**Building—and Buying—a Campus**

**THE RECENT BOOM—AND THE FUTURE IN ALLSTON**

*by Jonathan Shaw*

“I S HARVARD RUNNING OUT OF SPACE?” ran a headline in this magazine in the spring of 1989. The answer, the accompanying article explained, was a resounding “Yes.” The Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) was first to go public with its dilemma, which had become apparent as the result of a space analysis provided to Dean Michael Spence in 1988. FAS also faced significant deferred maintenance problems in the freshman dormitories within Harvard Yard, and in its buildings north of the Science Center. A renovation of the exterior of Memorial Hall, then used only occasionally for exams or special events, prompted thoughts about what to do with the grand but underutilized hall within. Planners proposed transforming it back into a dining facility for freshmen. The decision to do so eventually freed the Freshman Union to be remade as the Barker Center for the Humanities, providing much-needed offices and a central location for scholars in those fields.

But almost from the moment renovation and reallocation of existing spaces were begun, it became clear those steps would not be enough. Leaders in the central administration charged with planning and real estate had been first to raise the alarm privately. The imminent space crunch was not confined to FAS. Data they had gathered on growth during the prior 40 years showed that Harvard had added more than a million square feet of space per decade.

“Considerations of flexibility for the long-term future of Harvard had not been an issue that was prominent on the radar screen for the Corporation, and no individual dean had much concern for the University’s overall space needs,” recalls Sally Zeckhauser, who had headed Harvard Real Estate Inc. since 1979, and subsequently served (from 1988 to 2009) as Harvard’s vice-president for administration. “But the message coming out of the data was clear. To meet Harvard’s mission in the coming decades would require considerable new physical space.”

Yet it is unlikely that even Zeckhauser could have anticipated...
what followed, as Harvard filled out its existing campuses with more than 5.5 million square feet of net new space, most of it built in a boom during the last decade in which the campus grew at three times its historic rate. FAS and the Harvard School of Public Health each grew 30 percent, the Law School grew 21 percent, and the Medical School added 57 percent more space—almost a million new square feet for that one school alone. More than 3 million square feet were added to the Cambridge campus: a 25 percent expansion. Across the campuses in Cambridge, in the Medical Area, and in Allston (the Business School and athletic areas), the University grew from approximately 15.6 million square feet to more than 21 million square feet—nearly 35 percent. Capital spending (more than half of it devoted to new construction and acquisitions) rose from less than $225 million annually in the decade and a half prior to 2000—jumping to more than $600 million in 2001, and eventually peaking in 2009 at $644 million (as the University quickly shifted gears to wind down such spending in the wake of the financial crisis).

Encountering Constraints in Cambridge

But as Harvard expanded in ever greater concentric rings within Cambridge, Zeckhauser says, it began bumping up against “mature neighborhoods with sophisticated and politically active residents often seeking to preserve things just as they were.”

Academic growth spurs continued at first on the traditional pattern of building around an open green space. Hauser Hall (1994), the first new building at the Law School since 1970, rose to complete the Holmes Field quadrangle, in the same way the Taubman Building (1990) completed the Kennedy School’s campus. But increasingly, it was tuck, wedge, and squeeze for new buildings in Cambridge, and renovation for older structures. Towering William James Hall, for example—enormously expensive to renovate—was spared destruction by Spence in the early 1990s mainly because the academic spaces the high-rise contained couldn’t easily be replaced at the same density. At the same time, plans were laid to renovate long-mothballed Lowell Lecture Hall. On the site of a faux-Colonial gas station it had acquired in the 1980s, the University built the Inn at Harvard (1991), with the expectation that it would eventually become faculty offices. Maxwell Dworkin (1999), with the slimmest of presences on Oxford Street (it expands from a wedge at the sidewalk entrance into a substantial building), made new space for information sciences on part of the old Aiken Laboratory site.

With little room left on the shelves of campus libraries, books began to be shipped to a satellite repository in the suburbs, eventually enabling renovation of three major libraries, including Langdell at the Law School in beginning in 1996, Widener in 1999, and Baker at the Business School (HBS) in 2003. Near Quincy House, a parking lot on DeWolfe Street gave way to a substantial brick apartment building that opened to house students and junior faculty in 1991. More housing rose later on unbuilt parcels of land near Mather House and in Riverside (2005), along the Charles River near the intersection with Western Avenue.

Just by renovating and expanding older buildings, and shoe-horning new ones into an increasingly constrained Cambridge campus, FAS alone added a whopping 2 million square feet in the 15 years between 1994 and 2009, a rate that dwarfed the previous pace of growth of the entire University.

Elbow Room Elsewhere—and on to Allston

In the Longwood Medical Area, a new research building (later named for the late Warren Alpert, M.B.A. ’47) rose in the Quadrangle in 1992, the first of two (the latter still awaits a name) in the past quarter-century. Only at HBS—already in Allston—did growth proceed unconstrained, presaging the University’s future even before its land purchases in Allston were made public in 1997. Although President Neil L. Rudenstine emphasized interdisciplinary, collaborative academic planning beginning in the 1990s, most of the larger schools (with the exception of FAS) continued to make plans independently, with their own budgets. At HBS, for example, Dean John McArthur supported the University’s Allston land purchases, but wanted no central involvement in his own campus, where Shad Hall, a cutting-edge gymnasium that also houses a research computing facility, opened in 1989. The stunning Class of 1959 Chapel (the patina of its green copper cladding assured thanks to weathering by goat urine) was built in 1992, and renovations to Morgan Hall, the principal home of faculty offices, were completed the same year. In 1999 McArthur Hall (a residential building for executive education) opened, followed in 2003 by Hawes Hall (a classroom building)—all rising within the school’s existing footprint and prompting no objections.

But back in Cambridge, there was trouble with the neighbors, as Zeckhauser anticipated. The 259,000-square-foot Center for Government and International Studies, for which planning began in 1993, was not completed until 2003; it had to be completely redesigned more than once to appease community concerns, more than quadrupling its price to a reported $140 million. A tunnel underneath Cambridge Street linking the two buildings was nixed, echoing earlier thwarted attempts to link the Fogg Art Museum to the Sackler Museum with an enclosed pedestrian overpass. Similarly, plans to build a museum of modern art along the Charles River near Western Avenue were resisted by vocal Riverside neighbors, some still embittered by the University’s construction of Peabody Terrace decades earlier. A park and graduate student housing, mixed with some affordable housing, went up instead. North of Harvard Yard, long-running negotiations with neighbors did allow the construction of the 470,000-square-foot Northwest Science building (2008); its twisting layout mirrors the shape of the parcel on which it was built.

Community concerns thus loomed large in the planning of every new building in Cambridge, and space constraints made it clear as well that not many more could be built in any case. Zeckhauser had realized that Harvard would need a new campus, in a place with fewer obstacles to its growth, in the late 1980s. In 1987 or 1988, she put together a proposal and took it to the Harvard Corporation, urging consideration of the long-term physical needs of the University, pointing out the difficulty of meeting them in Cambridge, and identifying Allston as the most promising place for future expansion.
“The Corporation, with Derek Bok as president, gave the proposal careful consideration,” Zeckhauser remembers. “Rod MacDougall, then Treasurer, was charged with determining how any land assembly in Allston might be undertaken appropriately, given the University’s responsibilities, and particularly to assure that Harvard secured properties at fair prices, properties that would not be used in the short- or even medium-term. He recommended, and the Corporation agreed, that the assembly should be done quietly, with Harvard purchasing on an anonymous basis. The purchases would be financed with central money, since no school would be an identified user of any particular parcel. The Corporation would approve individual acquisitions as they were made.” (In practice, many dozens of acquisitions were made, but the Corporation deliberated only over those that were substantial.) The first acquisition, of a Sears warehouse site, was completed in 1989. Harvard’s Allston holdings grew from 140 acres in 1994 to 354 today, even as the University’s total holdings in Cambridge, Allston, and the Medical Area grew from 380 acres in 1986 to more than 586 acres today, a 54 percent increase.

A Matter of Style

A bias for brick as the material of choice for new Harvard construction continued throughout the mid 1990s, and on the question of style, the 1930s-era neo-Georgian look of the River Houses was still favored in many quarters. But Allston changed the nature of the dialogue about questions of style and materials. When Harvard—then in a public bidding process for 91 acres of Allston land owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike—decided in 1997 that it was necessary to disclose its aspirations across the river, that step brought questions of architecture and “brand” to the forefront “in a way that individual projects by individual schools never really did,” says Kathy Spiegelman, whose 26-year career at Harvard included a long stint as director of Harvard Planning and Real Estate.

HBS’s Spangler Center (2001), a building that was designed by Robert A. M. Stern, became a touchstone for such discussion when the architect declared that his neo-Georgian brick structure, the first to face Harvard’s presumed future in Allston, set up the University to “go forward with the brand.” (The building was both reviled and praised at the time.) But the prospect of neo-Georgian brick stretching as far as one could imagine into Harvard’s future in Allston was not widely embraced. As Peter Rowe, then dean of the Graduate School of Design, pointed out in 2001, “We are in the twenty-first century. Why should we build in the style of the eighteenth?” Furthermore, he pointed out, the University’s expansion would not be just the construction of a campus, but a city-building project. Larger questions of urban development were more important than questions of style, he said. “A lot of the discussion gets caught on specific buildings and
doesn't speak to the more general surroundings that they find themselves in: roads, streets, trees, landscapes.”

The modern student-housing high-rise at One Western Avenue (2003), another controversial building, designed by Machado and Silvetti Associates, was in part a statement, says Spiegelman, that the University was not going to build in a single idiom. The previous year, she and her colleagues had published *Harvard Patterns*, a report that documented and analyzed the various patterns that make up the University's existing fabric. And for Harvard, she summarizes, “That means swimming in trees, because environmentally that is what our campus is about, as well as transparent activity and porosity to pedestrians on the first floor of buildings around sequences of open space.” A succession of modern architects (Rem Koolhaus, Frank Gehry) and consultants were hired to help with the planning process for Allston. Each brought a different perspective to what the future campus should look like: first it was more urban; then more campus-like and filled with Harvard brick; and then, recalls Spiegelman, “Renzo Piano came and said, ‘Wait a minute. Universities are no longer about setting themselves apart from the world to pursue knowledge and stay focused on intellectual activity. We need to be open and engaged with the world around us.’”

Looking ahead, Spiegelman predicts that sustainability principles will play an increasingly important role in the look of the Allston campus, as they did in the design of the unbuilt science center begun there. In choosing materials, technology, and the way landscape is handled, she says, “You cannot ignore what the planet needs. What our students—the world’s next leaders—demand from Harvard...has to be reflected in the physical nature of this place.”

In a still broader sense, Allston has clearly had a shaping influence on the University’s development in all quarters. “The goal of the Allston acquisition,” says Zeckhauser, “was to provide a resource to free the academic decisionmakers in the University to think creatively about exciting and important teaching and research opportunities, knowing that they would have the space to implement them. The potential availability of Allston caused the University to think more broadly about its options, and to have a greater focus on long-term issues. It has also led to more collaborative thinking—across schools and departments—about what facilities and programs might be developed were the constraints of current location to be loosened. Despite a severe financial crisis, Allston has already encouraged the University to think in more visionary terms.” That ability, adds the woman who bought Harvard a future, “will be reinforced as the Allston campus becomes more of a reality.”

Twenty-five years ago, Prince Charles, a speaker at the University’s 350th celebration, noted in a symposium on urbanization that American universities had been very successful in contributing to the health of their host cities, something he hoped might be transplanted to England. Now, with plenty of space to expand and new plans for business and academic development in Allston (see page 96), Harvard can hope that the prince’s observations about American universities will come true on its own patch of real estate, across the river.

Jonathan Shaw ’89 is managing editor of this magazine.