

# Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

## Meeting Minutes, June 1, 2023

### **Area Council members:**

Rakashi Chand (absent), Barbara Darnell, Robert Fizek (partial attendance), 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:**

Martha Bixby (Candidate for City Council), City Councilor Tarik Lucas, Sonja McKnight, Lisa Gordon, Jeffrey Freudberg, City Councilor Julia Malakie, Loumona Petroff

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:

#### Village Day:

Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory reported that things are going well regarding planning for Village Day. There have been about 80 booth sales, compared to about 60 last year. This will generate \$6300 in revenue. The Area Council has received \$3600 in donations. Most of the remaining budget is on par. The Area Council has asked Chris Pitts for a reduction in the music budget to \$2600. The City of Newton will charge a cost of \$900 plus \$350 for police detail and trash pickup, dropping off the barricades. The Hyde Community Center will be paying the \$350 portion of these fees. If things to well, Village Day may net a surplus of about \$2500.

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported that he has been exploring purchasing new T-shirts for this year's Village Day which will be provided at cost. These are being produced by All Sportswear in Newton Highlands. Around 36 T-shirts will be ordered, for a total cost of around \$600. Village Day will be occurring on Sunday, June 11.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell, who is in charge of promotions for Village Day, noted that yard signs promoting Village Day 2023 will be available tomorrow. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked for help in placing the signs. A question was posed regarding whether the Village Day banner will be hoisted above Lincoln Street, and this question will be addressed to John Rice. Area

Councilor Amy Wayne has been talking to vendors on Lincoln Street in planning for Village Day. Posters advertising Village Day have been printed by Signal Graphics and will be posted in various places in the village.

Set up for Village Day will take place on Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup> for the booth layout. Each booth will have a space that is 10 ft wide. Area Councilor Groot Gregory has made a list of the registrants, with the goal to mix up the type of vendors along the street. The list will be posted on the Area Council website in advance. It is expected that Village Day will have booths extending from Walnut Street down to the Hyde Community Center.

#### Levingston Cove and other Crystal Lake Topics:

Area Council President Freudberg reported about rules at the Crystal Lake bathhouse part regarding grilling and music at the Lake. Area Councilor Amy Wayne also conversed with Carol Stapleton about this topic. It was noted that grilling is not allowed, and the general noise ordinance for the city applies to Crystal Lake.

After last month's meeting, the Area Council had sent a letter to Mayor Fuller expressing concerns that the installation of stones at Levingston Cove was blocking access to this portion of the lake. The mayor responded with a note reiterating her support for Director of Parks & Open Space Luis Perez Demorizi's response on the Newton Highlands google group indicating reasons for placement of these stones. The Area Council has requested a meeting with the mayor to discuss the issue of access to the lake, and how these stones create an exclusionary and unsafe environment at the lake. The Area Council maintains its position that in order for Newton to be a welcoming city for all groups of people, the stones should be removed.

Area Councilor Nathaniel Lichtin gave a report on progress of the construction at Levingston Cove. The cantilevered fishing deck is in the process of being constructed at this time.

It was noted that there are many people accessing Crystal Lake at the official bathhouse beach prior to its official opening day, especially on a warm day like today. This is happening in spite of the gates to the lake having been locked since the docks were placed in the water. Crystal Lake officially opens on the day after Village Day. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg stated that he will follow up about when the staging area for Levingston Cove will be restored to public use.

#### Route 9/Winchester/Centre traffic signal:

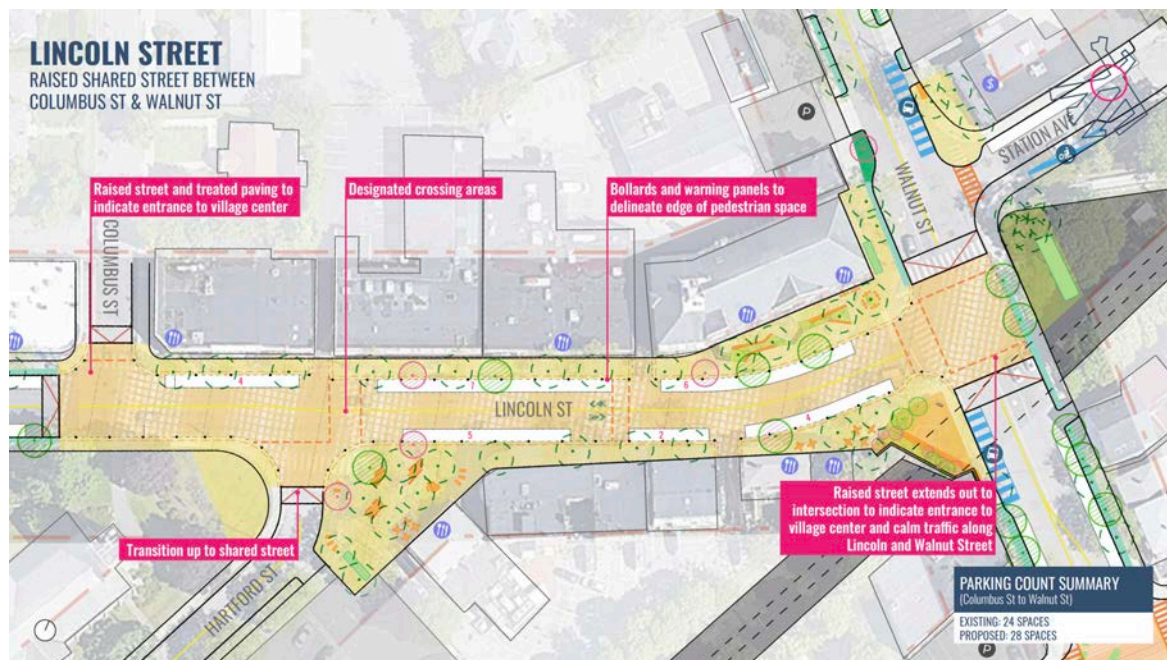
It was reported that there is a new traffic signal at the Route 9 overpass over Winchester Street and Centre Street. The final design of the project was several years ago and is just being implemented now. Removal of the previous traffic island at the westbound Route 9 on-ramp has increased the curb-to-curb distance to cross the ramp here, which may adversely affect pedestrian safety. However, it was also noted that the new traffic lights may improve pedestrian safety.

City Councilor Tarik Lucas asked about the utility of traffic lights. There is a feeling that the lights will improve safety for traffic, especially turning traffic. The road (and construction project) is

currently under the control of the state, but the roadway will revert to city control after the project has been completed. Lisa Gordon commented how the roadway is oriented to cars over pedestrian safety. It was pointed out that the crosswalk for the ramp that goes east on Route 9 seems to have been narrowed somewhat. There will also be a new pedestrian activated signal to cross Winchester Street near the Newton Highlands Playground.

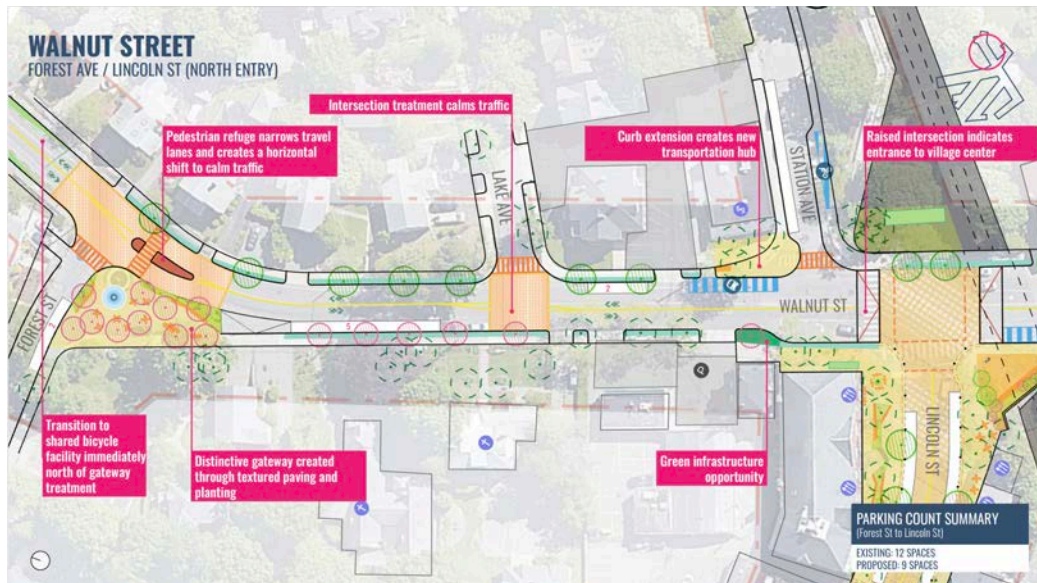
### Village Enhancement Project:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported on the public meeting by DPW at City Hall on Thursday, May 25 to discuss the Newton Highlands Village Enhancement Project. Because of echo at the War Memorial space, it was difficult for people on-line to understand what was being presented at the meeting. A preferred option for the redesign of Lincoln Street and Walnut Street was presented. On Lincoln Street, the preferred design is a shared streetscape as presented in the November meeting. This option narrows Lincoln Street from about 44 ft to 37 ft, allowing for larger sidewalks and more potential for seating on the sidewalk. The right turn lane from Lincoln Street to Walnut Street is eliminated. Rodney Barker Plaza is expanded to reduce the size of the Lincoln Street and Hartford Street intersection. The entire street will be raised to the level of the sidewalk so that both the street and sidewalk will be on the same level, with bollards serving as a protective barrier. There will be an increase in on-street parking spaces from 24 to 28 spaces.

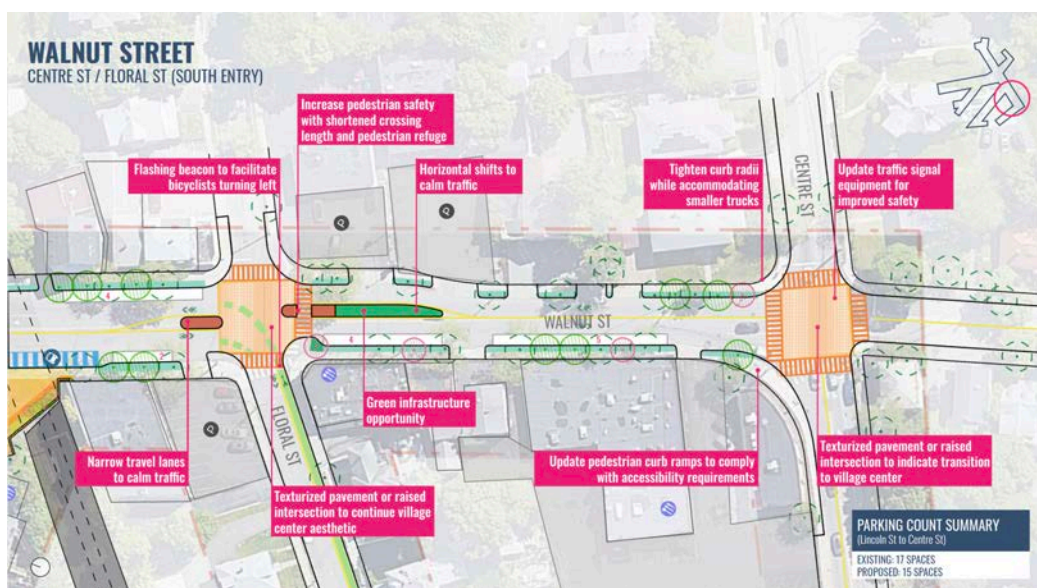


Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic advocated for extending the shared street concept down past Columbus Street to the Post Office. Also there should be better lighting in the village center, either using lights on trees or by lights strung across the road. City Councilor Lucas questioned whether removing turning lanes on Lincoln Street may increase cut-through traffic on adjacent streets. A discussion ensued about how well the “shared street” will be maintained, and how the issue of double parking will be addressed, since this often occurs related to delivery trucks.

The preferred option at the Hope Fountain calls for elimination of the right turn lane from Forest Street to Walnut Street, expanding the public space such that the fountain no longer sits without a traffic island. A number of Area Councilors expressed concern about the median that is proposed in the middle of Walnut Street where it curves at the Fountain. It was pointed out how this bottleneck may cause a safety concern if cars and bicyclists merge through a narrow area.



On Walnut Street, the preferred plan calls for bicycle accommodations to be mixed with traffic. Also, it is proposed that on-street parking will alternate from one side to the other on Walnut Street, with 2 parking spaces on the northbound side adjacent to the Brookline Bank and 5 parking spaces on the southbound side at the Christian Science Church. At Walnut and Floral Street, the proposal calls for a median island. On the southern side of Floral Street, the plans propose a dual-way bicycle lane to the Route 9 on-ramp, while preserving one way auto travel southbound.



Concern was expressed regarding the relocation of on-street parking to the northbound side of Walnut Street near Brookline Bank rather than keeping it on the southbound side adjacent to the property at 1149-1151 Walnut Street, which has been approved as a new residential development. Alternating the parking between both sides of the street may create a visual chaos that diverts a driver's attention from pedestrians and bicyclists using the roadway and this may worsen safety.

Regarding undergrounding utilities, an evaluation of this issue is happening on a parallel track. The two projects will move forward in parallel. Estimated costs from the utility companies are pending.

There will be a time for public feedback over the summer, and then another public meeting will be held most likely in September with a further refinement of the plans.

### Outdoor Dining:

A discussion ensued regarding a motor vehicle crash that occurred on Lincoln Street near the Buttonwood restaurant on May 7, when a vehicle crashed into the Jersey barriers. The police report indicated that the barrier and lane markings were deficient, and that the driver was not at fault for the crash. There is only 9 ft 4" of roadway width for cars at this location. There are now flex posts in the road that designate extra space on the southbound travel lane and less space on the northbound side.

It was noted that the street space behind the Jersey barriers has not been utilized by Buttonwood Restaurant this year, except as a storage area. Other outdoor seating in the city are all designed to be within boundaries of a regular parking space; however, at the Buttonwood location the outdoor seating is wider than the parking space. A discussion ensued about fixing this safety hazard in the village center and improving the aesthetics, as the space intended for outdoor dining seems to be used for excess storage throughout the year. Area Council President Freudberg will follow up with City traffic engineer Isaac Prizant regarding these issues.

### Zoning Redesign Discussion:

There have not been many new updates. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported that there will be a public hearing at ZAP on June 26<sup>th</sup> to discuss Zoning Redesign. Also, on June 8, there will be a public hearing at Programs and Services about placing a non-binding ballot question on the November ballot about whether people agree with the zoning redesign parameters. The City Council will decide if this non-binding question should go forward on the November ballot. Regarding the June 26 meeting date for ZAP about the important issue of citywide zoning changes, it was noted how many people may be away on this date, since it is after the end of the school year and right before the July 4 holiday.

City Councilor Tarik Lucas commented how he agrees that the June 26 date is a difficult date for many people to attend a public hearing. It was noted that there will be another public hearing before the City Council vote in the fall. Lisa Gordon said that it will be important for people advocating for the ballot item to attend the Program & Services meeting on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Area Council president Jeremy Freudberg noted that the Version 2.0 text has now been posted on the city website. A discussion ensued regarding some of the details of the text in the new zoning version.

Regarding information about how many units could be built-out based on the proposed zoning, there was an analysis on how parking minimums affect potential build-out under MBTA communities act. The MBTA communities act zoning could yield 10,250 units if there was no parking requirement. If the parking requirements were added back in, then with 0.5 parking spaces required per unit, there could be 7850 units, and with one parking space required per unit, 6900 units could be generated. City Councilor Tarik Lucas noted that units could not be counted according to the MBTA Communities Act that are in a “mixed use” district, and that they had to be in a “residential only” district. Area Councilor Darnell asked if omitting Historical Districts from the Communities Act is a state requirement. City Councilor Tarik Lucas pointed out that this is a City of Newton decision.

The village zoning maps for Newton Highlands were reviewed. Most of Four Corners is zoned as VC2, with mixed use zoning on the south side of Beacon Street. A few parcels are Multi-resident Transit at Four Corners. In the village center, there is a central VC3 zone, surrounded by a VC2 zone, and then surrounded by a larger VC1 zone that includes multiple parcels far away .

### Administrative Items:

Review and Approval of May Minutes: The draft minutes from the May meeting will be discussed at the July meeting.

Treasurer’s Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory had no additional items to report other than what was reported during the Village Day discussion.

### New Business:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported on two other Land Use public hearings that are upcoming. On June 13, a discussion will take place regarding the proposal for a Dunkin Donuts drive through to be located at 940 Boylston Street (Route 9). The other special permit item is related to the proposed Vault project at Walnut Street and a request for waiver of parking requirements.

Juneteenth activities are happening at the Hyde Center, and the concert program will be happening throughout the summer, mostly on Fridays.

Meeting Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 pm.