

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, December 7, 2023

Area Council members:

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

Ex Officio:

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

Residents and others:

Loumona Petroff, Lisa Gordon, Lisa Monahan, Kathy Pillsbury, MaryLee Belleville, Carol Carroll, Beatrice, Isabelle Albeck, Kim Thurmond, Jeff, A Meyers

Meeting called to order at 7:06 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:

Authorize Expenditure for election workers:

Poll workers were needed to staff the Area Council elections. Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported that the NHNAC is due to pay \$607.50 to cover the costs for poll workers that staffed election sites that were inclusive of the Area Council service area. The check will be payable to the Newtonville Area Council, which has taken the role of paying the poll workers who staffed all of the Area Council elections. A motion was made to authorize this funding, and the vote passed 8:0, with all area councilors present voting to support the expense. Members of the Area Council expressed hope that the City of Newton will be able to provide financial support for the poll workers at the next Area Council elections.

A discussion ensued about how to improve the Area Council election process, including ways to increase publicity regarding the Area Councils during the days and weeks prior to an election. Some voters said that they were reluctant to vote for Area Councilors because they did not know much about the candidates who were running. Also, there are problems in finding an adequate number of poll workers to staff the elections. A suggestion was made to reduce the number of hours that a poll worker has to work, since a full day shift is 14 hours, and a half day shift is 7 hours. Limiting the hours may increase the number of people who are interested in being poll workers. There is support to continue to allow for early voting for Area Council elections, which took place over a period of 5 days this election cycle.

Route 9 at Winchester/Centre Streets traffic signal operations:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported that there continue to be concerns about traffic operations at the newly signalized intersections under the Route 9 bridge. The city agrees that the shifting of lanes driving northbound is problematic and is considering of addressing this either through line repainting or through optimization of the signals. A suggestion was made to survey people in the area about their concerns regarding this intersection. It was noted that some people are using Floral Street or driving through Upper Falls in order to avoid this intersection.

Levingston Cove Update:

Area Council President Jeremy Freudberg reported on the opening of the cove on November 15. Area Councilor Darnell felt that the large granite sign indicating the name of the cove was excessive. Area Councilor Rosenberg felt that the city did a good job with the project, but that it will take a few years for the plantings to mature. Area Councilor Lichtin stated that he is pleased with how it came out and said that he is using it more in the new configuration. However, the rocks and the gravel at the water's edge will make it difficult to access the water. He noted that some of the pebbles are disappearing already. Area Councilor Fizek stated that the project did not fulfill the goal of "keeping it simple and keeping it natural," wondered if the cost of the project was justified, and felt that the project appears "commercial."

Area Councilor Nedeljkovic noted that there are positive aspects of the project, including the terracing and the management of runoff. Hopefully the landscaping will be durable after use and wear by the public. There is still concern that access to the lake posed by the boulders at the lake's edge may be perceived as a barrier, and that the sharp gravel rocks between the boulders may cause safety issues and problems for people. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic complimented the city and the mayor for a very pleasant and engaging ceremonial opening. Area Councilor Robert Fizek asked about further plans by the city for the Left Beach and the Bathhouse, and this question will be brought up with the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department.

Zoning Redesign Discussion:

City Council has passed a comprehensive compromise package for Village Center rezoning. A discussion ensued how this will affect Newton Highlands. In the village, the parcels on Lincoln Street will be in the VC2 zone whereas parcels on Walnut Street will be in the VC3 zone. The parcels around the CVS plaza will be VC3. Four Corners was not rezoned as part of the currently approved proposal. Many parcels along Route 9 and on Centre Street have been rezoned as MRT. On these parcels, buildings that have 3-4 units may be built by right. Parts of the historic core of Newton Highlands are now included in the MRT zoning.

A discussion ensued regarding how to protect the historic aspects of the village, including whether another effort should be made about establishing a Local Historic District in the Highlands. Several Area Councilors expressed interest in reinvigorating this effort and making further outreach to the community.

Area Councilor Freudberg reflected how there have been many discussions in City Council about details related to the zoning and wondered how the zoning may ultimately affect what is built. Area Councilor Lichtin suggested that the zoning should be amended to reduce heights in VC2 and VC3. A question was raised if mandating ground floor commercial space in the new zoning code is viable, and whether small businesses can continue to exist. It was noted that in the new zoning plan, in order to have a height bonus that allows for 6 stories by right, half of the units must be affordable, but this is only applicable in a VC3 zone.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic noted that architect Marc Hershman and others continue to have recommendations about possible amendments to the new zoning plan that just passed. A suggestion was made to invite Mr. Hershman to an upcoming Area Council meeting to discuss some of these possible amendments. New councilors will also be attending the Area Council meeting, and it will be interesting to hear their thoughts and opinions on going forward.

Administrative Items:

Review and Approval of November Minutes: The draft minutes from the November NHNAC meetings were considered for approval. The minutes were approved 8:0.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory reported that the Area Council has a balance of over \$17,000 in funds. A check is outstanding to Chris Pitts from Village Day, as the check has not been deposited. Area Council Treasurer Gregory noted that payment was made for \$1000 to the Hyde Center. Payment of \$607.50 will be made to the Newtonville Area Council to cover the cost of the election workers.

New Business:

There will be two open positions on the Newton Highlands Area Council after January 1. Any interested individuals are invited to attend upcoming meetings to be considered. The Area Council thanked Nathaniel Lichtin for his many years of service to the Area Council. At the next meeting, the Area Council will discuss how best to acknowledge Area Councilor Lichtin.

It was noted that Angelo's barbershop at 19 Lincoln Street is being renovated in a historic style and with great attention to detail. The Winter Soup Social will be at 5:30 pm on Saturday, January 27. It will be held outside at the Hyde Center and the Playground.

Lisa Gordon noted that the Tree Ordinance is under discussion, and that we may wish to invite someone from Protect Newton Trees at a future meeting. Robert Fizek noted that he will be drafting a letter regarding undergrounding of utilities as part of the Village Center Redesign.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic noted that water meter replacement is happening throughout the city. The new water meters do not start with a reading of 0, as the meters are flushed prior to being installed. Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg agreed to contact the Water and Sewer Department to obtain more clarity on this issue and residents' responsibilities for payment.

Next Area Council meeting: The next meeting of the Area Council will be taking place on Thursday, January 4th.

Meeting Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.