

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, May 4, 2023

Area Council members:

Rakashi Chand, Barbara Darnell, Robert Fizek, Groot Gregory, Jeremy Freudberg, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Larry Rosenberg, and Amy Wayne.

Ex Officio:

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

Residents and others:

Stephen Farrell, Martina Jackson (reporter Fig City News), Mary Lee Belleville, Rena Getz (Waban Area Council), Loumona Petroff, City Councilor Pam Wright, Kathy Pillsbury, John Rice

Meeting called to order at 7:03 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:

Brief Updates and Announcements:

Swap Shop Open: Area Councilor Groot Gregory noted that the Swap Shop is open at the Rumford Recycling Cycle on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 7:30 am to 1:30 pm. A tent will be added to accommodate new items. People can bring items including anything that they think can be useful to donate. Items have to be in working order, safe, and clean. Certain things subject to weather damage like furniture will not be accepted. Child seats will not be accepted. Housewares, clothing, and toys are accepted. Items can be dropped off during open hours at the Recycling Center. The items will be organized by volunteers. People can look at the items and take whatever they would like. Volunteers can get first choice of items as an incentive to work there!

Northland Charlemont 3D Model: Area Council President Freudberg presented a brief report about the proposed residential development Chapter 40B project on Charlemont Steet that is under review by the Zoning Board of Appeals. The petitioner has created a 3-D model of the proposal and how it may appear in its surroundings. An graphic image of the 3-D model was displayed. A number of people commented on how the model was helpful in order to understand the project. It was noted that there were originally 410 units planned at this development, while the current version includes about 380-390 units.

Area Council President Freudberg presented a draft letter developed by Area Councilor Fizek and Freudberg requesting that 3-D modeling should be utilized when presenting zoning changes in our

villages as part of the Zoning Redesign project. Using 3-D modeling will help educate and engage the public in this City planning and zoning effort. Area Council President Freudberg proposed that other Area Councils individually consider this letter and support it. A discussion ensued regarding the letter and Area Councilors were highly supportive of the letter. Area Councilor Fizek noted that these kinds of three dimensional models can cost several thousand dollars, depending on the scope and complexity of the model.

A question was posed whether the new development will count against meeting housing goals required by the MBTA Communities Act. It was noted that this project will not be counted in such a manner. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic commented that it is unfortunate that this new development, as well as many of the upcoming planned developments such as the Northland project and the proposed new residential development on Route 9 will not count towards meeting the housing goals of the MBTA communities act.

A motion was entertained on the letter, as amended based on the Area Council's discussion. Area Councilor Fizek suggested that the modelling should be made available as part of the upcoming public process for Zoning Redesign. The motion was approved 8:0, with Area Councilor Wayne not present.

Needham Newton Community Way study: This project involves a study of the feasibility of implementing either a bicycle-pedestrian path or a combined bicycle-pedestrian path with a route for electric shuttle buses along the railroad right of way parallel to Highland Avenue in Needham. Area Council President Freudberg noted that there have been two community meetings on this project, one in Needham and one in Newton. There is funding of approximately \$200K to study if it is feasible to construct a bicycle-pedestrian path (18 ft wide) or a combined electric bus and pedestrian path (26 ft wide) from Webster Street in Needham to the Charles River. The study is not evaluating whether transit will be utilized, but only on the engineering aspects of enabling these two options.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic commented that he attended both meetings. It was his perception that there is strong support for establishing a bicycle-pedestrian pathway along this route and little support for an electric shuttle bus route. The study will not be considering other alternative, such as a light rail extension along the route, although this may be possible in the future. It was noted that if state funds are used to construct this project, it will need to be paved and not finished with stone dust like the current Newton Greenway. The results of the feasibility study may be available as early as June, but full implementation of the project may be several years away.

Bicycle Pedestrian Network Plan: The city of Newton is in the process of developing a Newton Bicycle and Pedestrian plan. An online engagement tool is available until May 8th. Some people have felt that the online tools are difficult to use. The public can provide input about the plan at the city website: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/789ae475277a423a95d75a4ead46659a> or can send an e-mail with their input to the city's director of transportation planning as per the website.

It was noted how the recommendations that stem from the Bicycle and Pedestrian plan may have an impact on the designs of Walnut and Lincoln Streets in Newton Highlands with regards to on street parking and potential implementation of bicycle lanes. The Bicycle and Pedestrian plan may inform

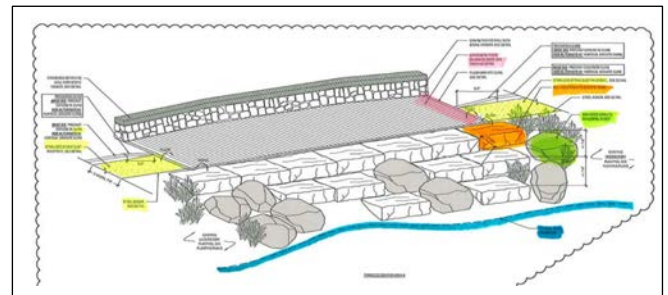
the plans for the Newton Highlands Village Enhancement Project. Anybody who wishes to provide input regarding bicycle lanes and on-street parking in Newton Highlands should communicate their thoughts as part of the Newton Bicycle and Pedestrian plan process.

Levingston Cove construction status/timeline: Area Council President Freudberg noted that he had reached out to the city’s Director of Parks and Open Space, Luis Perez Demorizi, regarding an update on the Levingston Cove project. Mr. Demorizi noted that progress is being made on the construction and overall on the project. An online discussion had occurred regarding the project on the Newton Highlands google group over this past weekend, questioning whether the project was being executed as per the approved plans with regards to the fishing wall and access to the shoreline. Mr. Demorzi had posted a letter on the Newton Highlands google group indicating that the project is progressing forward as intended.

A discussion ensued regarding access to the shoreline at Levingston Cove. Over the past several years, there has been significant use of the cove by people who are sunbathing and accessing the water at this location. It was noted how at public meetings in 2018, plans for the shoreline included a welcoming access to the lake at Levingston cove. The plans submitted to the Conservation Commission and the City Council in 2021 when the project was approved included flat stones that would allow safe access to the shoreline at this location. Images were shown of the current status of the project, which now includes a dumping of sharp, jagged stones at the water’s edge. Concern was expressed that the lake would become inaccessible to people and unsafe to access.



LEVINGSTON COVE AT CRYSTAL LAKE - OPTION 1
 NEWTON, MA
 APRIL 2018



Levingston Cove Access (Approved Plans – 2021)

A discussion ensued about the intention of the current plans to exclude people from the lake. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic expressed concern that the placement of these boulders was inconsistent with Newton being a city that intends to be welcoming to people and provide equitable access to those who may wish to enjoy the lake at this location. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell expressed outrage that the cove was being made unsafe and inaccessible to people. Area councilor Rakashi Chand commented that this issue needs to get public attention. Area Councilor Robert Fizek



Levingston Cove (Actual View – April 2023)

commented on how these plans have evolved to become something that is very hostile. A general sentiment was made that the placement was inappropriate and undesirable.

A motion was made for the Area Council to write a letter to the City of Newton Parks, Recreation and Culture Department that the stones should be removed and that the area should be smoothed and graded to allow for safe and welcoming access to the shoreline at this location. The motion was approved by a vote was 8:1, with all in favor except Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg opposed.

The discussion continued with Area Council President Freudberg noting that the hardscape areas that are currently under construction at Levingston Cove may be open by mid-July but the natural areas may not be ready for public access until later in the season to allow the plantings to become established. Some of the planting and landscaping near the fishing area may be deferred until the Fall. Therefore, the project may not be fully completed until after the summer.

Concern was expressed about the large staging area at the main bathhouse park that is currently being used to store construction equipment. Area council President Freudberg has asked Mr. Demorizi to minimize or remove that construction zone so that the park is usable during the summer season but noted that Mr. Demorizi was not able to provide a commitment regarding cleaning up of that area and making it accessible to the public.

Crystal Lake regulations regarding music and barbecuing: Area Councilor Amy Wayne noted that last year there were complaints regarding the playing of loud music and grilling at the lake. Currently, grilling is not allowed at the lake. A discussion ensued regarding the issue of music and how it may be difficult to define and regulate this matter. It was pointed out that although there is a noise ordinance in Newton, it is rarely enforced. A question was posed on whether the use of external speakers and amplifiers should be allowed at the park? Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that a sign may be posted suggesting that people be courteous about playing music and respectful about other people's desire for a more quiet environment.

Area Councilor Amy Wayne said that she will discuss options on how to address this issue with Lake Facility Director Carol Stapleton.

Village Day:

Area Councilor Groot Gregory presented a budget for Village Day, which will be held on Sunday, June 11, with a projected income of \$8,000 and expenses of \$8,000. Thus far there is \$2500 income already committed, and there are \$3150 in expenses already committed. Donations are expected from Brookline Bank (\$1000) and Village Bank (\$2000). Further efforts are being made to obtain additional sponsorship. The tent rental cost will be \$1225 with a budgeted amount of \$1400.

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg suggested that the Area Council creates a new Village Day T shirt, as some people would prefer a Village Day T-shirt rather than having a road race T-shirt. However, the Area Council has previously lost money by buying too many T-shirts. A discussion ensued with a suggestion to buy only a small number of T-shirts and limit it to a simple design. A suggestion was made to use Newton North to print the shirts at a low cost. However, it is

probably too late to do this as it is close to the end of the school year. Several ideas were discussed regarding how to reduce the costs of the T-shirts, including obtaining sponsorship. Area Councilors Groot Gregory and Jeremy Freudberg will follow up regarding further options about the T-shirts.

Area Councilor Groot Gregory asked for ideas for how to promote Village Day. The Area Council will need volunteers to help on Village Day. Area Councilor Amy Wayne suggested that we make a Village Day sign and staple these signs onto poles. It was noted that there is an Area Council Facebook and Instagram page, and that we can promote Village Day through these media. The Area Council can also ask the Mayor if she can post about Village Day on her weekly newsletter. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg pointed out that Steven Feinstein had created a separate account for Village Day for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and the intention is to direct these pages to the main Area Council account.

Village Enhancement Project:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg noted that after the prior Area Council meeting a letter had been send to the Department of Public Works regarding the Village Enhancement program. One question was about parking spaces. Regarding an analysis of parking spaces in the village, DPW stated that they will provide these numbers. Regarding the timing of the next Village Enhancement project meeting, it will be a regular zoom meeting and a concurrent in-person meeting at City Hall at the War Memorial Auditorium on Thursday, May 25 at 6 pm. Regarding the Area Council's question about undergrounding utilities, DPW responded that a request had been made to Eversource (Annemarie Walsh), Astound (Alex Ortiz), Comcast (Manny Fertado), Newton Fire (Glenn Manning), and Verizon (Stan Usovicz) regarding potential engineering fees and estimated construction costs. Only Comcast had responded regarding construction costs and provided an estimated construction cost of \$697,434. Verizon provided an estimated cost for an engineering fee of \$2500.

Traffic Enforcement:

Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg discussed the issue of double parking, parking in no-parking zones, and illegal U-turns in the village. There is not adequate enforcement of these problems. The police say that they are too busy and not available. A call for action was made to the enforcement authorities. More enforcement is needed from Parking Control Officers. Delivery trucks sometimes are double parked for long durations of time. Area Councilor Freudberg noted that the upcoming city budget will include motorcycle patrols. A note will be sent to Police Chief Carmichael regarding these concerns, including speed enforcement.

Outdoor Dining Impact on Sidewalks:

Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg noted that sidewalk space has been blocked near the Buttonwood restaurant. The storage of materials intruding on sidewalks should be discouraged. The Jersey barriers that extend beyond a parking space to provide outdoor dining can cause an obstruction for vehicles. City Councilor Pam Wright noted that a complaint could be filed to Inspectional Services. A request has also been made to stripe a handicap parking space near 57 Lincoln Street.

Zoning Redesign Discussion:

Update on Fiscal Analysis from March meeting: Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg introduced a discussion about the annual net benefit of new development. Kathy Pillsbury and Lisa Monahan had presented an analysis at the April Area Council meeting regarding the potential fiscal benefit of new development projects in Newton. However, the existing value and tax revenues from the prior uses of these development parcels had not been taken into account. A re-analysis was done. When the value of existing real estate is taken into consideration, it reduces the amount of fiscal revenues from the development of 32 new projects consisting of 3800 residential units that have been built between 2016 to those under review in March 2023 from \$21,295,400 to \$18,120,400.

Village Center/MBTA Communities 2.0 maps: New updates regarding the Village Center maps are expected to be released in the next few days. The ordinance text has not yet been released. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg presented the new Zoning Redesign 2.0 maps. The VC3 zone includes a 4.5 story building, the VC1 zone includes buildings that are 2.5 stories and 4000 SF footprint, and there is a new zone MRT (multi-residence transit) that includes buildings of 2.5 stories and 1500 SF footprint for new construction. There is no minimum lot size, such that a 1500 SF footprint could fit on a small lot. No parking on the lot is required by zoning.

A map of Four Corners was shown that proposes mostly a VC2 zone with VC1 at the edges. An area is designated in which commercial uses on the first floor are required. Under this scenario, the Whole Foods could be replaced by a residential building. An entire block that is currently residential could be redeveloped as solely residential or also continue to include ground floor retail. Current market forces support primarily residential development over any ground floor commercial.

A map of Newton Highlands village center was shown. A VC3 zone is present on sections of Lincoln Street and Walnut Street. Several VC2 parcels exist adjacent to these sections. A large portion of the village center that is currently zoned as residential is proposed to be zoned as MRT.

A map of the Eliot T stop area was shown. The parcel that currently contains the CVS plaza is proposed to be VC3. Buildings along Route 9 are proposed to be VC1 and VC2. Concern was expressed that the new zoning could result in no retail in this area, whereas now there are mixed uses that include retail and other uses.

A map was presented of a proposal to establish a new zone that would be compliant with the MBTA Communities Act. The map creates a contiguous zone between Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, and the Eliot T station. Much of this would be zoned MRT. This would include lots that contain 2.5 story buildings with up to 4 units. City Councilor Pam Wright suggested the new MRT zoning requirements would keep new build projects smaller, so there would be less incentive to tear down existing larger, older homes. However, a developer could still build under existing zoning.

It was noted how much of new residential development in Newton these days results in a double house on a single lot with a shared wall, two large forward-facing garages, and a large amount of asphalt. This type of development would still be allowed under the new zoning. It was also noted

that large amounts of Newton are outside of the zoning that would be included under the MBTA communities act. It was pointed out that the estimates for how many housing units could be accommodated utilizing the new zoning do not include land parking spaces. When parking spaces are added to parcels, the number of possible new housing units will probably be less. Concern was expressed on how small units with no parking could be suitable for families with children.

A question was posed regarding whether population growth estimates are accurate. What if the population decreases over the next few generations? Are we zoning for additional new housing that may not be needed? It was noted how populations in high schools have been increasing while elementary age populations have been decreasing.

A question was posed about golf courses and how they may be redeveloped. A planned community could occur on a single lot. Currently, the golf courses are zoned as single-family only. A discussion ensued regarding what the best use may be of these properties in the future. Further discussion ensued about how applicable the MBTA communities act may be to the actual communities where it is being proposed to be implemented.

Regarding the new zoning proposal, the Area Council had expressed opposition regarding height bonuses that are ostensibly being used to provide more affordable housing units. Instead, density bonuses could be considered on a lot-by-lot basis. This recommendation was not accepted by the Planning Department. The Area Council did not have any further action items at this time, pending final text of the zoning ordinance being released.

Waban Area Councilor Rena Getz suggested that more focus is given regarding Route 9, including issues such as driveways, topography, and the mix of retail and residential that the zoning may allow. Ms. Getz suggested that it would be appropriate for the Area Council to comment on the issue of new zoning for the Route 9 corridor. A motion was made for the Area Council to draft a letter to the Zoning and Planning committee, the Planning Department, and the City Council regarding these concerns. The letter approved by a vote of 6 yes, 1 no (Lichtin) with 2 abstentions (Wayne and Fizek).

Area Councilor Fizek made a motion to ask for the Planning Department to make a presentation at the Area Council regarding the new zoning proposals. A vote was held, and the motion passed 9:0.

Administrative Items:

Approval of April Minutes: The draft minutes as amended from the April meeting were approved 9:0. No changes were made to the April minutes.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory had no additional items to report. The Area Council balance is \$14,951. A discussion ensued regarding maintenance of bank accounts independently by Area Councils, and no changes are currently anticipated.

New Business:

The next Village Day planning meeting will take place this Saturday, May 6th. John Rice noted that Taiwan Day will be taking place on Saturday, May 6th. There may be two police details for Village Day (\$1600), but the cost will not be incurred if the police details are not present. A number of new fees have come into existence, and they are being paid by the Hyde Community Center.

Meeting Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:46 pm.