

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, July 6, 2023

Area Council members:

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

Ex Officio:

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

Residents and others:

Bob Burke, City Councilor Julia Malakie, Sonya McKnight, Loumona Petroff, City Councilor Pam Wright, Martha, Steven Farrell, Mary Lee Belleville, Jeffrey Freudberg, Dan, Terry Sauro, Jane, Carol Carroll

Meeting called to order at 7:05 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:

1114 Beacon Street update:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported that this project on Beacon Street in Four Corners was approved in 2021 as a condominium development. It was later changed to a rental apartment development. Recently the property was sold to a new entity, Alpine Property Group from Needham, and now it will proceed as a condominium project. The foundation for the project has already been excavated. A building permit application is on file for the new building. There will be underground parking. City Councilor Pam Wright noted that when a property sells, the special permit continues to be valid with the property. Councilor Wright noted that in general, if a project consists of between 30 and 35 units, it is usually a condo development. If it consists of more units, then it is generally an apartment project.

Area Council President Freudberg noted there have been two additional transactions of interest in the Area Council service area. The property at 1158 Beacon Street, which had been approved for Union Twist, has been sold to the abutter. The other transaction is the Avalon apartment complex on Needham Street which was sold for \$169 million to Abacus Capital Group. Avalon has also sold their property in Dedham, which changed its name to Aven. City Councilor Pam Wright asked if Avalon is in the process of selling other properties. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg responded that he is not aware of this.

Village Day Recap:

Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory reported that following Village Day, the Village Day budget is positive by \$3700 in funds, and that the Area Council has an additional \$40 coming in from Bike Newton. O'Hara's has provided \$500 that has yet to be added to this amount, and the Area Council is expecting funds from Salon Capri. Expenses for Village Day were lower this year since there were fewer expenses for police detail. It was noted that the Hyde Community Center has paid \$900 for their contribution to Village Day organization. Regarding T-shirts, there were \$230 in sales with a cost of \$576 to purchase the T-shirts. There were about 40 T-shirts purchased, and they were sold for \$15 each. The Area Council still has some T-shirts left over, perhaps about 10 shirts that are mostly children's sizes. A suggestion was made that it may make sense to buy more T-shirts next year and give them away to sponsors in appreciation for their support of Village Day.

For next year, B-fit 60 is interested in managing the road race. They have a relationship with a race timing company, which may make the race more economical to support. They may also be able to help with promotion of the race. Area Councilor Groot Gregory suggested that the race may be routed on Forest Street, so as to not interfere with the set-up of the vendors. Several Area Councilors noted that it appeared that Village Day was very well attended. Next year will be the 50th year anniversary of the creation of the Area Council, and a suggestion was made to commemorate the Area Council's anniversary during Village Day in 2024. Area Councilor Nathaniel Lichtin suggested that the Area Council provide gift cards to those who provided a substantial contribution of time and effort to organizing Village Day. The Area Council voted to provide a \$75 gift card to a Newton Highlands business to Chris Pitts for his help with arranging the music for Village Day and a \$50 gift card to John Rice for his overall help with Village Day. The vote was 7:0 (two absent: Amy Wayne and Rakashi Chand) for both motions.

A discussion ensued about who to involve in organizing Village Day for next year, with a suggestion that Area Councilor Rakashi Chand may be approached. Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg noted that the popcorn vendor told him that he did not have a profit during Village Day. Area Councilor Groot Gregory stated that he did not hear complaints this year from people about prices from the small vendors. Area Councilor Gregory stated that he had sent a thank you note to vendors for their participation in Village Day. Regarding any complaints, there was a dispute between two jewelry vendors and an issue with a pop-up lemonade stand at the Officer English Garden. Area Councilor Robert Fizek suggested that the Area Council should make more of the occasion and to invite the community to learn more about the Area Council and invite attention and participation to inform Village Day visitors that it is the Area Council who organizes Village Day. It was noted that 2024 will be the 47th annual Village Day (2020 and 2021 were not held due to the Covid-19 pandemic), with the first Village Day being in 1976.

Village Enhancement Project:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg provided a reminder that there is a community feedback tool on the City of Newton website to provide feedback about the most recent Highlands Village Enhancement proposal. This tool will be active during the summer. In the Fall, there will be further updates from DPW about the project. As far as the undergrounding of utilities, there have been no new updates regarding cost. Area Councilor Robert Fizek asked the Area Council to invite the

Department of Public Works staff to provide further information about the project. Area Council President Freudberg stated that he will reach out to invite DPW to a future Area Council meeting.

A discussion ensued regarding the proposed shifting of travel lanes on the section of Walnut Street between Lincoln Street and the Hope Fountain to accommodate new on-street parking on the northbound side of the street while reducing it on the southbound side. Concern was also expressed about the narrowing of the travel lanes at the fountain that may also create a bottleneck that worsens safety for bicyclists and drivers. Area Council members had concerns that both of these new elements of the plans may degrade safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Also, it is unclear if the section of Forest Street near the fountain will be one-way or two-way. A motion was made to oppose the shifting of auto travel lanes to accommodate parking on the northbound side of Walnut Street between Lincoln Street and the fountain, and to keep the parking on the southbound side. This proposal was approved 7:0 in favor (two absent Area Councilors did not vote: Wayne and Chand). Area Councilor Robert Fizek made a second motion for the Area Council to ask DPW to attend an upcoming Area Council meeting to discuss the project. This motion was approved 7:0 in favor (two absent Area Councilors did not vote: Wayne and Chand).

Zoning Redesign Discussion:

Area Council President Freudberg noted that there was a public hearing held on Monday June 26 to discuss the zoning redesign proposal. The meeting was very well attended by up to 900 people on zoom and over 200 people in person at City Hall. Not everyone had a chance to speak, with only 53 people able to speak. At least 20 more people wanted to speak but did not have the opportunity. There were issues with people accessing the meeting on zoom, so it is unknown how many people who wanted to speak may have been discouraged. The presentation by the city's consultant took about one hour, which left relatively little time for the public to fully participate. The public hearing will be continued, but it is unknown when.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that even as the public process continues, it is likely that the zoning proposal will move forward with a positive vote by City Council before the end of the year. Will it be possible to include some element of historical preservation to maintain the historical continuity of the village centers? City Councilor Pam Wright noted that most Chapter 40B properties are being developed in commercial areas. City Councilor Wright noted that the proposed VC1 zone is calculated to have up to 11 units per building. Therefore, the new zoning proposal for VC1 may provide some affordable housing, but inclusionary zoning does not start until more than 7 units are developed. It is possible that developers may limit new development to only 6 units to avoid the inclusionary zoning provision.

A discussion ensued about the number of units that are needed in the new zoning proposal to meet the MBTA Communities Act proposition. Carol Carroll commented on the challenges of heat island locations for proposed new housing. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that new development should preferentially be located on infill locations rather than on existing green spaces. Steven Farrell noted that a referendum is a mechanism by which a new zoning plan can be modified, but only after it is approved. The more we can do to inform people about this process, the better. Area Councilor Nathaniel Lichtin noted that the Newton Highlands and Waban Area Councils had previously had their own meetings on zoning redesign and that having such meetings can help make

people more aware of the zoning process. A suggestion was made for the Area Council to hold this meeting to take place on Saturday, September 23. A suggestion was made to engage people during Hyde community events. It was noted that this year is an election cycle and that the Area Councils may bring this issue of zoning redesign forward during debates, but there are only a few contested seats of existing city councilors. A discussion ensued about the role of the Area Council in organizing debates for the contested races.

Area Councilor Robert Fizek suggested that the zoning proposal intended to meet the MBTA Communities Act should be separated from the general zoning redesign process that the city is engaged with. Some villages are not affected by the requirements of the MBTA Communities Act compared to others that have more relationship to transit. City Councilor Pam Wright stated that she is in the process of crafting an alternate proposal on how the city can meet the MBTA Communities Act.

Administrative Items:

Review and Approval of May and June Minutes: The draft minutes from the May and June meetings were discussed. A vote was held for the May minutes, and they were approved 6:0 (one abstention Groot Gregory). A vote was held for the June minutes, and they were approved 5:0 (two abstentions, Groot and Barbara abstained as they were absent in June). The two absent Area Councilors (Chand and Wayne) did not vote.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory noted once checks have been deposited, the Area Council will have a balance of about \$18,000 in the bank account.

New Business:

Next Area Council meeting: It was noted that the next meeting of the Area Council will be taking place on Thursday, August 3.

Crystal Lake and Levingston Cove update: A meeting took place on June 14 between Area Council members Jeremy Freudberg, Barbara Darnell, and Srdjan Nedlejkovic with Mayor Fuller, Nicole Banks, and Luis Perez Demorizi regarding concerns about Levingston Cove and other Crystal Lake topics. Concerns as previously outlined in a letter from the Area Council to the Mayor were expressed, including concerns that the newly installed stones at the water's edge will create an exclusionary environment and a potential safety hazard. Limiting access to the lake to only the paid bathhouse area also discriminates against people with limited incomes who cannot afford to pay for day passes to access the lake. The Mayor, Ms. Banks, and Mr. Perez Demorizi acknowledged these concerns. However, the project will advance towards completion as it is currently planned. If the concerns about inclusion, diversity, safety, and access to the lake are confirmed after the project has been completed, the Mayor noted that changes in accessing the cove may be considered. Area Council representatives to the meeting specifically requested that the boulders should be removed, as they represent a hostile, unwelcoming, and unsafe environment. The Mayor suggested that a follow up meeting should take place in the fall to reassess the impact of the project after its completion.

Crystal Lake Left Bank Project: Area Councilor Nathaniel Lichtin stated in a conversation with Mr. Perez Demorizi, it was noted that that a community meeting will be scheduled to take place in the fall regarding the left bank project at the Bathhouse beach. Apparently, a number of new options will be presented at that time. Mr. Lichtin also noted that the Levingston Cove project will be opening on the hardscape areas later in the summer, perhaps in late July or early August. A number of Area Councilors commented on the seeming prolonged duration of time that this work is taking to open the Cove back up to public use.

Outdoor Dining and Street Obstruction at Buttonwood: Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg noted that the outdoor dining problem is getting worse at the Buttonwood restaurant. The roadway is extremely narrow there, and the stanchions placed to shift traffic have been knocked down. There was consensus among Area Council members that the outdoor seating area at Buttonwood should be limited only to the parking space width, and not extend onto the street travel lane. Some Area Councilors commented that the umbrellas at the Buttonwood outdoor tables are causing visibility issues as well. A lively discussion ensued on how to address the safety issues caused by this problem, but without clear resolution.

Meeting Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 pm.