

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, February 2, 2023

Area Council members:

Robert Fizek, Jeremy Freudberg, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Larry Rosenberg, and Amy Wayne.
Not present: Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, and Nathaniel Lichtin

Ex Officio:

City Councilors Bill Humphrey, Brenda Noel, and Holly Ryan were not present.

Residents and others:

Sandra Davidow, Newtonville Area Councilor Carolyn Gabbay, Stephen Farrell, Lisa Gordon, Jeff Freudberg, Rakashi Chand, Kathy Pillsbury, Waban Area Councilor Rena Getz, Newtonville Area Councilor Jennifer Bentley, Bob Burke, Mary Lee Belleville, Gloria Gavis from Newton Community Pride, Sean Roche, Lisa Monahan, Marc Hershman and John Rice

Meeting called to order at 7:02 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg presiding. The meeting was held in person at the Brigham House as well as via Zoom videoconferencing technology. The meeting was recorded.

Substantive Topics:

Vacancy on Area Council: There is one vacancy on the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council, but there are now two interested candidates for this position. At tonight's meeting the Area Council will hear from the candidates. Due to a number of absences, the Area Council does not have the necessary number of Area Councilors to appoint a new member at tonight's meeting.

Rakashi Chand is interested in joining the NHNAC. Ms. Chand stated that she is interested in getting more involved in Newton Highlands activities. She is already very involved in city activities overall. Ms. Chand is a human rights commissioner for the City of Newton. She is currently serving as a trustee of the Jackson Homestead and for Historic Newton. She also noted that she has organized events for the Indian community, and that she will be organizing the community's spring festival of colors, most likely at City Hall. Ms. Chand works at the Mass Historical Society in Boston and is the Reading Room Supervisor. She has been a resident of Newton for 12 years, and previously lived in Brookline. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg asked why Ms. Chand is interested in joining the Area Council specifically. Ms. Chand responded that there are a lot of people who have moved to Newton recently and who aren't aware of ways to engage with their community and that she can help in that regard. She noted that her children are enrolled in Newton schools, and that it is important to connect organizers of community events with the new population that has moved to Newton. Area Councilor Robert Fizek asked about Ms. Chand's ties to historical

organizations and how she may bring this locally. Ms. Chand responded that she is interested to connect people in the community to Historic Newton. Area Councilor Fizek and then Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked Ms. Chand her thoughts about the city's zoning initiative and how that may have an impact on historical properties. Ms. Chand responded that she believes that it is important to have protections for historical properties as part of the zoning initiative.

Sandra Davidow has also expressed an interest in joining the Area Council. She introduced herself as a resident of Newton Highlands for 25 years. She has lived in Newtonville and Newton Corner prior to that and had lived in Newtonville as a child. Ms. Davidow has been a member of the Newton Council on Aging for 5 years, and last year she was asked to serve as the Secretary. Ms. Davidow stated that she has a history of fundraising and event planning and that she has done retail work. She worked for an independent store in Wellesley, and she strongly supports independent stores. What made her interested in being on the Area Council was her love of Newton and Newton Highlands. She would like to be more involved in community activities. With the change of the Newton Highlands Soup Social to be more of a citywide event, Ms. Davidow sees this as an opportunity for the Area Council to pursue a new event to sponsor. Ms. Davidow thinks it would be amazing to have a holiday stroll in Newton Highlands. This activity would be a great support to village businesses. By supporting the businesses, and by having an event such as a stroll, the community will benefit by helping to keep independent businesses vibrant in our neighborhood. With regards to historical issues, Ms. Davidow noted that her father had introduced her to the beauty of old architecture. She stated that she tends to look at things differently and can help bring a unique perspective to the Area Council.

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg invited both candidates to meet other Area Councilors at the NHNAC meeting in March, and he encouraged both candidates to be officially elected in November. Lisa Gordon asked about a questionnaire for candidates to express their views on certain issues, and Mr. Freudberg responded that the Area Council is having an informal process to meet any new candidates.

Levingston Cove Updates: Area Councilor Robert Fizek gave an update about the project. He noted how there was limited community involvement in the later stages of developing the current design for Levingston Cove. The project remains controversial, especially since many community members had asked to keep the design simple and natural. A few photographs of the current state of construction were presented. An image of the fishing wall was shown with the required fencing surrounding the construction zone. The design includes a cantilevered deck. There is 2 feet of crushed stone surrounding a set of pins that are drilled into the stone in order to pour a 2 ft thick 90 ft slab that will allow steel beams to be bolted to project out over the water.

Area Council Fizek pointed out how details about the fabrication are being worked out between the designers and the engineers. The area will be about 2 to 3 feet higher than before and will consist of a deck of composite materials with a railing and a seating wall. The structural base was moved back towards the street 2 feet so that it would align with existing wall structures. Preparations are being made to change the grade from the street level to the deck. It will be interesting to watch the project come together.

Of note, the same design team for Levingston Cove was given the opportunity to work on the “left beach” area closer to the bathhouse. Area Councilor Fizek believes it would be worthwhile to have another firm take a look at the project and provide a second opinion. No action was taken by the Area Council regarding the update of the Levingston Cove project. Area Council President Freudberg feels that the on-site drawing of the project is difficult to interpret as the plans are in black-white print whereas the original plans are in color.

Lisa Gordon stated that many community members were very involved in working on a proposal for the Levingston Cove area. For a good 4-5 years, community members worked on alternatives but some members felt that their views were not listened to. As a result, the current plans may actually reduce access to the water at Levingston Cove.

Regarding the “left bank” project Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked whether additional community feedback is being sought. A number of Area Councilors suggested that the Area Council should invite a representative of the Parks, Recreation and Culture Dept to a future Area Council meeting. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that this meeting should be one in which community members can express their views about the “left bank” project and how this will improve access to the beach. Diane Prunte questioned whether sharp rocks will limit access to the water at Levingston Cove.

Area Councilor Robert Fizek suggested that the Area Council should have a community meeting for the city to provide an update about the current project and what the plans are for the new Left Bank swimming area. Hopefully the community can be engaged more fully and completely in the design process. Lisa Gordon agreed that we need an update about the current plans and to have an opportunity to provide community input about the left bank project. A link to the current project is being provided here.

<https://www.newtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/90704/637988735994870000>

Jeff Freudberg suggested that community members need to get more politically involved, and to involve the three ward councilors in the “left bank” approval process. Lisa Gordon noted that some members of the community felt that their views were not always shared by the ward councilors during the last process. A discussion ensued about the rights and regulations of Crystal Lake.

Zoning Redesign Discussion: Area Council President Freudberg introduced Carolyn Gabbay and Jennifer Bentley from the Newtonville Area Council (NAC) who gave a presentation regarding the zoning process and how it might affect Newtonville. A map for the new zoning in Newtonville was presented, showing mostly the new zones labelled VC3 and VC1. The NAC hired an experienced urban planner to do 3-D modeling. An image of the current zoning was shown. Then a 3-D image of the fully built-out area was shown considering by-right development. It was noted that the software program doing the modeling could not put as much density on the image as is being proposed by the new zoning. Ms. Gabbay noted that she has been told that it is unlikely full buildout based on the new zoning will occur. However, she remarked that developers do have an incentive to build out so she believes there is a prospect for this kind of development. An image of a shadow study was shown during the Winter solstice at 9 am, noon, and 3 pm. With the development permitted by the

new zoning fully built out, many streets would be engulfed in shadow. Images were shown of aerials of the proposed zoning build-out. There is potential for removal of a significant number of trees. An image was shown of existing conditions on Walnut Street, and Ms. Gabbay pointed out that many businesses are rebounding after the Covid pandemic. Images of by-right buildout were shown, showing structures similar to the Trio building that currently exists on Washington Street. Ms. Gabbay noted that developers may combine parcels to build larger single buildings, and a five-story building may result. Images of further buildout on the Star Market parking lot and of the entire village were shown, with buildout occurring sequentially parcel-by-parcel over a longer period of time. Concern was expressed that the current businesses may not be able to afford rents in these new buildings. The new Trio development has had difficulty in renting its commercial spaces out, except for a bank that could afford the rent. The present-day local businesses in Newtonville may be at risk of no longer being able to remain in the village, and national or chain businesses might step in to replace them. The final slide presented by Ms. Gabbay showed massing blocks.

Area Council President Freudberg asked who created the images. Ms. Gabbay responded that a professional planner was hired by the NAC, and that certain software was used to create the images. The professional planner was Fraser Blyth of Selkirk Planning in British Columbia and the software used to create the images was "Modelur." The project cost \$5000. Area Councilor Robert Fizek commented that normally these kinds of plans would be shown and debated during the front end of a process in considering zoning changes. City planning should precede zoning so that zoning responds to what is determined to be appropriate by the community. Mr. Fizek commented that the drawings that were developed by the Newtonville Area Council are very useful and that they will help people understand the scope of what is being proposed with the city's new zoning plan. It is possible that new development allowed by the new zoning may replace existing buildings that represent the fabric of our villages. Area Council President Freudberg noted that the city's team working on zoning intends to provide images of the proposed impact of zoning on development during the upcoming ZAP meeting on February 13, and that further images and renderings of the impact of the new zoning proposal will be provided in the next version of the zoning draft. Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg thanked the presenters for taking the effort to make these visual representations. Area Councilor Amy Wayne suggested that the Newton Highlands Area Council may wish to fund a similar effort.

A discussion ensued about the presentation. Newton resident Sean Roche commented that the buildings shown in the presentation do not seem to be compliant with the maximum footprint limitations of the by-right designations for the proposed VC1 and VC3 zones. He posed two questions. What is the rubric you used to combine lots? If you think developers will buy properties to amass lots and develop, why aren't they doing this now using the BU-4 district? Carolyn Gabbay responded that the measurements were corroborated and that the drawings represent a fair representation. Sean Roche challenged these representations because the zoning intends for there to be buildout of smaller parcels. Regarding lot assembly, Ms. Gabbay pointed out that there are relatively few owners of properties already. A discussion ensued about whether the combination of lots is likely to occur under the new zoning. Ms. Gabbay noted that some single family lots may be replaced by as many as 10-20 units of housing. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg asked for clarification regarding an image showing what could be built in a VC3 zone on Walnut Street, noting that the perspective of the image made it difficult to tell whether the potential building extended into neighboring VC2 lots on Madison Avenue. Kathy Pillsbury questioned how some representations

showed combinations of parcels with multiple buildings replaced by a single larger building. It was noted that the zoning covers a large amount of the existing Newtonville Historic District. The proposed zoning extends into the residential areas. A discussion ensued about whether the new zoning would encourage multiple residential and other lots being combined into larger lots that could support larger buildings. Lisa Monahan commented on the representation of the building shown on the Star Market parking lot that is a 30,000 SF footprint, and noted that the new zoning proposal has a limit for VC3 that is a 15,000 SF footprint. Criticism was made about how the VC1 areas in the presentation are being illustrated as having all residential homes torn down and rebuilt with large flat roof buildings. It was pointed out that there have been comments at ZAP meetings about keeping historic fabric. Ms. Monahan stated that it is misleading to suggest that the single-family homes and other historic homes would be wiped clean.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic thanked the presenters for sharing their perspective and stated that he looks forward to seeing a presentation from the City planning department representing the new zoning. He pointed out how new zoning was put into place in the Fenway neighborhood of Boston and that as a result, substantial new development has occurred. Once the zoning is in place, it is likely that new development will come to match the new zoning code. Newton resident Lisa Gordon expressed concern how the new zoning is intruding into residential neighborhoods, and that we need to do a better job to protect some of what we have in our residential neighborhoods. Ms. Gordon applauded the efforts by the Newtonville Area Council to make these representations. Waban Area Councilor Rena Getz expressed her support for the Newtonville Area Council's project to make 3-D representations. She believes that the representations are more accurate than anything presented thus far by the Planning Department, and that even more density may result from the proposed zoning. Ms. Getz is looking forward to seeing what the City consultant, Utile, will be presenting at upcoming meetings. Newton resident Diane Prunte agreed that if we zone for high buildout, then it may certainly happen. If we don't intend to have such high buildout, then we shouldn't be zoning for it that way. She pointed out how Mark Development has already consolidated multiple lots in West Newton to make larger development projects. And Ms. Prunte pointed out that the Trio property also incorporated several lots, so the combination of lots in future zoning is likely.

The Area Council then closed the discussion and decided to continue the conversation about the zoning process at subsequent meetings. Sean Roche pointed out that buildings also must have a minimum distance between them. However, others noted that lots may be combined or separated as an owner may decide.

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg and Area Councilor Robert Fizek recounted what the Area Council represented at the January 9th ZAP meeting. The Area Council expressed concerns regarding the scale, massing, and lack of historic preservation in the new zoning proposal. There was controversy about Rodney Barker Square and how it may relate to zoning, and whether public space like this may be affected. Issues of outdoor dining and the relationship between the private and public realm were brought up.

At the end of the zoning redesign discussion, a question was asked about the status of the 1149-1151 Walnut Street development proposal. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg noted that there has been a request to extend the special permit for zoning at 1149-1151 Walnut Street for 2 years.

Village Enhancement Project: Area Councilor Robert Fizek reported that a letter was sent to the City Department of Public Works regarding the undergrounding of utilities in the Newton Highlands village center. The Area Council is requesting that DPW to continue to pursue planning for undergrounding along Lincoln Street in the village center, and to include this initiative in forward design efforts. There may be cost effective ways to do this to the benefit of our village. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg noted that City Councilor Deb Crossley had commented that she was skeptical that Eversource would allow in-house engineering work for any undergrounding planning.

2022 Annual Report Status: Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg noted that one was due. Area Council Secretary Srdjan Nedeljkovic stated that he will compile a report and present it to the Area Council for review at the next meeting. The report will be sent to the City Council and be available in their docket as an official communication.

Reports:

Soup Social Report: Newton Community Pride Board Chair, Ms. Gloria Gavis, reported that this was the second year partnering with the Hyde Community Center on the Winter Soup Social at the Hyde. The outdoor concept came as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, when it was decided to move the event outdoors last year. It appeared to have been a big success and provided an opportunity for the entire community to gather in an outdoor environment. We have been lucky with the weather both years. This event is taking on a larger audience than years past, as a result of Newton Community Pride's marketing efforts and social media advertising to bring people to the event. It was a huge success, had costume characters, nine restaurants participating, city officials came, there was a big volunteer effort, and there were music performers.

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported that he attended the Winter Social and that the event was a success with lots of people. The soup ran out early, and then it was gone. Ms. Gavis noted that Newton Community Pride will have a debriefing meeting about the event. She noted that the restaurants have been challenged the past few years, and how we are grateful that they have contributed as much as they did. Ms. Gavis suggested that we may consider compensating the restaurants for their cost of the soups. She noted that since we do not have heating stations, the soup will remain hot only for a while. Area Councilor Robert Fizek stated that while the Soup Social had been a Highlands event, there were many people from outside of the Highlands, so it was a different experience than in prior years. With a larger event, which was vibrant and entertaining, the ability to interact with neighbors was more limited. Area Councilors Larry Rosenberg and Amy Wayne agreed that the event was no longer a local Highlands event. Ms. Gavis pointed out that Village Days are also not limited to the village where they are held and that these events are also citywide. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked what is the role of the Area Council in future events. Ms Gavis responded that she doesn't know the role of the Area Council in future events. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg stated that there is nothing to hold back the Area Council for participating in future Winter Social events.

Village Day Update: John Rice reported that there is a new electronic process to organize events like Village Day. A committee of the Area Council including Area Councilors Groot Gregory, Barbara

Darnell, Amy Wayne, and Larry Rosendberg are helping to organize the event. The committee intends to meet in February.

Parking Update: Area Council President Freudberg noted that Area Councilor Groot Gregory had a meeting with a Highlands business owner who stated that parking permits were not yet available. But another owner has already received his permit. The process for business permits is somewhat inconsistent between the business owners. Area Councilor Amy Wayne stated that she will survey some of the business owners in the village to see if an expansion of the number of business permits is desired.

Website Status: Area Council President Freudberg asked that the finalized Minutes of prior NHNAC meetings are provided, and Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic stated that he will provide these. The minutes will be posted on the website, as will letters written by the Area Council. Area Council President Freudberg put a call out for any new content. More organization is needed, with some older items to be archived. Recordings of Area Council meetings exist for approximately the past year.

Administrative Items:

Approval of Minutes: The draft minutes from the December meeting were approved 5:0 (Area Councilors Darnell, Gregory, and Lichtin absent and not voting). No changes were made to the December or January minutes. For January, the minutes were approved 4:0 (Abstain: Amy Wayne; Absent: Groot Gregory, Barbara Darnell, Nathaniel Lichtin).

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory was not present, and no updates have been provided.

New Business:

Conflict of Interest training is due for Area Councilors.

Meeting Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 pm.