

JUN 24 1965

June 21 1965

Dear Harry,

I am writing you ~~now~~ at the earliest free moment since my return from Bennington to express my concern and surprise about the new site plan that Ed Barnes has sent me.

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In the first place I am concerned because the plan that it supersedes was approved in principal by the Board of Trustees last July and it is a great surprise to discover that Ed has been working on a new one without anybody on the Board or the Campus Planning Committee knowing that a change was under consideration. It is particularly startling to find the new plan in such opposition to the Program for a Site Plan which was given to the architect after having been approved by the administration and the Board a year ago January and which many people including myself thought still represented our official policy.

In the second place the new plan is such a decisive step in the direction of decentralization that it is bound to result in changes in the educational life of the college. I would be distressed if such a commitment were entered into without a more open discussion, and over this weekend it became apparent that a number of others agree. Moreover there is a considerable body of opinion that questions the wisdom of the new plan. I am therefore writing to ask you as urgently as I can to defer work on it until we have had a chance to give it a thorough airing and to see it from all sides.

As buildings characterize the patterns of learning within a division, so a site plan characterizes the general pattern of learning in a college. It is the embodiment of a college's educational philosophy--at least it is whenever a college is lucky enough to be able to plan all at once. In this sense it is a more fundamental decision than any that concern the individual buildings alone, and it's one that will last longer and be harder to change. It's a decision of such importance that I think we should bring to it our broadest and deepest thinking and do everything possible to see the implications of what we're doing before it's too late. Even at the risk of delay to one or another of the buildings, I beg of you: let's stop a moment and give ourselves the benefit of all points of view.

Sincerely,

B. S. B.

Mrs. Ralph S. Brown, Jr.  
Chairman, Trustees' Campus Planning Committee

Copies: Mr. Ruebhausen  
Campus Planning Committee

Excerpts from pp. 3 and 4, Program for a Site Plan for  
Bennington College, January 1964

We would like the Bennington campus to remain a pedestrian campus. This means that the new buildings should be closely related to those that already exist and that they should be as accessible to the three main centers of daily life--Commons, The Barn, and the Library--as the needs of each building will reasonably allow.

Distances not only should not be too great, they should not seem too great. Ease of circulation and visual unity will probably both be needed to contribute to this end. By visual unity we do not mean imitation...but we do mean a continuation of patterns already laid down....

We realize that by favoring...a close grouping of buildings we may be committing ourselves to an architectural style in which relationships will be more important than individual architectural expression...

...We have particularly wanted to keep certain big, self-contained pieces [of land]--such as the Jennings meadow, Longmeadow, and the field and woods to the west [of the nightwachman's hut] intact, so that if a whole new complex of buildings is someday required, every section of the property will not have already been dotted with an isolated building or road...

But we want to be careful that...[zoning] is not carried to the point of compartmentalizing the life of the College. As colleges grow, there is a temptation for departments to draw together into separate clusters of buildings and to become worlds in themselves. We would like to discourage this and are therefore not much interested in reserving land around each new building for its future satellites. Communication between disciplines is fundamental to education at Bennington, and rather than stress a separate and efficient Arts Area or a separate and efficient Science Area...we would like to stress the contacts between them.