City hears request for Biogen facility

By Richard Salt
The Cambridge Biochemicals Committee (CBC) held a public hearing Tuesday night on the Biogen Corporation’s request to establish a laboratory and limited production facility in East Cambridge.

The request by the Swiss chemical company marks the first commercial venture into the city by a company involved in recombinant DNA technology. The firm would like to start construction within six months, and already has tentative site picked.

Harvard molecular biology professor Walter Gilbert is chairman of Biogen’s scientific advisory board, making body analogous to a company’s board of directors. Gilbert was a co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry last year.

First, there is sufficient trained manpower in the area to build and staff the desired facility. Biogen expects to employ about 200 people within two years, according to Muller.

“We would also be close to MIT and Harvard,” testified Muller. “These institutions are at the cutting edge of the field.” Muller did not explain why this proximity was desirable, except to add that no one else has similar research and development activities in the Boston area.

The fourth reason is that Cambridge has shown itself to be both concerned and knowledgeable in recombinant DNA work. It is the only city in the U.S. which requires all DNA work to comply with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) guidelines.”

The NIH guidelines provide for varying degrees of control and hazard levels of experimentation. Mandatory for a facility meeting NIH funding, the guidelines prescribe four levels of protection, termed P1 through P4. A P1 facility must ensure that any genetic material is kept in sealed cabinets and never exposed in the open lab. A P4 facility involves sealed experimentation chambers, protective clothing and mandatory cleansing procedures.

Biogen is interested in setting up a very small P1 production facility of approximately 1000 square feet, or about 200 gallons. “We would be doing the same sort of thing that MIT and Harvard do,” said Muller.

Candidates need students

By Ivan Fong
Editor’s note: This is the second of a two-article series analyzing student involvement in the presidential contest. Tuesday’s article covered the two major party candidates. Today’s article covers the two major third party candidates.

Both the Democratic and Republican presidential campaign headquarters in Boston are making strong last-minute efforts, with the help of area student volunteers for this year’s election next Tuesday.

The main goal of organizing a student volunteer program is to increase the candidate’s visibility, said student organizers from both major parties. There are a variety of jobs done by the students, including working on campus, handing out leaflets on street corners, stuffing mailings, and supporting group events such as concerts.

“It is a state where the race is neck-and-neck, student volunteers can make a difference. They provide workers for the campaign, and contact voters personally,” said Jack Ahern, chairman of the Massachusetts College Republican Union.

Lisa Rotenberg and Dave Bracken, Massachusetts State Campus Coordinators for the Carter-Mondale campaign, say they think Reagan would probably win if we had no student organization. This state is a trend-setter, and there are a lot of liberal students who are politically very active. A junior from Boston College, Bracken estimates that student volunteers account for approximately one-seventh of the campaign effort.

Ahern has about 5000 volunteers state-wide at 45 colleges, and began recruiting about two months ago. The student campaign has been “doing extremely well, and the campaig response to Reagan has been phenomenal,” reported Bracken.

“Mady students identify with Reagan, and are characterized by a ‘hard-core enthusiasm,’ opposed to that of students for Carter,” added Ahern.

Volunteers from 54 schools in Massachusetts work for the candidacy of DNA. [Editor’s note: see related story, this issue.] Philip Sharp, MIT professor of biology is on the board of the two-year-old firm. Professor Daniel Wang is also involved with the company.

The announcement by Harvard President Derek Bok that the University should consider becoming an active partner in a commercial recombinant DNA operation is coincident yet not totally unrelated.

At Tuesday’s hearing, Andre Muller, Director of United States Operations for Biogen, explained that there are four primary reasons for the firm’s desire to locate in Cambridge. First, Logan airport allows easy access to the airport allows easy access to the rest of the country.

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Anticodon

By Laura Farhie
A $25,000 study conducted by Arthur D. Little, an independent consulting firm, has confirmed many of the recommendations made by the Committee on Campus Dining dealing with the incorporation of food services.

The A. D. Little study was concluded on May 15, but the report was not released until three weeks ago. Although the details of the report were discussed by the Food Services Department, only a summary of the report was released to the press.

There are three conclusions made by A. D. Little deal with improved customer satisfaction, another three recommended improved sanitation and food handling, and the rest deal with more effective management and implementation.

“Significant opportunity exists to increase cash sales and user satisfaction levels through renovation and concept modification at Walker and the Student Center,” observed the report. The Cambridge-based firm concluded, “Students on Commons here do not grasp a sense of community.”

The large diversity in the needs of Commons participants and cash customers in Walker and the Student Center is “our biggest problem,” said Director of Housing and Food Services George Hartwell, however, maintains that at Walker “almost half of our business is from cash customers.”

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