in Cambridge Massachusetts

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Cambridge town and gown relations in the twentieth century reflected the best and worst of this community’s capacities and talents. During periods of external threat, town and gown often came together and accomplished much. When in need Cambridge has often asked for help and the universities have come to its aid. When the institutions were threatened, Cambridge was there to provide support. While they both suffered from the traditional perception that conflict was the natural state between them, most of the stresses between town and gown can be accounted for by understanding that each of the city’s educational institutions had its own primary agenda. An agenda, driven by their distinct academic and social missions and shaped by financial and political realities. Cambridge, in turn, had its own agenda and was intent on realizing its own dreams, on its own terms rather than as an adjunct to the academic institutions with which they shared place and space.

The perceptions that each of these communities had of each other were colored by notions of prestige and social class distinction, ethnicity, religion, clan loyalty, racial and religious bigotry and a long history of ambivalence that the town has about the gown. It is illustrated by the story told of the resident who in response to a surveyor’s question “what’s your opinion of Harvard”, replied, “it is a snobby,
unfriendly and arrogant place “ and to the follow up question, “ would you like your children to attend the university”, the answer was “of course”.

Cambridge began the century with three secular educational institutions, Harvard, Radcliffe College and Lesley College, joined in the second decade by MIT. Other smaller institutions arrived over the course of the century. Radcliffe and Lesley served only women; Harvard admitted only men; and MIT was from the beginning a coeducational institution. The institutions represented opportunity and prestige for those who were permitted to enter. They were perceived as rich and powerful and able to do as they wished. But in reality the history of these institutions in the 20th century was profoundly influenced by the changes in the city’s people and the actions of the city’s political leadership and agencies. We will look at how these two forces have interacted during the last century and perhaps discover principals regarding the rules of their engagement.

The Century began as political power was being wrested by the newer citizens from the old establishment. At century's end, the city’s political map became far more diverse, reflecting immigration from around the world. But, the fundamental issues which town and gown have struggled with over the last hundred years have changed little. While Cambridge has gone from precarious financial stability in the early years to one with a triple A bond rating , the solution to some problems that both town and gown share still eludes resolution. The quality of the cities educational services, the availability of housing resources at reasonable cost, the cities’ financial stability in the face of objections to unbridled commercial real estate
development and the continuing acquisition of land for institutional development with its inevitable reduction of taxable real estate, remained unresolved.

The basis for much of the misunderstandings between town and gown lay in their fundamentally different governance structures. The” academy”, is a self governing, self perpetuating autocracy, where leaders are chosen by a select few for long terms with the specific purpose of defending and extending the academy’s aspirations. And the” town”, which is a raucous, rough and tumble expression of democracy, where leaders who stand for election every two years must, to survive, reflect at least some of their constituents loves, hates, fears and biases. Often their best and worst qualities.

There were, however, during the century, demonstrations of leadership and unity of purpose that illustrate how under certain circumstances, the town and the gown could act together to address problems and opportunities of mutual interest.

In 1900, President Eliot at Harvard and was finishing a long run in office. He had been a professor at MIT during its early years in Boston and he brought to Harvard a passion for changing a hide bound college into a modern university. He modernized the curriculum and opened the college’s doors to students of merit regardless of religious preference, ethnicity or race, if they met his academic standards. His message was what mattered was merit and ability. This extension of this hospitality to the community seeking the American dream through education
sent a message to the town that the institution preferred community's affection rather than its envy and anger. The result of this initiative was a new student body, many of which were the products of the local public school systems and who commuted from home. For them the college was their entry into another world. Many of the new students would continue to come from New England towns and cities but a growing number were from immigrant Jewish families. Fewer came from the Irish Catholic community where the suspicions of church authorities on the motives of the secular university were still strong. Access to Harvard for needy graduates of the Cambridge public schools was made possible by the generosity of a local philanthropist. The Buckley Scholars would establish important links between town and gown in the years to follow.

At the beginning of the century, the Cambridge economy, which had developed industries in, fits and starts in the eastern end of the city had produced a variety of factories that employed a large number of immigrants. Housing to support this population was being built quickly and as the city’s population grew a new political majority took its place in the town. A population that discovered that education was the key to success.

Education, one of Cambridge’s earliest colonial enterprises, continued to stimulate new ideas about how to do it well. In 1909, Edith Lesley, a pioneer in early childhood education decided to open a normal school for young women who wanted to prepare for careers in teaching young children. These students came mainly from immigrant and working class families who saw the school as their
opportunity to engage in a worthy profession, to improve their mobility and their social standing. The fact that the college located in the Lesley homestead on Wendell Street was a few steps away from the Harvard Law school was something the college has never shied away from noting in its description to prospective students.

By the end of the decade A. Lawrence Lowell, the complete Boston Brahmin, succeeded to the presidency of Harvard and with him came in full measure the prejudices, self assurance and arrogance of his caste. He found an institution full of messy ideals. Eliot had enriched the curriculum and invited students to seek their own specialties through elective courses of study. Lowell found this an invitation to anarchy. Furthermore, he found the students in the college broke into divisions. There were students who drew their place at Harvard from family legacy and social position as compared to those who came on the basis of merit and academic achievement. Lowell found the poor but determined immigrant students who appeared out of trolleys and later the Harvard Square subway station each day not to his liking and he dreamed of a new way of college life that would produce a social integration in his image. He believed that he had the college’s best interest at heart regardless of his critics.

The “well rounded“ Harvard man was his goal. His image was of a version of an Oxford or Cambridge college where gentleman would be formed that would rise to his standard.

But his view had a dark side characterized by his caste’s religious bias. He pressed for quotas for Jewish students for fear of Harvard’s becoming dominated by
immigrant and ethnic students. He sent the message, however, oblique, to the town that Jews, Italian, Irish, French Canadian, Portuguese and others of their like need not apply or not apply in too large a number. The shift in policy would send a clear message to the town that unlike Eliot, who saluted merit from any quarter, Lowell would protect the college from the influence of the “newer races.” He began by insisting that freshman all live in college houses. A consequence, perhaps unintended would be to draw students away from the rooming houses thereby reducing the informal and economically important interaction between town and gown. His housing policy also undercut the more exclusive private residences along Mt Auburn Street’s gold coast that catered to wealthier students. These had been built by private developers who by 1912 had lost many of their customers to Lowell’s new policies and were anxious to negotiate their sale of their properties to the university.

He began an aggressive campaign of recruiting students from outside the Boston area. He looked for students from the mid west and south. Students, he thought were the “right” kind of people to populate his institution.

While his policies increased construction work, for local workers they also resulted in an expansion of the universities land holdings with the resulting loss of tax revenue for the city.

Meanwhile, from the Boston end of the Harvard Bridge MIT’s new President Richard Maclaurin was casting his eyes on the undeveloped land facing the new
Charles River basin. In 1911, he proposed that MIT move to Cambridge. The idea began to develop traction as Cambridge industrialist Everett Morse; president of the Simplex Wire and Cable Company and other MIT alumni recruited supporters for this idea.

Harvard’s Eliot had tried three times to draw MIT into the Harvard fold and had failed in each attempt. So it came as no surprise that President Lowell, was opposed to having MIT come to Cambridge. Concerned for the impact of two institutions on the tax base he voiced his opposition to the idea. He was fearful that MIT would add to the tax burdens of the city and lead to demands for compensation from both institutions.

When other cities began to compete for MIT, Cambridge civic associations and the city council invited MIT to settle in Cambridge. It is not clear whether it was the spirit of competition or the belief that MIT could offer access to new technologies and employment opportunities that Cambridge extended its invitation. But, it appeared, that not since the lifting of the Spanish siege of the City of Leiden, when William of Orange asked what the town would choose to recognize their valiant effort, had a community chosen a university rather than tax relief.

By October of 1911, the MIT Corporation had acquired 46 acres of soggy land at the edge of the Charles River and had started planning its new campus. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts joined in supporting MIT’s move for which it received a number of state scholarships for Massachusetts residents.
The design for the new MIT campus was intrusted to MIT alumnus William W. Bosworth, who produced a handsome campus for MIT and a new front door for Cambridge. The new buildings, of classical design, serenity and symmetry were a sharp departure from the Cambridge brick that had dominated the city’s architecture. Built in reinforced concrete and clad as they were in limestone they presented a new image of the city to the world. No doubt to the dismay of the owners of the Cambridge brick works in North Cambridge.

In 1916, the new Technology buildings were finished, ceremonies celebrating MIT’s move to Cambridge were completed and the faculty and students got down to work. And a new word had entered the Cambridge lexicon. The conductors on the Massachusetts Avenue street car Line, upon stopping on the north side of the bridge to let passengers off, would now call out “Technology”

But some other important events occurred in 1916 that would tie the institute’s leadership to Cambridge for the future. A new house for the MIT president was built on memorial Drive and Pres. Maclaurin took up residence in Cambridge. Simultaneously, new student housing was being occupied on the campus. The following year, the United States had entered the First World War and MIT was training aviators and radio operators for the service. Mobilization took many young people from both the town and the gown. Many never returned. At the end of the war in 1918 returning veterans, both student and residents returned to their
duties but the lack of funds made it difficult for MIT to digest its new campus and to begin to fulfill its aspirations. But, some bright spots appeared for the town on the industrial side. The Lever Bros. Company built its new soap plant in Kendall Square and the Boston Woven Hose Company producing rubber products installed itself just north of the campus on Broadway. Both brought new olfactory experiences to the neighborhood.

By the end of the second decade MIT was still struggling with financial difficulties but alumni and friends came to the rescue. The most serious community calamity, however, was the great influenza epidemic that took scores of lives in Cambridge and Boston. In January of 1920, MIT President Richard Maclaurin fell ill and died. In spite of this tragedy, renewed efforts to protect the public health were undertaken by MIT and the Harvard School of Public Health faculty and students.

1920 was also the year that women won the right to vote and theories regarding the impact of this new constituency in the city’s politics were rife. The league of Women Voters would soon begun to be heard from. Although non-partisan, they would be seen as allied with the universities and more progressive views about city affairs. They would soon discover that clan loyalties would emerge to support more conservative and traditional Cambridge political lines.

Meanwhile President Lowell was determined to leave a legacy of residence based education at Harvard that would bring the undergraduates inside the university’s
walls. Thereby removing in part, the unruly private housing conditions that he may have sensed fueled the conflict between town and gown. His plan also may have been designed to support his strong view that there were too many commuters from groups he thought less desirable. He demanded that only 12% of the entering class would be of the Jewish faith. To give substance to Lowell’s goals, he commissioned a new plan for the University’s further development in 1922. He retained the services of the very Brahmin firm of Coolidge Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott to do the work. And the university would expand its land holdings.

By 1923, Samuel Stratton was president of MIT. The following year, a member of MIT’s corporation, looking ahead to the future, acquired for MIT, additional undeveloped land on the west side of Massachusetts Avenue. Originally intended as a copy of an elegant Backbay neighborhood, the land had lain fallow and had become an informal dump for all sorts of unwanted material. The City approached MIT in that year for land to extend Vassar Street from Mass Ave to Memorial Drive. MIT provided the land and as a result a number of landowners developed warehouse facilities on Vassar Street that added to the city’s tax base.

By 1925, Cambridge’s population was reaching a peak of 120,000 and MIT under pressure to accommodate more of its students on the somewhat isolated campus added a new dormitory. The following year Harvard completed additional land purchases along the river’s edge. Over the next two years, as Harvard began to implement its new housing plan, the city began to experience some economic woes
as its expenses began to outstrip its resources. By 1928 circumstances had reached the point where members of the Harvard Corporation expressed concern about the university’s expansion and its impact on real estate revenue to service the Cambridge budget. The universities represented an estimated 50 million dollars in tax exempt property and Cambridge faced the need to demand more tax from residents, not a few of which were members of the Harvard teaching staff. Cambridge sought the universities assistance. After much discussion, the first formal payment in lieu of tax agreement that included Harvard, Radcliffe and MIT was formulated in 1928 and signed in 1929. It provided for payments for land taken off the tax roles after this date. Mayor Quinn of Cambridge made great capital of this agreement but the Harvard Crimson made light of Quinn’s political posturing given the limitations of the agreement. They did, however, note that this was a watershed in town gown relations that suggested there were limits to tax exemption for educational institutions.

But 1928 was a lucky year for Harvard’s President Lowell. Edward Harkness, a Yale alumnus provided the funds for Lowell to fulfill his dream of creating the undergraduate houses that he believed would transform the college into a place that served his new kind of Harvard student. White, protestant middle and upper class and drawn from across the country.

Following the stock market crash in 1929 the universities and the town began to reflect on the economic troubles that confronted them. Harvard raised its tuition 33% from $300 to $400 dollars. Despite the economic situation their enrollment remained stable as Harvard was now drawing its students mainly from wealthier
families who could afford the higher tuition. It would be the less well off that would feel the doors close. With the exception of Cambridge students eligible for the Buckley Scholarships, the demographic profile of the university was beginning to change. The shift was not lost on the City’s residents.

By 1930, the change was accelerating and more than one half of the freshman at Harvard came from private schools. The preppies often brought with them social biases that revealed a cruel streak. Students living in the Harvard Houses along Bow and Mt Auburn Street would heat copper pennies on their steam radiators. When a Cambridge youngster would pass by they would toss the hot pennies to the street and watch with amusement as the children singed their fingers as they tried to pick up the hot pennies. Generations later, these stories, still retold today, color the relationship between the town and gown. Yet the anger at such behavior was to a degree mitigated by the economic opportunities the universities provided. During these difficult times, the construction program at Harvard and MIT kept many construction workers employed and their families fed. 1930 saw the opening of new undergraduate Houses. As these buildings were occupied they would offer opportunities for longer term employment to Cambridge workers.

These were difficult economic times and a new generation of leadership at both the City and the universities were moving into place.

Karl Compton came from Princeton in 1930 to lead MIT into a new scientific era. At the same time, President Roosevelt asked Dr. Compton to search for new ways to combat the depression that had gripped the country. Compton recommended
reorganizing the U.S. patent system to help make the U.S. economy more competitive. The long term effects of those and other policy changes relating to patents have allowed Cambridge to become the base for many new science and technology based industries.

But in 1931, everyone was in trouble. Compton found MIT in serious financial difficulty and set out to rebuild its educational and economic base. Harvard during this period cut employee wages while faculty salaries remained intact. President Lowell, in an effort to protect his faculty from the depression provided them with low cost housing, food travel funds and even funds for servants. This disparity in treatment for employees, many of whom were Cambridge residents, only served to reinforce the enmity between town and gown. In contrast, the following year, MIT withheld 10% of salaries over $500 as a reserve to tide it over the crisis. These funds were later distributed to those who had suffered the deduction. MIT felt it necessary to increase tuition in 1932 from $400 to $500. It’s enrollment dropped as a result. But with the help of Gerard Swope of the General Electric company MIT was able to establish the Technology Loan Fund, an interest free loan fund that allowed able students of modest means to attend MIT.

In 1933, James Bryant Conant becomes President at Harvard. Scientists were now at the helm of both of the two large institutions in Cambridge. Conant described his position as being the president of a holding company responsible for twenty odd, operating companies. He was; apparently, not always sure if each of the companies knew to whom their first loyalty belonged. The secretary of the Harvard
Corporation, Mr. Bailey, is said to have observed that “the University suffers from acute decentralization“. Conant shared some of Lowell’s views on the makeup of the student body and he worked to establish a national scholarship program that would bring in students from the south and west. He also was advised to repair Harvard’s relationships with the Irish Catholic community who exercised considerable political clout in Boston. Soon, the “Celtic Chair “ was established as an expression of the desire to develop more cordial relationships with the town. But old injuries die-hard. In 1934 Michael Sullivan was elected to his first term in the Cambridge City Council. He set the tone for contentious relationships with Harvard for many years. He would be followed by two sons and a grandson who would serve as councilors and mayors of the city. They have never hesitated to remind the universities of their obligations to the people of Cambridge.

During the difficult economic times in the thirties, employment at both institutions helped to tide many city residents over. Meanwhile, at MIT, Compton was building the scientific capacity that a few short years later would be key to the country’s ability to defeat Germany and Japan in WWII. It would also serve to establish the basis for a new economic era in Cambridge.

At Harvard, the university continued to struggle with the issue of the proportion of scholarship students that were entering as freshman. The claim was that too many scholarship students could undermine the fiscal health of the institution. That message was heard by people of modest means and it never went down well.

Meanwhile, the city’s municipal government had slipped into habits of nepotism,
favoritism, and questionable financial and contract behavior. This led to a movement to change the established political order. Dean Landis of the Harvard Law School, the League of Women’s Voters and other volunteers led a good government movement. They were determined to clean up the City. The Plan E form of government, that featured professional management and elections to the city council by proportional representation, would be their mechanism. Their first attempt to change in 1938 failed, but they were determined and ultimately won the change in 1940. The “gown” now seemed to be engaging in the political process and a continuing struggle for power between the university surrogates and the independent town’s folk would ensue.

As the city’s expenses climbed, Mayor Jack Lyon called on the University to make a $100,000 contribution to the City. The Universities were not inclined to do so given what appeared to be a bloated city budget rife with political appointments. The tensions between town and gown grew as the new members of the City Council joined the fray. In addition, to Michael Sullivan, who attempted to close down two student theatrical productions at Harvard, John Toomey who would later be the powerful chairman of the ways and Means committee in the state legislature joined the chorus. But some of the new politicians were, of a different stripe. Edward Crane Harvard class of 1935, the son of a Cambridge police officer began his career in politics at this time. He would bring a different view to town gown affairs.

Meanwhile, off on quiet Wendell Street, in the shadow of the Harvard Law School, Lesley College was growing and developing under the sponsorship of several Cambridge businessmen. That year the college became a four year institution
issuing bachelor’s degrees. The College also began the laboratory schools which have helped to make them one of the leaders in early childhood education.

By 1940, the world was at war again. The government in Washington once again looked to MIT and Harvard in Cambridge, to prepare for the nation’s defense.

The year ended, with a change in the city’s form of government and the indictment for bribe taking of the City’s Mayor John Lyon. The following year, 1941, would be a year of great significance for Cambridge and its institutions. With the US entrance into WWII town and gown shifted into high gear for the war effort. MIT needed Cambridge’s cooperation to suspend a number of building restrictions to allow the building of research facilities for the now famous Radiation Laboratory. This laboratory would develop the radar equipment that many claim won the war.

Hundreds of Cambridge citizens worked at MIT and Harvard laboratories in Cambridge. Everyone was focused on the common goal of winning the war. However, from that experience a different view of the town and gown relationship began to emerge. MIT and Harvard were doing war time research that would in the post war years form the basis for a new Cambridge economy. The electronics, computer and biotech industries all had their seeds planted at this time.

But wartime did not entirely suspend the city’s desire to seek new revenues. In November of 1942 with gas rationed, bicycles were becoming the preferred mode of travel about the city. A new city ordinance was introduced which required all bicycles to be registered for a 25cent fee, which entitled the owner to a license plate and ID. Unregistered cyclists could be liable for a $20 fine. Well over a thousand university personnel became contributors to this new source of income.
By the end of the war in 1945, the City and its institutions realized that nothing would be the same again. The GI bill brought thousands of veterans to Cambridge to pursue their education. Older, serous, many with families they needed housing or in some cases places to park their trailers. Cambridge was asked to continue to suspend some building restrictions to accommodate this situation. The Cambridge Housing authority pitched in and helped to facilitate the housing of some of these new residents of the city.

But some of the old habits still lingered. Cambridge tried to put the federally financed veterans housing on the tax rolls and only after the federal government stepped in was it agreed to come up with a formula that would pay the city some additional payments in lieu of taxes. But self interest was not only found in the city, Harvard, anxious to control costs being mandated by new federal programs such as the expansion of the social security program tried to get an exclusion for its employees from the Social Security Act. Fortunately wiser heads prevailed and the Harvard treasurer warned that the university would only earn deep resentment from its employees and forgo much good will from the public.

The good government movement led by university graduates, faculty and staff having changed the form of governance and having put in place a professional management versus a political management system in city government, now turned to the Cambridge schools which they believed was controlled by political families and personalities. They initiated, in 1945, a review of the school dept by the
Harvard School of Education. The School of Education’ Field Study Report was very critical of the Cambridge School Superintendent and his management of the school system. This led to a long chill between Harvard and the Cambridge School’s to the loss of both. Supporters of the school department replied to the Harvard critique with anger. They did not wish to have their children "experimented " with by Harvard academics who were undoubtedly influenced by questionable ideologies. At the center of this controversy was probably the perception that the university wanted control of the school system and questioned the competence of the resident community to guide their own children’s education.

By 1946, housing was becoming a serious issue with many students taking up the available housing inventory. Some students lived in trailers and the University’s were trying to develop new housing inventory to meet the needs. In 1947, with students living in war time research buildings converted to barracks, MIT commissioned the distinguished Finnish architect Alvar Aalto to design a new senior dormitory, In 1948, it leased land to an insurance company to build 270 apartments at 100 Memorial Drive for both MIT staff and the public. Harvard began the planning for additions to its graduate residences and the expansion or construction of new undergraduate houses.

In 1949 James R. Killian became MIT’s President and brought to the job a desire to work with Cambridge to solve old problems and prepare for new opportunities in which the city and the Institute could cooperate. It was the same year that city
councilor Michael Sullivan long a nemesis of Harvard died in office. His son Edward Sullivan succeeded him on the city council the following year.

At mid century the cold war was in full swing and town and gown issues gave way to questions of academic freedom, loyalty oaths and political affiliations. Many Cambridge politicians supported loyalty oaths for what they thought were patriotic or politically advantageous reasons. They were less concerned about the implications for academic freedom. The red scare and McCarthyism threatened the very core of Cambridge’s institutions and at MIT President Killian fought back against the forces who were prepared to do great injury to the universities. He warned “In a period of armed truce …he was concerned about national and local politicians seeking to hunt communists on the campus.” He said that…”the institute is opposed to communism. It is equally opposed to the communistic method of dictating to scholars the opinions they may have and the doctrines they teach “.

In his first year in office President Killian was gearing up for a major fund raising campaign that would put MIT on track to expand the discoveries made in its laboratories during the war. This would set in motion events that would have a major effect on the future of Cambridge’s economy.

By 1950, the old industrial base of Cambridge was faltering.

The soap manufacturing at Lever Brothers in Kendall Square, the meat packing plant at Squires in East Cambridge, the woodworking firms and furniture factories were losing ground and last but not least the American Casket Company was heading into the sunset. The confectionery industry, long a Cambridge stalwart was beginning to loosen its ties to the city. The Daggett Chocolate Company would be
gone in a few years. The abandoned space, however, would be key to the emergence of a knowledge based economy in Cambridge. MIT and Harvard faculty researchers and graduates were incubating a new economy in the old warehouse and manufacturing buildings. A score of electronic companies and research and development firms began their days in Cambridge in these old, low rent factory buildings.

This slow transition was not an immediate boon to the city. It was still losing tax revenue and jobs at a rapid pace. Meanwhile, the Institutions were growing and more job opportunities for able Cambridge residents were expanding. The jobs, at least for some MIT employees meant more than food on the table. Employment at MIT brought with it the opportunity for tuition support for their children. Maintenance workers seeing their children graduate from MIT would result in bonds not easily equated to a holiday bonus or a Christmas turkey. At Harvard, in spite of good intentions, faculty committees, examining the relationship between Harvard and its employees characterized the labor management situation as “feudal”.

In spite of some progress, the decline of the city’s industrial base was a steady drain on the city’s resources. Efforts to seek direct financial aid from the institutions continued but were not generally successful. The city began to look at the Federal and State redevelopment programs as a way out and authorized the Cambridge Housing Authority to seek funds for urban redevelopment. The first of these urban renewal projects was the “Rogers block”. A down at the heals tenement building,
across Main street from MIT and adjacent to the Lever soap plant. It did not attract investment interest.

Meanwhile, Harvard was picking up the pace to help meet some of its housing needs. It built a new graduate center and residence next to the Law School. A move which alerted nearby Lesley and the Agassiz neighborhood to pay closer attention for the sake of their respective futures.

In 1952, Cambridge awoke to the fact that the Massachusetts State highway Department’s proposal to build an inner belt highway through Cambridge was becoming serious. This highway had grown from a four lane road to an eight lane interstate highway and would cut a swath through the city some 400 feet wide and displace many families and businesses. This issue would test the political and institutional leadership of the city in the most serious way. During the years that it was under consideration, the highway proposal pitted community against institution and institution against community. Ironically, it was a time when Cambridge and Boston had powerful representation in both state and federal government. Yet, the redevelopment and highway building frenzy of the time carried along its representatives. They could have worked for a balanced transportation program but did not. The lack of political leadership capable of organizing all of the resources of the city to focus on this issue persisted until the early 70’s. Then, Governor Frank Sargent, an MIT alumnus decided to withdraw state support for the highway proposal.

Harvard changed leaders in 1953. Midwestern Nathan Pusey, president of a small college in Appleton, Wisconsin came to Cambridge to take up his duties. At
Appleton, he developed close personal relations with local citizens and town officials. He had been lionized in the national press for his willingness to stand up against Senator Joseph McCarthy then leading a witch hunt for communists at American institutions. But he was not prepared for the rough and tumble political atmosphere he found in Cambridge.

As the universities took up the opportunities that increasing national support for research was providing, they also attracted bright graduate students from all over the world. These young people were not always met with friendship or hospitality from Cambridge Landlords. Alice Rossi, a distinguished sociologist and wife of an MIT professor, undertook a study of attitudes of rooming house landlords toward MIT graduate students. The study revealed some deep-seated prejudices toward foreign students particularly Africans, black Americans and Jewish students. This study led to a non-discrimination pledge requirement for all landlords who wished to list their rooms or apartments with university rental listing services.

The 1954 Federal Housing Act further energized the city to take advantage of federal aid. Mayor Crane established the required Citizen’s Advisory Committee to assist the city in guiding its renewal planning program. Both Presidents of Harvard and MIT served on the committee, as did a wide variety of citizens from all parts of the city. For many ordinary Cambridge residents this would be the first time they would come into contact with the leaders of these mythic institutions to address citywide issues. Cambridge would ultimately be deeply influenced by these events,
because they focused on local issues of economic development, jobs, taxes, education and housing. Issues, which were of, equal importance to the city and to the institutions.

In 1957, the country was jostled out of its self-assurance by the Russian Sputnik achievement. And once again the nation turned to the Cambridge universities for help. President Eisenhower asked Mr. Killian to become the nation’s first science advisor and to help the country get its scientific affairs in order. MIT professors were working full tilt on developing new physics curricula for high schools.

With all of this national and international attention on the city’s institutions one would have thought that local conflicts would be put on hold. But, the old tensions and political tweaking were just below the surface. A City Councilor proposed to pave over the Harvard yard to provide parking for people driving to Harvard Square.

In 1957-58, the City’s efforts to plan for its future had the benefit of a number of talents from the university community. The head of the City Planning Department at MIT and the Dean of the Harvard School of Design, both residents of the city, served on the Planning Board. MIT alumnus Mark Fortune, the city’s planning director formulated, with his small and talented staff, a vision for the Cambridge Planning Board and City council to consider. It showed how the renewal of the city could occur in a rational way. Many of the ideas in this plan ultimately were realized through the cooperation of the city, the universities and the business community.

By 1958, both Harvard and MIT had established planning offices to address the
long-term planning and development needs of their institutions. Both explored ways to meet institutional needs that would be in concert with the cities goals. The MIT Planning Office was established by President Julius Stratton with a broad mandate to plan for MIT’s growth but to also seek ways of developing useful and cordial relations with the community. President Pusey, at Harvard established a new post of Assistant to the President for Community Affairs and charged it to “Deal with the manifold problems connected with the University’s day to day existence in a large urban area“.

In 1958, MIT leadership, with a reputation for taking an active role in community affairs, was called upon to respond to an unusual request. The city found itself confronted with the decision of the Lever Bros. Soap Company to close its Cambridge plant. The employees were given notice and the property, was put on the market. Next door, the “Rogers Block” redevelopment project, undertaken by the city, lay moribund. The property had been cleared but there was little commercial interest in redeveloping the land. Now Mayor of the city, Edward Crane asked President Killian if MIT could do something to help the city in this crisis. Out of these conversations emerged a proposal to establish a partnership involving MIT and the real estate development firm, Cabot, Cabot and Forbes to redevelop the soap plant site and the Rogers Block into a new Research and Development Center to be called Technology Square. This unusual venture would be the first step in the revitalization of the city’s commercial and industrial economic base.

In another corner of the city, Lesley College was also planning its future. The
talented President Trentwell Mason White whose earlier career in the theater gave him a sense of flair and imagination now led the college. Under his leadership, the college became a major player in early childhood education and training for special needs children. Several Cambridge businessmen and local corporations that included Livingston Stebbins, the Carter Ink Corporation, and the Welch Company supported him.

Lesley college had long since developed relationships with the Cambridge school system and as its reputation and enrollment grew it was seeking to expand its services. It began to purchase homes in the Wendell and Mellon Street area adjacent to its existing facilities. One of Lesley’s motivations was their sense that the impending expansion plans of Harvard University would preempt their own aspirations to develop a more efficient and economical campus. Their actions, however, alerted the Agassiz neighborhood to the threat of two expanding institutions. But Lesley wisely established a number of satellites for its lab schools to limit their need to intrude into the neighborhood. Lesley Ellis and Lesley Dearborn on Concord Avenue and Lesley Lowell were among the initiatives. In another pioneering effort, the college developed programs for foreign language training for young children.

As the fifth decade closed it was clear that although the City appointed Citizens Advisory Committee with community and university representation had commissioned or conducted study after study of issues facing the city, little progress was visible. Progressive political action groups that had grown out of the effort to install the Plan E form of government was active in presenting candidates
for the city council and school committee and pursuing its own vision for the city. But, often these views were contested by the long term Cambridge residents who thought of the good government or goo goo's as they were known, as merely extensions of the universities. An illustration of the extent to which this could lead to bizarre behavior was the water fluoridation proposal, which pitted town against gown. For some, this proposal was seen as the university’s trying to poison the children of Cambridge, for others it was simply a plot to put all of the local dentists out of business. Unusual theories, rumor and mistrust were the order of the day.

1960 was a big year in Cambridge for Town and Gown relations: A major revision of the zoning ordinance was being debated. The changes proposed would introduce new ways of constraining university expansion. High densities would be allowed in the existing university precincts to encourage concentrated development. Height limits were lifted in the hope that the universities would build up not out.

MIT Chairman James Killian announced the Technology Square development at a Chamber of Commerce meeting, raising the hopes for a renaissance in the city’s economy.

MIT and Harvard both embarked on fund raising campaigns to increase the amount of student housing. Complaints from Cambridge landlords and developers of rental housing were heard as the universities went forward with their housing plans. Unfair competition it was called. But the rising market for housing quickly made it clear that there was room for everyone to pitch in. In recognition of how rapidly times were a changing,
Harvard, in 1960, finally permitted women to attend all classes at the university on an equal basis with men.

President Kennedy announced that with the help of MIT’s scientists and engineers the United States would get to the moon within the decade. At the same time, the Innerbelt highway issue was heating up and ironically, many of the laboratories that would get us to the moon lay along one of the routes proposed for the highway.

Unintended consequences and conflicts that stoked the town-gown fires were the order of the day. Harvard completed additions to its undergraduate housing along Memorial Drive without thinking that the sole neighborhood playground serving the Riverside neighborhood would soon be dominated by students who elbowed local residents out, another item, in the list of offenses by the university, that would long is remembered by residents.

With the passage of the amended zoning ordinance in 1962, the expansion of the universities was guided by a new set of rules. Laboratories and housing for students were being built but little progress was being made to meet community-housing needs. Even the city’s Housing Authority was running into resistance from traditional neighborhoods when they tried to find sites to develop housing projects for their own elderly.

But the growth of the universities was not only a concern of the town; it was an issue for some of Harvard’s own corporation members. One called for “putting on the brakes on the explosive expansion of demands for growth”

The following year brought town-gown into conflict in unexpected ways.

Some members of the university were encouraging the Metropolitan District
Commission to resolve the difficult traffic condition at the intersection of Memorial Drive and Boylston Street (now J F K Street) by building an underpass. This would have required the removal of several of the stately sycamore trees that had been planted almost a 100 years earlier by the city’s Parks commission. The residents of the adjacent neighborhoods led a campaign designed by the father of American public relations, Edward L. Bernays; called “Save the Sycamores” that defeated the proposal.

Another misadventure initiated by Harvard was its attempt to develop much needed junior faculty housing on a large piece of land acquired from the estate of a Harvard Professor. The neighbor’s, largely senior Harvard faculty members, opposed the plan testifying at the City’s Planning Board meeting. They criticized the University administration for a plan that would destroy the peace and quiet of the neighborhood. These events illustrate that it was not always clear where the town and gown began and ended.

One of the most painful events of 1963 was the assassination of President Kennedy. Both town and gown had shared in his triumphs and now, so abruptly it had ended. In the aftermath of his death, the battle over the location of his presidential library will go down as one of the great ironies in the city. The Harvard Square neighborhoods opposed the library for fear it would bring unwanted traffic. The fractious situation led the library to another site near the University of Massachusetts. In hindsight the development of a hotel, commercial space and academic buildings for the Kennedy school of government has probably produced more traffic than has ever been experienced at the Kennedy Library’s site in Boston.
By 1964, frustration with the lack of progress by city housing agencies led the university leadership to seek the counsel of the Ford Foundation. A study funded by the Foundation recommended that a non-profit corporation be established that could initiate housing developments in the City. Underlying the lack of housing programs sponsored by the city may have been the cautious concern on the part of some City Councilors that too much new housing would serve new populations that would change the political profile of the city’s voters.

The universities established the non-profit Cambridge Corporation and capitalized it with a million dollars in startup funds. The board of directors included members of town and gown as well as public officials. A director was recruited to fulfill the corporation’s mission of generating new housing and new economic development. Unfortunately, the corporation had only limited success in its mission. It soon became mired in Cambridge politics.

But there were some gains. That year when university students initiated the Tutoring Plus program connecting university students with Cambridge school children, it has become one of the most successful encounters between town and gown.

1965 was the year in which the Cambridge Planning Board, in an effort to give sensible guidance to the future development of the city, published its Cambridge Land Use Plan which set out areas for housing, recreation, commerce and areas where the institutions could develop in a rational fashion.

It was also the year that NASA, seeking to find a home for its electronic research center close to MIT and other universities in Boston, began to search for a site in
Cambridge. A proposal to create a redevelopment project in Kendall Square to accommodate NASA and simultaneously develop a new commercial center was presented by the Citizen’s Advisory Committee to the City Council. A major difficulty for the city in this proposal was how it would pay for its share of the project costs. MIT agreed to provide the city with the necessary financial credits that were needed by the city to proceed. With this support, the ground was laid for capitalizing on the initiatives that had started with MIT’s Technology Square seven years earlier. The renewal of the city’s economic base was now a possibility.

In 1966, a new president was appointed at MIT. Howard W. Johnson, 44 years old was an enthusiastic supporter of the city’s efforts to revitalize its economy and to preserve its heritage. He was determined to make his views for improving the working relationship between the educational institutions and the city. He presented his ideas for a new era in town-gown relations at the annual meeting of the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce. President Pusey of Harvard, now somewhat more cynical about the city’s hospitality told Johnson “Be careful Howard, they are difficult”. Johnson recalls that he later came to know exactly what he (Pusey) meant.

But Johnson’s optimism led him to encourage students to serve in the community. He sought friendships with city councilors but he later recorded in his memoir that “town gown relationships are always complex. Fraught with difficulty as it is, it demands constant attention”.

With a new leadership team in the city comprised of Mayor Daniel Hayes and City
Manager Joseph DeGuglielmo there seemed to be an opportunity for a new amity between town and gown. The Cambridge leadership asked the institutional leadership for help in developing a new cooperative spirit that could help Cambridge move forward on a number of fronts. The university’s leaders agreed to help. MIT’s planning Office assigned staff to identify new planning and financial resources for the city. They helped the city prepare requests to Federal agencies that ultimately brought “Model Cities’ funds to Cambridge. They identified professional resources that allowed Cambridge to take a fresh look at the divisive issue of the Innerbelt highway and design a unified strategy for defending the city from this threat and ultimately demonstrating that it was an unnecessary element of the state’s transportation plan.

There were, however, some issues, which continued to elude resolution. They were housing and the city’s educational system. In 1967, Prof. John Dunlop of Harvard chaired a committee on faculty recruitment and retention that concluded that the improvement of the Cambridge schools and better housing were essential to the university’s ability to hire and keep good faculty. Not long after President Pusey appointed a faculty Committee to look into how the university should deal with Cambridge. Professor Daniel P. Moynihan, was a member of the committee whose report said among other things, “the unremitting scandal of Harvard’s relationship to its community has been its relationship with the working class “

The in lieu of tax agreements first established in 1928, were, once again, up for renewal in 1968 and both universities renewed their agreements, although on
somewhat different basis. Harvard’s officers chose to introduce a percentage of income as a basis for their payment while MIT continued the longstanding policy of contributions based in part on the city's average tax levy for land.

1968 was also the year that the City Council agreed to go forward with the Kendall Square Urban Renewal project to accommodate the NASA Electronics Research Center. Utilizing a special section of the Federal Housing Act designed to assist communities with a heavy presence of institutions, MIT was able to provide the city over five million dollars in financial credits that would enable the city to receive over ten million in Federal funds for the project.

The country was at war in Vietnam and the turmoil between the cities young and old alike was palpable. The universities were the focus of student pressure to change society. Harvard was perceived to be part of the establishment that had led the country into the morass and MIT was seen as the maker of the military instruments that sustained the policies of the national administration. Passions ran high and ultimately a small group of radical students were able to create the conditions for violent confrontation. The “take over” of the Harvard administration building in 1969 followed by President Pusey’s call for assistance from State and local authorities resulted in the now famous “bust”. But it also presented in vivid terms the cartoon of the gown being attacked by its own progeny and calling on the town to save it from harm. The irony of 200 officers mostly from working class backgrounds expelling the privileged students of the middle and upper economic classes from what the town had always seen as the impregnable tower of the elite was historic.
But there were other issues that kept town and gown at spear point.

The housing issue continued to be the nagging irritant that kept conflict alive.

Dissatisfied with the rate of progress being made by the Cambridge Corporation and others in the community, MIT announced in 1969, a program that would produce for the Cambridge Housing Authority, 700 units of housing for the elderly. MIT would do this using the Federal government’s “turnkey housing program”. It would also add a substantial number of housing units for its own students on the campus. In addition, President Johnson announced that a portion of the newly acquired simplex property would be used for the development of housing for MIT faulty and staff.

Shortly thereafter, The Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, the city's poverty agency, sponsored a Housing Convention, which called on all of the city’s institutions, universities and government agencies alike, to commit themselves to providing housing resources for the elderly and the poor.

The opportunity to participate in the revolutionary fervor was too delicious for some members of the academy. Faculty and students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design soon became the source of protest graphics and housing need reports, some of questionable integrity that called people to the barricades. It was another student - worker alliance that would burn brightly for awhile and then fade into oblivion when self-interest replaced political passion.

Competition for housing resources in a city that had become one of the principle destinations of the “liberated” young of the country was making things difficult for
both the town and the gown. The resulting rise in the cost of housing was laying the
ground for the introduction, in 1970, of rent control. It would become one of the
most politically divisive issues to be taken up by the City Council. It would be a
source of conflict for many years to come. The author of the rent control ordinance
was sure it would be a temporary measure quickly rescinded when the housing
crisis passed. As it turned out, it became the polarizing issue for the city’s politics
for many years. It would have many unintended consequences and it would shape
the political climate in which town and gown lived in ways that few could have
conceived.

But, other events in which town and gown were intertwined emerged during the
year. The sudden cancellation of the NASA Electronics Research Center by the
Nixon administration galvanized the city to seek help from its institutional and
political friends to find another compatible federal use for the site. Soon the
Department of Transportation was designated as the new tenant for the site. The
most dramatic event of the year were the demands that Riverside neighborhood
resident Saundra Graham made at the Harvard commencement that stopped the
university’s proposed development of university housing on a site on Memorial
Drive facing the Charles river. Graham went on to elected office on the City
Council and the State Legislature. Yet, thirty years later, she would find herself
once again confronting Harvard on their proposal to build first a museum and then
student housing on the same site. Though the faces representing the university had
changed, the universities relentless application of political and economic power
allowed them to finally achieve their objective. Yet, at a price.
Meanwhile Lesley College, under the leadership of President Don Orton was anxious to contain growing neighborhood resistance, to the College’s purchase of dwellings. The college undertook a new campus development strategy and built a new academic building within its existing campus to accommodate its growth needs.

The following year both MIT and Harvard changed presidents. Jerome Wiesner, who had been President Kennedy’s science advisor and who was a deeply committed anti war advocate, took over at MIT and Derek Bok, Dean of the Harvard Law School became Harvard’s president. President Wiesner’s was a person who had devoted himself to nuclear disarmament and human rights issues. He had lived in nearby Watertown where he had been elected to the school committee. He had a strong interest in primary and secondary education. He was a great supporter of initiatives, which would help the minority community. But he did not become much involved in local Cambridge affairs. Perhaps, believing that things MIT had underway with the city were well in hand.

MIT continued to make progress with its housing for the elderly projects for the Cambridge Housing Authority. When completed they would be the largest single contribution to affordable housing for the elderly in the city’s history.

The seventh decade of the century was full of excitement for town and gown in Cambridge. It was a muscular time when civility had slipped into the background and “demand” had replaced “requests for consideration”, Yet, the outside world continued to influence the common town and gown agenda in Cambridge. President Nixon’s announcement that he would initiate a war on cancer energized scientists
and citizens alike. The research resources that would come into Cambridge would require new facilities and new researchers that would advance the science that would cure this scourge. It would also help to create the basis for the biotechnical industries that would form the backbone of the city’s economy two decades later.

But, the dominant atmosphere at this time was of cultural and political revolution. Hippies and flower children camped in and around the universities. Counter culture was ala mode. Challenges to traditional authority were rife in both town and gown. Sexual liberation and the “People's Republic of Cambridge” were the standards that flew in the face of the institutions that were trying to protect the principal of rational discussion and respect for everyone’s rights.

There were political events that focused on the role of the university laboratories whose work supported national and international policy that got out of hand. The police responded with tear gas clouds but in the main most of the activity was limited to debate and discourse. It was a time, when new political leadership, drawn, often from university graduates, began to emerge. David Sullivan, no relation to the Cambridge Sullivan’s and an MIT alumnus took up a leadership role in the Cambridge Civic Association. He ultimately won a seat on the city council and advanced an agenda that was determined to change the balance of power in the city. Not inconsequential to his objective was the fact that 18-year-olds had gained the right to vote.

The city now began to make formal annual requests to all of the tax exempt land owners for a payment in lieu of taxes based on the their land holdings. MIT and Harvard were already participating, but Lesley College and many other smaller
institutions, already challenged by difficult financial times, demurred.

By 1973, MIT had sold its interest in Technology Square, having produced since the project began, some 900,000 square feet of new tax paying buildings. But next door the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority was now faced with another Federal government’s decision to abandon a portion of the land that it had reserved for its electronic research center. Eleven acres of land were now available for other uses and the Mayor Barbara Ackermann appointed a citizen’s committee to review the development options for this land. In spite of cries for more mixed income housing from MIT and the surrounding neighborhoods, some city councilors opposed new housing. Apparently for fear that it would change the political balance of voters in the neighborhood. This shortsighted view was abetted by a combination of forces from the Harvard side of the city that saw the eastern end of Cambridge solely as the city’s economic cash cow.

The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 brought much relief to town and gown but it was not long after, in 1976, that a new controversy erupted between town and gown concerning recombinant DNA research. Ethical and safety discussions about this kind of research had been going on for some years and in 1975 a national conference at Asilomar in California has proposed standards for how such research should be conducted. However, Mayor Alfred Vellucci, aware of the interest of some Harvard faculty in building a laboratory to conduct this kind of research, saw an opportunity to demonstrate his skill at reminding the University that “elitist know - it -alls in this city’s academic quarters “ needed to be reminded that the
public might have something to say about this issue. Public hearings were conducted and Mayor Vellucci generated much national publicity for Cambridge and himself. City Councilor Frank Duehay, a Harvard alumnus, moved to put the matter out of the reach of political maneuvering by sponsoring a resolution that would have the City Manager establish an advisory committee to review these matters. After much controversy an ordinance was passed that established a Biohazards Committee that would oversee all recombinant DNA research in the city. Many other university towns adopted this model legislation.

But there were times when town and gown were faced with natural adversity that simply made it sensible to work together. In 1978, a blizzard shut down Boston and environs. Governor Michael Dukakis established a traffic moratorium that precluded automobiles from coming into the city. Town and gown now worked together to restore the city’s operations.

Notwithstanding these moments of cooperation, continued concern about institutional expansion into the city’s residential neighborhoods prompted a legislative petition that would serve as a clear message that the city was willing to draw a line in the sand beyond which the universities would not expand. The next year a home rule petition was passed that allowed the city to restrict institutional expansion into low-density residential neighborhoods. The principal impact of this new authority was to convey to Harvard that its development opportunities in Cambridge were narrowing and that its growth in the city would be severely curtailed in the future. It was time for look for other pastures for its growth. And
Harvard began to look across the river.

The decade of the eighties began with Paul E. Gray inaugurated as the 14th president of MIT. The Cambridge Community Development Department published its “Institutional Growth management Plan” designed to establish limits on the institutions while recognizing their need for reasonable growth and change. Economic impact studies were commissioned by the universities to show their value to the city.

As these development and neighborhood pressures mounted, Lesley College contemplated leaving Cambridge for a less contentious place. Ultimately, it decided that its mission could best be achieved in Cambridge. It decided to stay and seek solutions to its space needs close by. It also initiated a summer school program for Cambridge public schools and it established at the college, the Cambridge partnership for primary education. Their close ties to the Cambridge School system were in stark contrast to the cool relations that had existed for years with Harvard.

By 1984, fourteen years after its acquisition and after what seemed interminable difficulties; MIT had designated a developer for the simplex property, Forest City Enterprises. The City then empanelled a Blue ribbon committee to recommend criteria for the development of the area. After several years of debate, Cambridge, MIT and Forest City Enterprises, in 1988, came to terms on the “University Park” plan for the former simplex properties and the City Council voted the necessary changes in the University Park project for it to proceed. By the end of the century, University Park would be generating five million dollars a year in taxes and supporting 4,500 new jobs.
The same year, Harvard, on the occasion of the renewal of the agreement with Cambridge on the payment of sums in lieu of taxes agreed to make some of its housing resources available to the community at a deep discount.

Not all of the relations with town and gown were contests during these days. One outstanding venture that provided an opportunity to celebrate both Cambridge and its institutions occurred in the design of the new subway station at Kendall Square. The MBTA and its station architect provided an opportunity for Cambridge and MIT to present the history of both communities on the walls of the station. MIT paid for the design of the exhibits. Completed in 1987 the station walls provide visitors and residents of the city alike with a novel and interesting record of the industrial and scientific history of the neighborhood.

The final decade of the century reflected the growing sense of parity of power between town and gown. The city, with the aid of the legislature increased its legislative mandate to exercise more control of land uses. The pressures for more direct contributions to the city’s welfare and the willingness to use the legal powers of the city and its agencies to slow or deflect institutional aspirations were increasing.

In response, the institutions tried to find ways to minimize friction with its neighbors and the City Council. At the beginning of the Decade the Harvard administration announced an increase in the pilot payment and a commitment to the Cambridge partnership for public education. They made new commitments to increase affordable housing and agreed to include a branch library within a faculty...
housing project they were planning for Observatory Hill.

1990 was also the year that Charles Vest would come from the University of Michigan to become MIT’s President. He arrived with mid western optimism and a friendly outlook. But one of his key missions was to improve relations with the Congress and the national administration, the principal source of institutional research support. He would also be required to devote a great deal of his attention to fund raising to help to rebuild student scholarship funds as the national government reduced its commitment in these areas. But, It would not take long before his attention would be drawn to Cambridge affairs.

In 1991, Harvard welcomed a new president Neil Rudenstine. In his early years he tried, as others before had tried, to consolidate the administration of the university. His effort to move toward one consolidated policy on many issues including town and gown relations faltered before the tradition of “each tub on its own bottom “ financing which gave deans great control of their own affairs including growth and expansion plans. Rudenstine would exhaust himself early in his tenure as president and, after taking some time off came back to spend most of his effort on fund raising for the university. At the end of his decade of service he sponsored a number of initiatives in housing and education with Cambridge and Boston that were characterized by now Mayor Duehay in Cambridge as “a magnificent step forward”

At Lesley, efforts were in high gear to connect with the Cambridge Educational system. Their "yes to Education" program provided support for 70 Cambridge students from the Harrington School. Margaret McKenna, Lesley's new president
oversaw the physical expansion of Lesley through the acquisition of the nearby Porter Exchange building whose owners had fallen on hard times. As Lesley found ways to meet its program needs it also reached out to a more extensive relationship with Cambridge schools and their teachers. Lesley also offered tuition discounts to teachers and city employees.

With some important battles won, the city continued to press the universities for more openness about their plans and ways in which they could service the common interest. In 1991, Mayor Kenneth Reeves appointed a council committee on University Community Relations and got the institutions to agree to submit an annual report to the Cambridge Planning Board and City council on their population, housing and growth expectations. But, continued interest in deriving more revenue from the institutions did not abate. Duehay, who had returned to the city council, commissioned a study of the in lieu of tax issue. Prepared at the Kennedy School of government it outlined the pros and cons of different ways in which the universities could compensate the city. The city now took every opportunity to extract a quid pro quo when institutions required some public approval or special service. An example of the cities behavior in these matters began in 1974 when a Justice of the Cambridge District court and a strong advocate for shelters for alcohol and drug abusers, asked MIT for the "temporary" use of a site near the campus to park two trailers that would be used by the Cambridge alcohol and drug rehabilitation program (CASPAR) until the city provided the permanent quarters that had been promised. MIT agreed to lease the land for a dollar a year with the understanding that the site was reserved for student housing. This act of
generosity and good citizenship would ultimately prove that no good deed goes unpunished.

In 1992, MIT asked for permission to connect two of its buildings under a public street that ran through the campus. The previous year, MIT had given CASPAR notice that it wanted to move forward on its student-housing plan and hoped the city would use this opportunity to finally provide the program with a permanent home. No neighborhood in the city was willing to have the CASPAR facility located in its precincts and Cambridge, like the man who came to dinner, indicated that it preferred to have CASPAR remain at its present location. In response, MIT crafted a solution that involved constructing a facility for CASPAR. It leased the building to the city in exchange for the transfer to MIT of public rights of ways and easements that ran through the MIT campus. With this agreement in place, MIT received permission to connect its two buildings under the public way.

In 1993, in an effort to dispel much of the mythology about MIT in the community, a public report was prepared by the MIT Planning Office describing, MIT’s past present and future in Cambridge. The public was invited to the presentations and discussions that followed.

1994 was another watershed year for town-gown relations. It was then that a group of small property owners who had felt unfairly burdened by the Cambridge Rent Control Law took the issue to a state referendum. The referendum won and rent control ended in Cambridge. The result would have profound effects on town and gown. The pent up demand and the artificially suppressed rents now collided and rents began to climb rapidly. Little rental housing had been built during the rent
control years and so rising rents pushed many older and long-term residents out of the city. The city’s efforts to expand the inventory of affordable housing units by levying a requirement on new housing or by contributions to the housing fund from commercial development did not slow the tide. The universities felt the impact of these changes as their students tried to find housing in Cambridge within their means. The universities built some additions to their housing stock but not in sufficient numbers to keep up with the growth in their student’s bodies.

The growing sense of empowerment that a new generation of citizen leadership in Cambridge was developing would soon begin to reveal itself to both the universities and the official city government. A new kind of resident activist, frustrated by the pace of dealing with traffic, over development, erosion of open space and inadequate controls over development spurred a new movement of residents to call for a better quality of life in Cambridge. They identified the new commercial developments as the culprit in generating traffic and parking problems. They saw university developments, particularly those that bordered on existing residential areas as excessive and overbearing. They began to use all of the legal tools at their disposal to redress the balance that they believed had been lost: Lawsuits, zoning petitions, were now the tools du jour. Every development was contested. In parallel, the city’s demography was changing. There was a growing distance between economic class and race. New immigrants and ethnic groups representing a diversity that the city had not contended with before were making new demands. The city was getting richer as a result of new technology stimulated development
but it was becoming more costly to live in. For the universities this would become a serious issue. A lack of an acceptable response from public agencies and Boards to the issues of traffic and development finally led to a citizen’s petition to revise the city’s zoning ordinance. The new changes would reduce allowable densities, limit building heights, restrict university campus development and impose many new restrictions in the city’s industrial zones, institutional districts, Cambridgeport and East Cambridge. The success of this rezoning and the subsequent CityWide Growth Management Advisory Committee proposals resulted in curtailed institutional development opportunities. Some of the institutions began to focus their attention on areas outside Cambridge as they considered their future. Lesley developed programs that are delivered across the country, Harvard would look to Boston and Watertown and MIT would seek to use the land resources it had assembled in Cambridge, over the years, to meet its current academic and residential needs.

By the end of the century the old themes were still being played out. The up coming election season would see new demands for institutional financial contributions, additions to the cities affordable housing inventory, a greater call for middle income housing was now being heard from the voters. More land for public facilities was high on the agenda. A new library, police headquarters, renewed utility infrastructure, water treatment plant, traffic policies, public education, improved quality of life and tax revenue.

Harvard in response announced a housing loan program that would address, in an innovative way, the expansion of affordable housing. MIT would put forward proposals to improve traffic safety on Memorial Drive and Massachusetts Avenue,
MIT would provide additional parkland to the Cambridgeport community and agreed to redevelop a building site in Central Square for the use of two community theatre groups. The extensive interactions between the universities and the school system would continue not withstanding the unrelenting difficulty of dealing with an educational system trying to serve a community that is racially and economically divided.

At the end of the century, town and gown could look back on a city that had come full circle, A prosperous industrial and university city that fell into decay and then phoenix like rose from the ashes with the help of the intellectual capital assembled in its universities. They could see one set of social divisions and prejudices exchanged for others. They could see an educational system that began by providing immigrants with their first step up the ladder of social mobility and was now struggling to meet the demands of a new and more diverse population. They could see that from time to time the city was able to overcome its penchant for tribalism and take advantage of opportunities and select leadership that could cross the boundaries between town and gown and thereby help the city fulfill its promise.

They could see that that the universities, on occasion, could be blessed with leadership that saw their citizenship in Cambridge as an opportunity for creative service. They could see that the tendency for universities to react to the town’s challenges was the norm and that to engage their talents and resources in useful ways was always going to be a work in progress for Cambridge.

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