



Newtonville Area Council - Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 28, 2022 7:00 PM
Meeting Location: Online via Zoom

Attendees:

NAC: Jennifer Bentley (President), Martina Jackson (Vice President), Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay (Secretary), Nancy Greenberg, Timothy LeBlanc, Aline Sammut [**Absent:** Dana D'Agostino]

City Government: City Councilors Lucas and Wright

Rena Getz, Waban Area Council President

Joan Belle Isle, Council on Aging

Public: Approximately 9 members of the public

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

1. Keep Newtonville Beautiful initiative update

Aline reported that:

- She is engaging with Jack Lovett about the new rules for lamppost banners and the posters for the clean-up campaign have been deployed widely.
- The goal for September is to create a “connector” with the participating businesses that have shared their emails, including inquiring about how the NAC can support them. A small physical newsletter or flyer (perhaps the remaining July 4th flyers) will be considered as a way to introduce the NAC and its contact information to local businesses.
- Added mid-block trash barrels (on the Los Amigos side) have been agreed to. The “Big Belly” trash cans which have been problematic are to be phased out citywide.
- Landscaping has been updated and cleaned, including enhancing the new traffic island with planters.
- Newtonville Centers seems cleaner but there are still major problems with dirty sidewalks (grease, gum, etc.) and she will turn to the street cleaning options. The benches are again dirty with the wood absorbing stains. Councilor Lucas suggested contacting Commissioner of Parks and Recreation. There was also discussion of asking Mr. David Porat, the volunteer resident, to consider painting the benches to make the wood impervious.
- Future plans include connecting with Scott Oran regarding Bram Way and with NNHS.

Martina noted that there are to be 3 new eating establishments on Walnut Street coming soon.

2. Newtonville sign follow up

Jennifer has tried to obtain more information about the large, cast-iron sign that Patrick Maher has in his possession and has offered to the NAC. She reported that President Albright solicited placement ideas from

the City Council, but has provided no feedback yet. In the ensuing discussion placement location ideas discussed included: Bram Way, the Trio Courtyard, the new MBTA station (when built), the Masonic Hall's Museum, NewCAL, the Washington Street or Walnut Street bus stop, and at the Walnut Street bridge over the MassPike in the newly landscaped triangle/traffic island as a low sign location. It was agreed that a more public placement than Bram way (which is the subject of a legal dispute about the easement) would be desirable. In the discussion, the traffic island location appeared to emerged as a consensus frontrunner.

Jennifer will solicit Patrick Maher's ideas, confirm his offer and bring more information to the August meeting, including trying to find out if the NAC will be allowed to erect the sign in the traffic island, possibly with solar lights for nighttime illumination. There was a suggestion that Mr. Porat might be willing and able to help restore the sign to better condition.

3. Update on Village Center Zoning effort/spot rezoning discussion

Martina noted that an article in the Patch reported that the Zoning and Planning (ZAP) committee has reached a "consensus" on the framework for village centers and that report raised questions about why the Planning Department has assembled the Community Engagement Network (CEN) composed of approximately 90 people. Jennifer echoed that the article made people feel like the village center zoning process is a "done deal." Martina also reported that the Planning Department is using various tools and surveys to determine, for example, what attracts people to village centers, but none of the suggested attractions resonated with members of her CEN subgroup. She also reported that the scheduled July 21st office hours with Planning Department staff was moved to August and that the CEN has not met with Utile, the planning consultants the City is using for this project. Peter Bruce noted that on June 24th ZAP published a planning document utilizing Utile's suggestions such as limiting parking as not being important for village centers, whereas the Star Market parking lot has been used by the public to avoid paying meters in the Austin Street lot and the Washington Street Vision Plan called for public parking. It was also noted that the Planning Department's concepts paper called for 5.5 story buildings whereas the Washington Street Vision Plan called for limiting village centers buildings to 3 stories and the Oakley Spa project has been reduced to 3 stories. Jennifer commented that the concepts memorandum treated village centers too homogeneously.

Councilor Wright explained that a "half story" is really a full story with a 6-foot set back. She reported that some village centers would be zoned MU4 with 4.5 stories and 5.5-6 stories with a special permit. She also reported that she and Councilor Baker are fighting an uphill battle in the straw votes being taken in ZAP. For example, all other Councilors on ZAP want to eliminate any parking requirements for 1st floor retail. Mark Development is planning on a 150-person restaurant for the 50-unit building project in West Newton Square at the Santander Bank building, but under the proposed zoning (a) the project could be built by right and (b) there would be no requirement to provide any parking even though the project would eliminate the Davis Street lot. Further, currently MU4 requires special permits for most projects, but the proposal would not require a special permit for a project if the lot is less than ¾ acre/15,000 square feet, which includes most lots. She noted that the special permit requirement has resulted in better projects when developers work with the City Council. Councilor Wright also reported that, although maps will be developed later, during August to October there are to be some displays on village center zoning proposals in the library and said that it is important that the public's opinions be recorded there.

Councilor Wright also reported that, in connection with the Dunstan East construction, 1 traffic lane will be closed for over 2 years, leaving a right turn only into Trader Joes. She also noted that more than 3,000 units have been developed since 2020.

Carolyn suggested that the NAC should ask business owners what they think they need to succeed in the village center, including as to parking. She added that the T is in bad repair and its routes are primarily ones that can be used to commute to/from downtown and not to help people get around town.

Tim reported that he posted the concepts memorandum document on the NAC website.

Rena Getz commented that Area Council have a significant role to play as they can act in an advisory role and reflect community input, getting into the details that affect our respective areas. She pointed out that the process will move quickly given that ZAP has taken straw votes and their next activity will be mapping. Peter Bruce asked her about the view of the Waban Area Council on resident surveys. Both he and Councilor Wright noted that commuter rail use is about ½ what it was in baseline 2018 and that service has been cut down. It was also noted by Councilor Lucas that Mark Development reported that only \$3,500 of the \$300,000 for free T passes for residents of the 141-unit Trio apartments provided in the Board Order (i.e., 1.5%) has been spent through June 2022 and that Mark Development returned to the City Council and the Land Use committee approved the request to divert about ½ of the amount to NewMo with the balance continuing to be set aside for T passes. He also noted that the complex has 1.5 parking stalls/unit underground with a current rate of .85 or .9 cars/unit. He and Councilor Wright noted that both Trio and 28 Austin are functionally 100% occupied, after allowing for normal turnover.

Councilor Wright noted that zoning maps are to be provided in the autumn and that the MBTA Communities Act rules are still pending until summer's end. She also reported that ZAP's plan is to have the zoning presented to the City Council for a vote in December.

Martina suggested joint meeting of the 4 Area Councils to address the village centers zoning framework. Carolyn suggested that Area Councils ask the City Council not to approve developer requests for parcel rezoning and special permits in the village centers because those projects could have the effect of dictating the character and context of the village centers while the process of developing new zoning for village centers is ongoing.

Martina moved, Aline seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To have the 4 Area Councils meet jointly to discuss village center zoning and the actions Area Councils can take.

Carolyn moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To ask the City Council not to approve zonings changes or special permits in village centers until completion of the village centers zoning process.

Rena noted that the Area Council presidents and representatives from each of the Area Councils are on the CENs, are aware of what is going on and that their role is to disseminate information and provide feedback to the City Council in about 6 weeks. Rena and Jennifer will reach out to invite the other Area Councils to meet.

4. Village Day Update

Martina reported that Village Day booths are sold out and there is a waiting list. Many sponsors are lined up and over \$18,000 has been raised. The Masons have undertaken to sponsor the roaming train and lots of entertainment is being lined up. Posters with sponsor's names will start appearing soon. Sponsors include

the following banks: Village Bank (the largest sponsor of the event), Brookline Bank and Rockland Bank. Nancy added face painters and tee shirts have been lined up. Carolyn suggested asking whether the Shriner's Motor Patrol might participate in this or future Village Day events. Kudos were given to the working group team for the hard and successful work they have been doing.

5. Other Business

Jennifer recused herself and Martina took over. She noted that the more recent plans for NewCAL were presented and ARPA funds will be used to purchase the property behind the Senior Center on Highland Street, subject to life estate for the current occupant, in a "friendly eminent domain" proceeding for a price of ~\$1.5M. The pending litigation challenging the NewCAL proposal at the Senior Center site is based in part on the parkland protection provision of the Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution. Martina noted the hostile response toward, and lack of respect for, people who object to the building and the demolition of an historic building and loss of a park. She said that opposition to this NewCAL proposal should not be equated with opposing Senior Center renewal. Peter Bruce agreed that demonization has been taking place and Aline noted the need to improve the level of public discourse. Carolyn asked about the law suit's timeline and whether a stay was part of the suit, but Martina did not know. Councilor Lucas reported that the Finance Committee will meet on August 1st and will vote on the proposed \$19.5M funding.

6. Administrative Issues

a. Approval of May and June meeting minutes

The draft minutes of the May 2022 meeting having been circulated for review prior to the meeting, Martina moved, Tim seconded, and it was unanimous:

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the May 2022 NAC meeting.

Action on the June 2022 meeting was deferred until the next meeting to allow time to review a draft of those minutes.

7. Adjournment

At approximately 9:02 PM, Carolyn moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay

Secretary