



Newtonville Area Council - Meeting Agenda
Thursday, March 10, 2022 7:00 PM
Meeting Location: Online via Zoom

Attendees:

NAC: Jennifer Bentley (President), Martina Jackson (Vice President), Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay (Secretary), Timothy LeBlanc, Aline Sammut

City Government: Councilors Albright, Leary, Lucas, Norton and Wright

Public: Approximately 16 members of the public

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

1. Discussion of candidates and vote to fill Council vacancies

Jennifer summarized the process by which the NAC intends to fill its 3 vacancies; a call for applications was issued on January 18th with a February 21st deadline for applications, 4 candidates responded (i.e., Linda Swain, Miranda Barrows, Dana D’Agostino and Jessica Aker Archer), and public interviews were held on February 23rd. She also summarized the guidance received from the Law Department on how to conduct the vote on the 4 candidates to fill the 3 vacancies on the NAC, which was as follows:

- Per the NAC Bylaws, a candidate must earn 2/3 of the votes of the existing NAC. Because the NAC currently has 6 members, a candidate must earn 4 votes to be elected to the NAC.
- The election process will begin with each current NAC member submitting up to 3 votes for their top candidates. The President will tally the votes and announce the results.
- Each candidate earning 4 or more votes will be elected to the NAC.
- If 3 candidates each earn 4 votes, the election is over.
- If the 3 vacancy spots are not filled upon the completion of the initial vote, another vote must be taken to fill the remaining vacancy(s). The second vote is taken by the NAC among the remaining candidates.
- Each candidate earning 4 or more votes on that second ballot will be elected to the NAC.
- If an unfilled vacancy remains after 2 votes, the NAC will leave the vacancy open to fill at another time.

Jennifer thanked each of the candidates for their interest in serving on the NAC. She then began the election. On the first ballot, the result was:

- Dana D’Agostino: **ELECTED.**

No other candidates secured 4 votes on the first ballot, so the election continued to a second ballot. No candidates achieved 4 votes on the second ballot, so the remaining 2 vacancies were held open, the election was suspended and Jennifer will ask the Law Department for guidance on next steps.

2. Update on NewCAL project

Jennifer recused herself and left the meeting. Martina took over chairing the meeting. Martina walked through a series of slides that had previously been shown by Josh Morse at a NewCal community session, including the site plan and two building design concepts for a replacement building. The two versions of the exterior are the same except for the roofline. Both have a Highland Street street-level entry, incorporate the Charles Connick stained glass windows, have a decorative railing and use brick, cupola, shingle roof, cladding, limestone, windows/glass walls, and have green space/seating along Walnut Place. One design has a pyramidal roof and the other a gable roof. She also noted that discussions are ongoing and there will be opportunities for added public input.

Councilor Lucas explained that there is a NewCal Community Meeting on energy efficiency and sustainability features on March 17th and that on March 24th the Newton Historical Commission will entertain a motion to accept the application for landmarking the current building.

Aline commented on the potential for divergence between the artist's renderings of the design concepts and the final product, expressed concern about the sufficiency of a single elevator, and pointed out the need for a maintenance plan.

Tim complimented the look of the building but was concerned about building's proximity to the street and the potential for a "canyon effect." He also expressed concern about losing a historic building for a new facility that might not meet long-term needs. Councilor Leary said that the City has projected demographics changes and long-term needs.

Peter Harrington commented on the environmental impact/energy use needs of having a large number of north-facing windows/glass walls. Peter also commented on the limited parking and the public's limited utilization of the Austin Street parking lot. He described the proposed building as "huge," especially for the small site, and said that he felt the issue was less a matter of the facility being adequate to address Newton seniors' future needs than the building being designed as a kind of municipal center rather than focusing on seniors.

Architect Robert Fizek commented on the project's pace having been slow for a long time but then rapidly landing on the site of an historic building. He expressed concern about what he felt was an inappropriate approach by the City Building Commissioner in the notice of the NHC meeting by focusing on a presentation of the proposed replacement structure, rather than focusing on whether the landmark candidate building is historic. He also commented that the City should be doing a full lifecycle analysis of the non-recoverable

embedded carbon environmental costs of demolishing an existing building even for a replacement that would be a so-called “net zero” building

Jessica Archer said that there were a number of meetings about siting and that the City found other locations and repairing the current Senior Center not to be economically feasible.

Councilor Leary expressed concern for making the windows bird-safe. She acknowledged that the Walnut Street site is a less than ideal space but said no place in Newton is perfect and that Walnut Street is relatively central and has support from the seniors in the community. She also asked why the building was not landmarked previously. Councilor Wright noted that no City buildings have been landmarked to date and that most landmark designations occur after an alternative use has been proposed.

Joanna Mann asked about the percentage of senior center users favoring this project and whether environmentally-forward elements (like solar panels) would be incorporated.

Joan Belle Isle encouraged attendance at upcoming NewCAL meetings where professionals can respond to technical questions about the proposed designs. She clarified that the proposed NewCAL basketball court would be sized comparably to an elementary school’s court, rather than being a full-sized regulation basketball court. She said that NewCAL’s primary intended use would be for seniors, although facilities would be available for use by others when not in use by seniors.

Martina noted that Josh Morse was unable to attend the NAC meeting due to a conflicting commitment and promised to convey the comments made when she attends upcoming NewCal meetings on behalf the NAC.

3. Cabot Park Outdoor Classroom/Pavilion Project

Jennifer returned and resumed chairing the meeting. She displayed an aerial image of Cabot Park and Cabot School and explained that with some remaining construction budget funds would be devoted to beautifying and activating the park area with the help of Mass College of Art & Design faculty and students. Community meetings will begin soon regarding construction of a pavilion area for concert and other outdoor events.

4. Supporting local Newtonville businesses

Jennifer noted that during interviews with candidates for the NAC vacancies, the ideas for increasing support for local businesses and addressing the Walnut Street vacant storefronts came up. She reported that she and Lauren Berman, who is working to support businesses in Newton, walked around Newtonville and that an informal review of the area resulted in a list of ~68 businesses. She also reported that she has invited local businesses to attend NAC meetings.

Councilor Leary reported that the City Council passed an ordinance permitted outdoor dining for another year. She also noted “shop local” Saturdays, music and other events can help support business activity. President Albright noted that musical events on Bram Way have been successful and suggested collaborating

with Gloria Gavis, Chair of Newton Community Pride. She also suggested talking with the Charles River Regional Chamber, which Jennifer and Aline said they have already tried.

Jennifer reported the NAC newsletter has started to feature local businesses, starting with MIDA and Cabot's this month. Martina reported that she and Dana did a lot of business outreach for Village Day and an increasing number of local businesses sponsored or participated with booths at the event for visibility.

Councilor Norton said that situations depend on the business, for instance that Los Amigos is expanding. She also noted that trash on Walnut Street is an issue for local businesses. Councilor Lucas said his efforts to support local businesses included meeting with Village Day booth and tent sponsors and featuring businesses in his newsletter. He also put in a "plug" for Needs More Sprinkles, as a home-based bakery business.

Jennifer said the brainstorming would continue and that the NAC would look into why Porchfest did not include Newtonville and how to further activate Bram Way.

5. Beautify Newtonville initiative

Aline reported on efforts she and Susan Reisler have been making with NNHS, which has created sign to post in storefronts encouraging keeping the area clear of trash. She and Susan will work with local businesses to have them posted, as well as with local media to cover the issue. She has also been working with NNHS to raise awareness among students, noting that NNHS students are not the only ones responsible for trash.

The discussion also included comments on the adequacy of trash and recycling bins on Walnut Street, including that there is a pilot program for better receptacles to replace the problematic Big Belly bins. Councilor Leary suggested contacting Phil Arpino.

Aline highlighted concerns about gum and glass being embedded in the sidewalk and the issues with not being able to power wash the unsealed pavers that were installed as part of the recent improvements project. Comments also commended the volunteer work to refurbish the benches in front of the Senior Center.

6. Administrative Issues

a. Refining the language of a vote taking on protocol for promoting events or activities

At the January meeting, a vote was taken about reserving use of the NAC listserv for communicating about certain matters and to use social media for communications about other matters. Jennifer explained that when she was preparing the NAC newsletter, she found that the meaning of the vote was subject to interpretation and was not fully clear. After discussion Martina suggested talking to other Area Councils about their procedures and Carolyn agreed to do so.

b. Submission and Approval of the 2021 Annual and Financial Reports

The draft minutes of the 2021 Annual and Financial Reports having been circulated for review prior to the meeting, Jennifer moved, Carolyn seconded, and it was unanimous:

VOTED: To approve the 2021 Annual and Financial Reports.

c. Other business

Sunday, September 18th was set as the date for Village Day to avoid a conflict with Rosh Hashanah. Dana agreed to run the event again, with the support of a working group with members beyond the NAC, and will work on getting the date on appropriate City calendars. Martina agreed to help again as well. Jennifer will post a notice seeking volunteers. Joanna Mann volunteered for the working group. Councilor Lucas noted that NNHS volunteers have helped in the past via one of their civic engagement clubs and Aline will reach out to NNHS.

d. Approval of February 10 & 23, 2022 meetings minutes

The draft minutes of the February 10 and 23, 2022 meetings having been circulated for review prior to the meeting, Jennifer moved and Aline seconded, and it was unanimous:

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the February 10, 2022 NAC meetings.

Next, Jennifer moved and Martina seconded, and it was unanimous:

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the February 23, 2022 NAC meetings.

7. Adjournment

At approximately 9 PM, Jennifer moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay

Secretary