Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

This year has been both productive and encouraging in our planning for the future use of Harvard’s properties in Allston. I want to thank the many people across Harvard and beyond who have been contributing their perspectives and experience to this complex and consequential effort. As the academic year ends, I thought this would be a good moment to note some of the key developments in the Allston planning process, in particular the release of a report on Allston planning prepared for the Harvard community by the lead firm of our planning team, Cooper Robertson and Partners (CRP). The full text of the CRP report appears at www.allston.harvard.edu. This report is offered for your comment and consideration.

I should emphasize that these concepts do not represent final decisions. There will be many additional steps and multiple factors shaping the ultimate outcome of this planning process. Our desire to be good neighbors and to address regulatory considerations will require that we continue our strong and positive working relationship with the City of Boston and our Allston neighbors. And, most important, our success in planning for Allston will depend on the continuing engagement of the Harvard community in knitting our new facilities and programs seamlessly to the core vision of excellence in scholarship and education, which are at the heart of what we do.

A year ago, in May 2004, four faculty task forces issued reports on their ideas for possible programmatic uses of our Allston properties. Each of the task forces addressed one of four broad domains—science and technology, professional schools, undergraduate life, and Allston life (with an emphasis on arts and culture).

With the benefit of these reports, the University engaged a team of planning experts, led by CRP, which in September embarked on an intensive first phase of physical planning to sharpen our sense of our opportunities and options, and to produce a flexible planning framework for the long-term physical development of our Allston properties. The exercise has focused on the framing of choices on such matters as transportation improvements, the distribution of open space, and the potential locations of the various programmatic uses that might make their homes in Allston. Many of these choices, of course, will depend on continuing our collaborative work with the broader community and with the relevant regulatory authorities.

While the effort led by CRP remains a work in progress, it has now reached the point where existing site conditions have been closely analyzed, where various physical options are taking shape, and where wider and more systematic input from across Harvard will be vital to identifying the best ways forward. To this end, the CRP team has begun to explore some early ideas in a series of meetings involving members of the Allston community, City of Boston officials, and key University groups. The latter process has advanced through discussions with
the deans; through periodic meetings with the 24-member Master Planning Advisory Committee that includes faculty, administrators, and students from across Harvard; through a set of workshops with all the members of the Allston task forces (comprising about 80 individuals from different parts of the University); and, most recently, with the FAS Faculty Council. These consultations will broaden and intensify next year, to draw in a wider circle of interested faculty and others.

For now, given the widespread interest in the planning effort and the importance of ensuring that decisions are taken with the fullest range of perspectives, I am taking the opportunity to share with you the interim report prepared by the CRP team. I will not try to summarize its content here, but only to say that it reflects a great deal of good work, and that it is intended to inform a continuing conversation—within the University as well as with our neighbors—in which I hope many of you will take part.

We commissioned this work by CRP in order to help the Harvard community develop a better idea of the physical potential in Allston for realizing our aspirations. A robust plan will best be achieved through an iterative process in which these academic and physical concepts inform one another.

Concurrently, there have been some notable developments in program planning. Principal among them has been the work of the task force on science and technology, including key faculty from the life sciences and physical sciences in the FAS, from the Medical School, and from the School of Public Health. In April, this task force issued its second report, resulting from a process in which faculty from across the sciences submitted more than 70 proposals for innovative, interdisciplinary initiatives.

While the task force’s considerations were not confined to Allston, the report identified a number of undertakings for which new and flexibly-designed space in Allston might provide an especially suitable home. The report also reinforced the sense that a number of the most promising initiatives are poised to move forward promptly, and that they would benefit from being part of the first phase of eventual Allston development. The full text of this report appears at wwwProvost.harvard.edu/reports.

It is vital that we continue to advance our planning with similar focus and care for the other major programmatic areas that may be part of our Allston development. With this in mind, I anticipate that long-range academic planning will be receiving concentrated attention within both the School of Public Health and the Graduate School of Education. In addition, a new advisory committee on arts and culture will begin work this fall, and will take as a central part of its mandate the development of more defined plans for artistic and cultural activities in Allston, in consultation with relevant deans, department chairs, and program directors. Other challenging program questions are posed in a number of other areas, including new housing for undergraduates and graduate students, the reconfiguration and enhancement of our athletics facilities, and a possible mixed-use conference center. These, too, will benefit from progressively refined consideration as we move forward.

Given the scope, complexity, and time horizon involved, planning for Allston will remain a continuing exercise. In the coming academic year we will think carefully about how best to integrate these early physical planning ideas with the overall planning of the Schools and the community, as well as about issues of cost and feasibility. Crucial to that end will be a more
structured set of opportunities for faculty and others across the University and the City to hear about emerging ideas and options, to contribute their own thoughts, and to help us ensure that the choices before us will reflect the best long-term interests of Harvard and our neighbors. Work will proceed during the summer, and we will schedule a series of appropriate meetings in the fall. Meanwhile, I hope that you will take the time to review the materials from the CRP planning team and to offer your thoughts, either to me at lawrence_summers@harvard.edu, or to our planning team at allston@harvard.edu.

With many thanks, and all best wishes,

Sincerely,

Lawrence H. Summers