

## **Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Annual Report for 2023**

Area Council Members in 2023: Barbara Darnell, Robert Fizek, Jeremy Freudberg, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Larry Rosenberg, Amy Wayne, and Rakashi Chand (joining in March)

Ex-officio City Councilors: Bill Humphrey, Brenda Noel, Holly Ryan

During 2023, the NHNAC met on the first Thursday of each month. Meeting agendas were posted on the City of Newton's electronic posting board. Area Council meetings were held at the Brigham House, 20 Hartford Street in Newton Highlands. All of the meetings were also held virtually using the Zoom platform.

Minutes of each meeting are available on the City of Newton website under the link for the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council.

Financial Report: The NHNAC has an account at Village Bank in Newton. The balance at the beginning of the year was \$15,465.44 and the balance at the end of the year was \$17,078.60.

January:

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell presided over the election of Area Council officers. The officers for the upcoming year are: Jeremy Freudberg (President), Nathaniel Lichtin (Vice President), Groot Gregory (Treasurer), and Srdjan Nedeljkovic (Secretary). It was announced that the Soup Social will be held at the Hyde Center on January 28. Area Councilor Lichtin reported that the MBTA is proceeding with station accessibility improvements at the Newton Highlands MBTA station, with the project scheduled for completion in 2025. The boundaries of the project have been adjusted so that they fall outside of Historical Commission oversight. A discussion ensued regarding Area Council goals for 2023, with a consensus that the Area Council should work to increase community involvement and engagement. The topic of a new pedestrian bridge across the Charles River was discussed. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic has proposed that a new pedestrian bridge should be built between the Wellesley Office Park and Larkspur Road in Waban, which would provide access for the new development in Wellesley to the Waban MBTA station. The Newton Highlands Village Enhancement project was discussed. The Area Council supports undergrounding of utilities to be part of this project. Additional parking permits have been approved for the Village to accommodate parking for the temporary Senior Center headquarters in Newton Highlands. A discussion ensued regarding Zoning and planning. Concerns were expressed about parking, massing of buildings, and building heights. Architect Marc Hershman gave a presentation about what makes a village appealing. Concerns about historical preservation were expressed.

February:

Ms. Rakashi Chand expressed interest in joining the Area Council to fill a vacant position. Ms. Sandra Davidow also expressed interest in joining the Area Council. Area Council President Freudberg invited both candidates to attend the March meeting, at which time the Area Council will hold a vote to fill the position. Area Councilor Robert Fizek gave an update regarding the Levingston Cove project, expressing concerns about the scale of the design. Area Council members asked for more community input to be considered when the “left bank” of the Crystal Lake Park is being designed. A discussion ensued regarding the zoning initiative. Carolyn Gabbay and Jennifer Bentley from the Newtonville Area Council gave a presentation showing the potential effects of buildout on shadows and trees in village centers. Concerns were expressed about scale, massing, and lack of historical preservation. Area Councilor Robert Fizek reported that a letter was sent to the City regarding undergrounding of utilities in Newton Highlands. Reports were presented about the successful Soup Social that took place in January. It was reported that Parking Permits for the village center for 2023 were not yet available.

#### March:

Luis Demorizi from the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department gave an update regarding the Levingston Cove project. He reported that the “left bank” project is currently on hold. A discussion ensued regarding the new fishing deck and its impact. The Area Council discussed the pending override ballot question. Area Councilor Lichtin reported facts about the proposed override in terms of its impact on residents and how the new funds may be spent. A discussion ensued regarding the general override question and the debt exclusion override, both of which were to be voted on by residents. Area Council President Freudberg presented information about a proposed repeal of the city’s winter parking ban and noted that most of the feedback received about this was in favor of a repeal. It was reported that the current owner of the 1149-1151 Walnut Street site was looking to sell the property, but that the special permit for building a new apartment building on the site would be transferred to the new owner with a 2-year extension. An update was provided regarding Village Day preparations. The Area Council voted to appoint Rakashi Chand to the Area Council. Ms. Davidow withdrew her candidacy. Further discussion ensued regarding zoning redesign, noting that new ideas were presented as part of a Version 2.0 discussion. Images were shown of potential impacts of buildout allowed by the new zoning, as well as a discussion about building heights and parking requirements. Area Councilor Darnell noted that there were still issues with obtaining parking permits for the village center. Area Council President Freudberg reported on a proposal to construct 400 apartments on Charlemont Street in Newton Upper Falls as part of a 40B project. An update was provided regarding rehabilitation and replacement of the Christina Street pedestrian bridge.

#### April:

It was reported that the property at 1149-1151 Walnut Street has been transferred to a new owner, who will be proceeding with the project to construct an apartment building as approved by special permit. The Area Council approved sending a letter to Parks and Recreation asking for more public involvement for Crystal Lake planning. Village Day planning was discussed, as were future outreach efforts by the Area Council. A discussion ensued about zoning redesign, including new updates regarding allowances for increased heights if more affordable units are included. The MBTA Communities Act was discussed. Lisa Monahan and Kathy Pillsbury gave a presentation

regarding parking issues and a financial analysis of the new zoning proposal. It was noted that a public meeting will be held by the DPW in May to discuss the Village Enhancement project. A discussion ensued regarding parking and parking permits for the Newton Highlands village center.

May:

Brief updates were made regarding a Swap Shop at the Rumford Recycling Center. Area Council President Freudberg reported on the proposed development at Charlemont Street, with the Area Council voting to request modeling of projects like this one. A report was made about the proposal for a Newton Needham Community Way along the railroad right of way behind Needham Street. It was noted that the city is in the process of developing a Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan. An update was provided regarding the Levingston Cove project, which included a discussion regarding public access to the lake. Concern was expressed about the placement of boulders at the lake's edge, and how these boulders may serve to exclude people from accessing the lake. A separate discussion ensued regarding music and barbecuing at the lake. Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory provided information about Village Day planning. It was noted that DPW will be having a meeting to discuss the Village Enhancement project. The impact of outdoor dining on sidewalks was discussed. Further discussion took place regarding zoning redesign, with maps presented of various neighborhoods within Newton Highlands.

June:

Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory gave an update regarding Village Day planning. New T-shirts will be purchased. Issues of set up and promotions were discussed. Regarding Crystal Lake, the Area Council agreed to send a letter to Mayor Fuller expressing concern about placement of boulders on the water's edge that may have an effect of excluding people from accessing the lake and also creating a safety hazard. A discussion took place regarding the new traffic signal at the Route 9 overpass over Centre Street. Area Council President Freudberg reported on the Village Enhancement Project meeting that took place in May. Scenarios were presented for making Lincoln Street more friendly to pedestrians using a shared street concept. Plans were also presented for Walnut Street, including a proposal to maintain most on street parking while creating a shared lane for traffic and bicycles. It was noted that an evaluation of undergrounding utilities was moving forward. The issue of outdoor dining in the village center was discussed as it affects the narrowing of Lincoln Street with barriers. A brief discussion ensued regarding zoning redesign and upcoming public meetings to discuss the matter.

July:

An update was provided regarding the 1114 Beacon Street project, which will be proceeding as a condominium development. The property at 1158 Beacon Street, which had previously been approved as a marijuana store, has been sold to the abutter. The Avalon apartment complex on Needham Street has been sold to Abacus Capital Group. A recap was given regarding Village Day, with a review of the income and expenses for the day. It was noted that B-fit 60 expressed interest in managing the road race next year. Village Day was well attending. A discussion ensued about advance planning for the next village day. The Village Enhancement project was discussed, with concern expressed over a proposal to shift travel lanes on Walnut Street and remove parking. A discussion ensued regarding zoning redesign, and it was noted that the

proposal will likely receive a positive vote by City Council in the fall. Further discussion took place regarding how the zoning redesign proposal will accommodate residential units that are required for Newton to be compliant with the MBTA Communities Act. A summary was given about the meeting that Area Councilor had with Mayor Fuller to express concern about access at Crystal Lake. Further concerns were expressed over outdoor dining and street obstruction at the site of the Buttonwood Restaurant on Lincoln Street.

#### August:

It was noted that nomination papers for Area Council are available. Area Councilors discussed planning regarding the Ward 6 Councilor Preliminary debates. The Area Councils will also hold debates for the contested City Council seats later in the fall. Area Council President Freudberg reported that there was no timeline yet for the reopening of Levingston Cove. It was reported that temporary fencing would be used for 2 years to protect the newly planted vegetation. A discussion ensued regarding zoning redesign and an analysis done by City Councilors Wright and Oliver regarding potential build-out under the new zoning. Some alternate proposals were discussed regarding how the proposed zoning could be amended to accommodate the number of units required by the MBTA Communities Act while reducing the impact of the zoning proposal on building heights and lot sizes in village centers. Area Councilors discussed issues with the google group e-mail list and whether a regular Area Council newsletter should be developed.

#### September:

A report was provided about the recently hosted debate for Ward 2 and Ward 6 city council seats. Concern was expressed regarding traffic operations at the new Winchester and Centre Street intersection at Route 9. It was noted that there are substantial delays due to the new traffic signals. An update was provided regarding the Levingston Cove project, as the opening has been delayed due to supply issues for the railings. A discussion ensued regarding safety concerns on Lincoln Street. Zoning redesign was discussed, including amendments that have been included in a new Version 3. It was noted that there is still lack of clarity on the overall potential buildout that would be necessary to comply with the MBTA Community Act. It was noted that the Strong block in Waban had been granted Landmark status.

#### October:

Area Council President Freudberg reported that Area Council debates for the Newton general election will take place in October. Each of the area councils will contribute towards sponsoring the debates. It was reported that the 1149-1151 Walnut Street project team was requesting removal of two street trees on Walnut Street abutting the property. Area Council members were opposed to this tree removal. An update was provided regarding the Levingston Cove project and further discussion ensued regarding safety concerns due to the placement of boulders at the water's edge. There is no date yet for opening of the park, as there remain supply issues to complete the project. A discussion ensued about the zoning redesign proposal. Mr. Yerardi from Nonantum expressed some of the concerns that the business community in Nonantum has had about the zoning proposal. Further discussion ensued about potential massing of buildings. It was noted that there has been little input from business owners in

Newton Highlands regarding the zoning proposal. A discussion was held about how to disseminate information about the proposal. The Area Council agreed to develop a postcard to send to residents and business owners about the proposal, with the text of the postcard to be determined. The Area Council voted to contribute \$1000 towards beautification efforts at the Brigham House. Architect Marc Hershman presented images of changes in the zoning maps related to the zoning proposal. Area Council President Freudberg noted that the City Clerk had expressed concerns about staffing of the polls for the upcoming elections and that the Area Councils are expected to provide poll workers.

#### November:

It was noted that poll workers are needed to staff the upcoming Area Council elections. A discussion ensued regarding safety concerns on Lincoln Street. There are issues with speeding, traffic congestions, and roadway obstructions due to outdoor dining. A request was made to the Police Department to install a speeding feedback sign. An update was provided about the Levingston Cove project, but no timeline for opening of the park was provided. A discussion ensued about the Village Enhancement project following a meeting that was held by the DPW in October. Plans for Lincoln Street and Walnut Street were discussed. Concerns were voiced about potential changes in the Walnut Street and Floral Street intersection that would block free flow of traffic. Parking supply in the village was discussed and there was consensus that parking availability is important. The Area Council supports a phased approach in which the city would begin with the Lincoln Street part of the project before moving ahead with the Walnut Street portion, for which there seems to be less consensus. A discussion was held about zoning redesign. The Area Council supports changing the plans for the Newton Highlands village center to eliminate the VC3 zoning and replace it with VC2 zoning. Regarding splitting approval of MBTA Communities Act zoning and village center zoning, the motion failed to pass.

#### December:

The Area Council voted to authorize expenditures for poll workers for the recent elections. A discussion ensued about how to improve the Area Council election process and inform residents about the elections. Further discussion took place regarding poor traffic operations at the Winchester Street and Centre Street intersection with Route 9. It was reported that the new Levingston Cove project has been completed and that the park opened on November 15 and that there was a good turnout for the opening ceremony. Regarding zoning redesign, the City Council has passed a comprehensive package for Village Center rezoning. Parcels on Lincoln Street will be VC2 and parcels on Walnut Street will be VC3. It was noted that new amendments to the approved zoning may be possible in the future, and how the approved zoning is compliant with the MBTA Communities Act. It was noted that following the recent elections, there will be two openings for Area Council seats in the next term.

#### Submitted by:

Srdjan S. Nedeljkovic  
Secretary, Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council  
March 7, 2024