



Newtonville Area Council - Meeting Agenda
Thursday, April 14, 2022 7:00 PM
Meeting Location: Online via Zoom

Attendees:

NAC: Jennifer Bentley (President), Martina Jackson (Vice President), Nancy Greenberg (Treasurer) Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay (Secretary), Dana D’Agostino, Timothy LeBlanc, Aline Sammut

City Councilors: Susan Albright, Tarik Lucas, Julia Malakie, Emily Norton, John Oliver, Pam Wright

Council on Aging: Joan Belle Isle

Public: Approximately 21 members of the public, in addition to the Mark Development presentation team.

Jennifer called the meeting to order and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

1. Update on Crafts Street Senior Housing Development (presentation by Mark Development)

Jennifer introduced the Mark Development LLC project team: Robert Korff (CEO of Mark Development LLC), John Martin (Principal at Elkus Manfedi Architects), Stephen Buchbinder, Esq. (Partner at Schlesinger and Buchbinder, LLP), Timothy Fox (Executive Vice President at Senior Resource Group, LLC (aka “SRG”) and Bill Drake (Head of Construction/Chief Architect at SRG).

Mr. Martin explained that the proposed senior living project on Crafts Street behind the Newtonville Whole Food, consists of 129 independent living units, 56 assisted living beds, and 26 memory care beds in 2 buildings, one having 7 stories fronting on Crafts Street with a 12-16 foot setback and the other in back being 5 stories with larger setbacks. There will be no access from Court Street, other than for fire/emergency vehicles. There will be a pedestrian connector from Court Street to Crafts Street. The exterior will have cooper-colored cement panels. The independent living units will have balconies on 2-bedroom and many 1-bedroom units. There will also be a communal courtyard and terraces on the buildings. The plan calls for mechanicals with air filtration, operable windows, and the use of low VOC materials. Amenities for independent and assistive living residents would include dining facilities, living rooms and common rooms.

The 209-unit project will have 137 resident parking spaces underground (allocating 1 spot per independent living unit and allowing spaces for employee and visitors), 5 visitor parking spaces on the driveway, and 3 drop off spots at street level.

Attorney Buchbinder explained that the Land Use Committee is tentatively scheduled to hear the proposal on May 17th at a hybrid in person and Zoom session, with further review activities running through the fall. The developer seeks to rezone the property to BU4 to allow for the proposed building heights, a change from the current primarily manufacturing zoning and the MR1 zoning for the two homes. A special permit will also be requested.

Mr. Korff said that the same presentation was given to Nonantum residents and that his intention is to gather and be responsive to community comments. There will be another community meeting via Zoom on April 25th and that for that meeting his team is studying how to rework the buildings in response to community comments, especially about the propose building heights.

Discussion included the following topics:

- Sustainability – Mr. Korff said that he has hired a sustainability consultant and that topic will be addressed with the City Council.
- Building height – The proposed 7 story height exceeds current zoning, as well as the compromise of 6 stories that was reached in connection with the Washington Street Vision Plan.
- Affordability – Mr. Fox stated that market rents will apply for each component of the facility. Mr. Korff said that Newton Sunrise facility currently charges \$10,000/month (\$120,000/year) for its assistive living units. Rents for the independent living units would be greater than Trio and 28 Austin because of the services that would be offered and the internal cross-subsidy of assistive and memory units. It was noted that area residents who may be thinking of the project as an option to “age in place” in Newton probably do not anticipate such high prices. It was also noted that renting an independent living unit did not come with an assurance of being able to move into an assistive unit when need arose, even assuming the renters had not become asset depleted by the prices paid in the independent living component for the 4-5 years that residents customarily live in independent units before needing to move to assistive living.
- Affordable Housing units - Mr. Korff said that, unlike the Sunrise facility, Mark Development would exercise the option under the current ordinance to “buy out” from the requirement applicable to senior living facilities to provide 5% affordable units (i.e., a total 11 units spread across the independent and assistive living components) by paying \$11Million for the City to use at its discretion to provide Affordable Housing elsewhere. Mr. Buchbinder explained that under the ordinance ½ of the buy-out fee would go to the Newton Housing Authority and ½ to the City. The buy-out payment would be due when the Certificate of Occupancy issues at the conclusion of construction in approximately 4 years.
- Rezoning – In response to concerns raised about whether rezoning should be intentional and advance the City’s goals, including for Affordable Housing, rather than being ad hoc in response to a developer’s desires, Mr. Korff said that Newton’s zoning is outdated and that in most cases zoning relief is necessary to get anything done. He also commented that advocates of more affordability should understand that increased density will be needed for affordability. A community member responded saying that it is not universally accepted that density is the solution to achieving affordability and that a “trickle down” theory underlies the Affordable Housing buyout provision.

Jennifer thanked the Mark Development team for engaging with the community at the NAC. Mr. Korff committed to making an updated website “live” after the April 25th meeting and to having his team continue to engage with the community.

2. Village Center Zoning

Jennifer introduced architect Marc Hershman to present his video study titled: “*What makes a Village Center Inviting?*” which he had tried to show to Zoning and Planning Committee, but experienced technical difficulties that prevented a full showing.

The video looked at the scale of more, and less, inviting village centers in other cities. The video examined successful village centers that are geared primarily to retail with 1- and 2-story buildings, avoiding long and extensive “mega buildings”. It noted that even in a highly dense community like Brooklyn, NY (which would be the country’s 4th largest city if it were its own city), commercial buildings were 1- and 2-stories. Other cities’ village centers included

- Delray which rehabilitated and maintained the 1 and 2 story model
- Santa Barbara which also maintains the 1 and 2 story framework for successful retail, but has one tall building that eclipses the village center with its mass and height
- Waltham’s Moody Street “restaurant row” has mostly 1 and 2 stories, but also has 4 story buildings that produce a “canyon effect” with the main ground floor being minimized by the building’s taller height. Cronin’s Landing was highlighted as an example of the impact of a bigger building has, lacking the appeal of 1 and 2 story buildings.
- Waban Center is a quintessential example of a village center with identity and uniqueness.
- Newton Highlands has 2- and 3-story buildings, with an open space plaza making the 3-story structure more acceptable. The roof structures on the 3-story building are also tucked into the roof system.
- Newtonville had successful 1 story structures. The Masonic Building is beautiful but overwhelms the village center and really deserves a plaza around it.
- Washington Street has some 1 story buildings. Trio, includes retail space on its ground floor.
- Newton Center has 1-story retail and Union Street has 3-story structures where the 3rd story is incorporated into the roof system, minimizing its appearance
- Framingham has predominantly 3 stories on the street, but that street has 4 lanes unlike Newton’s 2 lane roads where buildings of that height would produce a canyon effect. Mr. Hershman explained that proportions of height and width are important to achieving a human scale. Wider streets and lower buildings (in a ratio of 2-3 times the street width) diminish the canyon effect.

Other examples of successful village centers shown in the video included Ohio, Colorado, Tennessee, London’s newer village center, Ireland, and Shanghai (the 3rd most densely populated city in the world), all of which use 1- and 2-story village centers.

The ensuing discussion included comments about affordability in Newtonville, with the Trio and 28 Austin Street at double that of native affordable housing promoting market rent increases and gentrification causing real estate tax pressures on residents from assessment increases.

Mr. Herschman explained that, rather than promoting affordability, increasing density actually reduces affordability because properties prices inflate as developers purchase parcels to replace single-family homes with build multi-unit developments, thereby increasing the cost of entry level housing and promoting a greater cost per square foot of living space (i.e., less home for more money). He explained that the studies relied upon in passing the new state MBTA communities law showed that with the new law's multi-unit zoning mandate a modest single-family residence would be replaced by 3 townhouses or 15 condo units, each of which would be more expensive than the single-family house they replaced. He also posited that while there may be opposition to "sprawl", people actually want more green space, which is important for the climate as well as quality of life.

Sharing slides shown to ZAP by the Planning Department, Jennifer described the Planning Department's intention to reach out to the community with a "Community Engagement Network" (a group of people who will facilitate engagement efforts and information proliferation) using an interactive tool, events for on-the-spot surveying in the spring and summer and public and virtual meetings between May and November. All of the Area Councils will be represented on the Community Engagement Network, which has also received applications from 90 residents who have expressed interest in running groups. As President, Jennifer will represent the NAC on the Community Engagement Network. Vice President, Martina Jackson also volunteered to represent the NAC on the CEN. Jennifer and Martina will pass along any information from the Planning Department and NEC to the NAC at future meetings and through the email listserv if necessary.

3. Update on Village Day planning

Dana said that planning is going well. She noted that the permit applications have been submitted to Planning Department for the event on Sunday, September 18, noon – 4PM. The plan includes many of the same activities as in the past, such as the community policing dog, Leo, a roving kiddie train, etc. A Save-the-Date will be issued in May. Martina will lead the sponsorship effort. Next steps will be outreach to past vendors and new businesses, as well as working on the forms for booths, etc. Dana noted that there may be a "Taste of Newton" approach to feature local restaurants. She also said that she expects to have a lot of help this year.

4. Administrative Issues

a. Individual / Group roles

Jenifer asked each member to speak about what role they want to perform on the NAC.

- Martina said she likes working on Village Day, she would like to be involved in the Village Center discussions and that, in conjunction with her Village Day work on sponsorships, she would also like to participate in business engagement initiatives.
- Dana said that, in addition to working on Village Day, after talking with Nancy, they agree that it would be more streamlined if she was Treasurer.
- Nancy said she would like to work on Village Day and agrees with Dana handling the role of Treasurer. She also said she is passionate about zoning.
- Tim said he feels his natural role is on the technical side, working on the website and fixing the architecture of the directory, which will be a topic of discussion at the next meeting.
- Aline said she wants to focus on "outreach" and build on what Susan Reisler started with regard to the Keep Newtonville Clean initiative and would speak with Jennifer about how the role can be clarified. She also volunteered to work on Village Day.
- Carolyn said she would continue as Secretary and do other appropriate work as needed.

b. Newtonville cleaning /maintenance funding

Aline reported that she is still exploring how to address this matter and the topic was deferred to the next meeting.

c. Other business

Nancy Greenberg reported that \$1,000 was paid to the NAC by Metro Credit Union, having sent in the check even though they had initially been confused and thinking that the payment might go to a Nonantum function. Dana deposited the check. She also reported that PO box fee has been paid.

Because it would be more efficient in connection with Village Day activities for Dana to be Treasurer, Nancy resigned as Treasurer. Martina nominated Dana, Carolyn seconded and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To elect Dana D’Agostino Treasurer of the NAC.

Carolyn reported on surveying other Area Councils about their policies on the use of their email list. They either have no formally adopted policy or do not use an emailing list. Carolyn moved, and Martina seconded and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To rescind the vote taken at the January NAC meeting establishing a policy on the use of the emailing list and social media and to rely, instead, on good judgment.

Jennifer reported that there on April 22nd there will be a “Parking Party” at Albemarle Road near Gath Pool in connection with a proposed permanent change in the parking arrangement to angle park tail to curb. Councilor Lucas encouraged attendance and noted the many complaints about the similar temporary arrangement on Homer Street during the construction at the library. He noted that this change would be on a busy street and might present safety issues. Tim thought that backing toward the curb, rather than the roadway, might increase the chances of hitting a child rather than a car. Councilor Malakie explained that the size of the spaces being testing was 8.5 and 9 feet and Councilor Lucas noted that current standard zoning is for 9 feet, so these would be narrow. Councilor Wright commented that most of the cars parking in this area are SUVs and minivans and that backing to the curb would be something that people do not do often.

d. Approval of March 10 meeting minutes

The draft minutes of the March 10, 2022 meeting having been circulated for review prior to the meeting, Jennifer moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimous (Dana having left):

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the March 10, 2022 NAC meeting.

Adjournment

At approximately 10:00 PM, Martina moved, Jennifer seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay

Secretary