

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, January 2, 2020

Area Council members attending:

Bruce Blakely, Bob Burke, Carol Clark (absent), Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Bill Roesner (absent), Amy Wayne

Ex Officio:

City Councilor Bill Humphrey, City Councilor Holly Ryan.

Also joining the meeting were City Councilors Pam Wright, Julia Malakie, and Alicia Bowman and Waban Area Council Vice President Rena Getz

Guests:

Carol Carroll, John Rice, Janice Bourque, Robert Fizek, John Pelletier, Pam Gilman, Mark Shuman, Sonya Mcknight, Barbara Smiley, and others

Meeting called to order at 7:30 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. At the start of the meeting, Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin announced that the meeting will be audio-taped.

Caucus to elect Area Council officers

Area Council member Bob Burke presided the election of the Newton Highlands Area Council officers for the upcoming year. There were 7 Area Council members present who participated in the voting. Barbara Darnell nominated Nathaniel Lichtin to continue as President. Other Area Councilors then nominated Barbara Darnell to be Vice President, Groot Gregory to be Treasurer, and Srdjan Nedeljkovic to be Secretary. For each candidate, a vote was taken amongst the Area Councilors and the vote was 7:0 to elect each Area Councilor for their nominated positions. The Area Council swearing in ceremony will be taking place at the War Memorial at City Hall on Wednesday, January 8th at 6 pm.

Development project at 1149-1151 Walnut Street

A proposal is being put forth to develop the two commercial parcels at 1149 and 1151 Walnut Street into a mixed-use project consisting of 26 apartments and about 1500 square feet of retail space. Representing the developer was Alan Schlesinger from the Schlesinger & Buchbinder law practice located on Walnut Street in Newton Highlands. Also present from the law office was attorney Adam Schecter. From the development team from Talanian Realty Boston, Chris Talanian along with architect Michael Liu and several other team members were present. Mr. Liu is also a resident of Newton Highlands, residing on Walnut Street.

Prior to discussion of the proposed development, Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic presented a summary of several planning exercises conducted by the Newton Highlands Area Council over the past several years, including work done with the Waban Area Council as part of a Future Planning project in 2016. The presentation will be made available on the Newton Highlands Area Council website within the next few days. The site of the proposed development, which consists of two small buildings that have been used by several businesses over the years, has been considered as a potential target for new development. It currently has 13 parking spaces in the front setback along Walnut Street and 13 parking spaces in the rear. The buildings have about 5000 square feet of commercial space. The visioning exercise considered new development on the parcel that could consist of a mixed-use building with parking in the rear. Srdjan Nedeljkovic expressed the desire of many in the community that any new development in the village center should be considerate of the historical architecture and design of the nearby buildings and that the development should reflect a certain excellence and quality in design. The results of a parking analysis were also presented, indicating parking utilization and supply in Newton Highlands.

Mr. Schlesinger then presented an overview of the proposed project at 1149-1151 Walnut Street, starting from a perspective drawing looking at the site from Walnut Street going southbound towards the village center. Currently, the site includes the Skin Innovations Spa, and is adjacent to Christian Science Church property to the north. Previously, there was an antique store and a Texaco gas station on this site. There is a mansard Victorian building between this site and the Stevens building that is historically contextual and that will remain. But the other buildings are not providing any historical enhancement in entering the Newton Highlands village. There are institutional uses on each side of the business district. Mr. Schlesinger noted that based on its current uses, the site represented a development opportunity.

Michael Liu, a local architect, then gave a presentation on the proposed building. The new building will be 4 stories high and consist of 26 units of housing with parking behind the building and at ground level under the housing. Mr. Liu provided a contextual overview of the property site. As a resident of Newton Highlands himself, he noted that everyone is familiar with the building site being next to the Stevens building. He reviewed the footprint of the proposed building on a property map. On one side of the parcels, there is the Stevens building, a prominent building from the era of HH Richardson in the late 1800s which is an imposing and important architectural structure. Mr. Liu noted that the commercial buildings on Lincoln Street represent a number of different architectural styles. Some have mansard roofs and some are flat buildings with a variety of heights and forms. As one moves up Walnut Street away from Lincoln Street, however, there are different types of building forms. Therefore, it is hoped that the design of the proposed building will be considered a transitional design as it transitions from the commercial buildings on Lincoln Street to the institutional and residential structures on Walnut Street.

Mr. Liu presented the schematic design of the proposed development as it stands today. The development will adhere to city guidelines for at least 60% glass on the ground floor, and will include about 1500 square feet of retail space on the first floor. Behind the retail space, there will be access to parking that will be placed at ground level behind and underneath the building. Above the parking spaces will be the 26 apartments. Overall, there will be 25 parking spaces to the rear and underneath the residential space. The front section of the building will be a retail space and an entryway to the apartments. The parking spaces will be pushed as far back on the

site as possible. Between the building and the street, the sidewalk space will be quite wide, widening out to about 20 feet. The space could be used for a café-style restaurant with outdoor seating. The finalized architectural plans intend to further break up the façade to have separate design elements. Closer to Stevens building, a portion of the new development will have a mansard roof. At the base of the new building, there will be entrances to the retail store and the residential units. The roof will transition to a gable form at the side of the building near the Christian Science Church property. Overall, the building will have about 25,000 SF of space with 26 units, 25 parking spaces, 1500 square feet of retail space, and an overall FAR of 2.0.

The plans show that the access driveway will come under the building and continue behind the retail, at grade behind it. The proposed plans for the site would be more reflective of zoning for the Mixed Use BU-4 district. The project would need to be rezoned into this district. One question is about the amount of parking that is most appropriate to include on the site? The current zoning ordinance requires 2 spaces per unit. However, in terms of planning, the number of parking spaces needed for a 2020 lifestyle directly across from the T stop may be a smaller number. This will be a transit-oriented development for people who will likely use the Green line. How much parking is appropriate? The development is requesting an allowance for 1 parking space per unit. Also, the project may be able to pick up a parking space or two on the street by closing a curb cut. Overall, the project will fill in the building gap on this section of Walnut Street near the village center.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked for a description of the apartments. The development team responded to say that there will be 12 2-bedroom units and 12 1-bedroom units, with 2 studio units. These will be smaller units, ranging from 400 SF for a studio to 650 SF for one bedroom to 1000 SF for a 2-bedroom unit. There will be 1500 SF commercial space that will not have dedicated on-site parking. The developer is not requesting a density bonus. In the business use zone 4 district, the zoning allows for this amount of density. Of the 26 units, 4 units will be for low income tenants at 80% area median income level and there will be 1 workforce unit at the 110% area median income level under ordinance. The absolute height of the building will be 49 feet, within a foot of the Stevens building.

The small building at 1153-1159 Walnut Street will remain in place. There are no plans to remove the small mansard building. Also, it would be difficult to obtain a permit to construct a building with larger dimensions. The way the floor plans are laid out for the new development, based on the design and location of the apartment units, there would be no feasible way of expanding the development into the 1153-1159 parcel, so demolition of that property is not likely. A discussion ensued regarding the sort of sustainability measures that will be implemented in the design and construction of the project. The City of Newton has recently implemented a sustainability ordinance. The ordinance requires significant compliance with environmental standards. Regarding the use of electric fixtures, no decisions have been made yet. Electric-only power may not be mandated for the commercial spaces, and not for hot water systems. Standards are now in flux, so this will be evolving.

Mr. Schlesinger pointed out how the development team is presenting very early renderings of the proposed project. The architectural team is working on the massing of the building structures. The first presentation was intended to show how the buildings interact with the streetscape. The

developer will hold the height of the new development to the height of the Stevens building. The final plans should reflect the gables as well as the materials and how the fenestration gets done. A question was asked about the impact of shadows on buildings across the street, and it is not likely that shadows will extend across the street to affect any properties.

Regarding undergrounding of utilities, there is a large set of wires going to the site that will be undergrounded. There is one pole in front of the site on Walnut Street, which would cost \$250K to underground and this would be prohibitive to do.

There will be a small alley between the mansard house at 1153 Walnut Street and the new development with a 4-foot gap. This may be considered for a footpath to access the rear of the property, but plans will be finalized in the future.

Janice Bourque asked if underground parking was considered. The architect noted that to go 10 feet down in depth, 75 feet of ramp is needed and a large amount of property would be consumed by the ramp. Underground is very costly and could run about \$75,000 per space. With the amount of parking currently being planned only for residents, visitors will need to park on the street. A discussion ensued on the amount of parking needed when public transit is located near a development with small units. Mr. Schlesinger commented that the project will need to develop a transportation demand management plan and a visitor parking plan. It was reiterated that the project may allow for additional on street spaces on Walnut Street when the curb cuts to the site are consolidated. Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked if there will be any incentive for residents to take public transportation, such as reduced rates for MBTA passes or free MBTA passes for residents or employees who work at the site. Mr. Schlesinger noted that this item will certainly be brought up by City Council for consideration. Bruce Blakely asked if the existing street trees on Walnut Street will be preserved. The developer stated that the current plan is to keep the trees intact.

A question ensued about providing bicycle parking. The parking ordinance requires a certain number of spaces within the site for bicycle parking spaces. The development intends to have electric charging stations for cars. City Councilor Alicia Bowman asked that consideration is made for visitor bike parking, and also covered bike parking for the residents. It was noted that the MBTA will be putting covered bike parking on its property across the street. Hyde Community Center Director John Rice noted that the city's municipal lot on Hartford Street has permitted parking overnight, except during snow emergencies. The cost of a permit is about \$25 per year.

Robert Fizek, an architect, asked about design elements of the building such as holding the edge, and regarding the massing. Mr. Fizek suggested that massing may be relieved by setting some units back on upper floors. To provide architectural consideration, it may be appropriate to create some offset space within the design. John Pelletier also asked about access to parking in the rear of the development from Lincoln Street. The development team pointed out how accessing the site from Lincoln Street would be a great challenge as this access route is only an 8-foot right of way.

Area Councilor Bob Burke reiterated that many buildings on Lincoln Street are on the National Register of Historic Places. It would be highly desirable to see preservation of the village center.

Carol Carroll stated that in the shown renderings, the building is gloomy and needs further architectural details. Area Councilor Groot Gregory stated that he believes that adding another 26 residential units in the village center will improve vitality. The development team reiterated that all of the units in the development will be rentals. There will be a plan to separate the parking charges from the rental costs, making them debundled to incentivize not having a car. The cost of parking will be priced to control demand. Srdjan Nedeljkovic once again asked to include free transit passes for the residents.

Janice Bourque encouraged the development team to enhancing foliage and landscape elements, and to provide plantings to continue the wrap around to beautify the village center around from Lincoln Street. The development team responded that subsequent plans will show a landscape aspect and hardscape aspect to the project. Mr. Schlesinger noted that we may wish to consider something to memorialize the proposed O'Hara Square at the corner of Lincoln Street and Walnut Street. The proposed sidewalk in front of the development will be wide enough to define an area for seating and pedestrians. Ordinance allows restaurant seating on public sidewalks. Here, the sidewalk will be wide enough.

City Councilor Julia Malakie asked how many businesses will be located on site? There will be only one business, 1500 SF. The developer plans to submit a Special Permit application during the spring in order for city council to consider the proposal over the summer and fall. It is anticipated it will take about 14 months to build. Construction management plans will include police control, fire watches, truck routes, and dust control will be established.

Area Council president Nathaniel Lichtin invited the developer's team to return to a future Area Council meeting when plans with greater architectural detail are ready. Members of the Area Council expressed appreciation to the developer for bringing forward the proposal relatively early in the planning stages.

After the conclusion of the development presentation and community discussion, a brief presentation of bicycle accommodations on Walnut Street was made by John Pelletier, from the city's Transportation Advisory Group and Bike Newton. John noted that the area at the new development is adequate to support a dedicated, protected bicycle lane that could be placed between the pedestrian sidewalk and the curb line adjacent to parked cars. Having a protected bicycle lane would improve safety for bicyclists along Walnut Street. John pointed out that there are plans for further improvements in bicycle accommodations when Walnut Street undergoes reconstruction in the future.

A discussion then ensued about the impact of various bus routes and bus stops in this general location, especially as the MBTA has been suspending Green line service as part of its track modernization project, which is expected to continue into 2020 after a brief winter pause. Various private shuttles are also parking and idling in the general vicinity of the Newton Highlands MBTA station, which will be subject to construction when the accessibility project is implemented.

Local and City Updates:

Demolition Delay and Landmarking Ordinance:

Carol Carroll presented information about the Demolition Delay ordinance discussed the issue of determining Landmark status of the Stevens building in the Village Center. Should there be a petition to declare the Stevens building with a Landmark status? Declaring the Stevens building a historical Landmark would be a way to proactively protect the building against demolition. Other issues that were discussed included whether decisions about historical preservation should be made by staff members in the planning department or by members of the Historical Commission.

Development at 956 Walnut Street:

Council President Lichtin gave an update about the 956 Walnut Street project. The proposed development was approved at a full City Council vote in December.

Christina Street Pedestrian Bridge:

No specific updates were offered regarding the Christina Street pedestrian bridge issue. City Councilor Alicia Bowman pointed out that the city is looking at ways to obtain grant funding to work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to make improvements that would allow better access to the bridge and trail system along the Charles River. City Councilor Bill Humphrey is also supportive of moving this project forward.

Area Council Swearing In Ceremony:

Nathaniel Lichtin noted that the Area Council swearing in ceremony will be held at City Hall on Wednesday afternoon, January 8 at 6 pm.

Soup Social:

John Rice announced that the Newton Highlands Soup Social will be held at the Hyde Center on Saturday, February 8th at 6 pm. John asked for volunteers to help set up and bring the soups from various donating restaurants.

Hope Fountain Update:

John Rice acknowledged the work done by Robert Fizek and John Osbourne in getting water provided to the Hope Fountain last summer. John is continuing to look for volunteers to help manage the fountain. After a brief discussion, Robert Fizek agreed to help manage and maintain the fountain during the upcoming year.

John noted that he had brought up the issue of running a new water line to the fountain with Newton Parks and Recreation department. The City indicated that it would prefer to continue to pump in water from a utility truck, rather than dig up the street to place a water line. Robert Fizek suggested that we may be able to ask for a tap at the hydrant to connect to a hose to fill the fountain.

Groot Gregory indicated that the Area Council would like to offer some financial support for maintaining the fountain. Robert noted that the fountain will need a new pump.

John Rice also pointed out the need to have a discussion about the Officer English Garden and who will be maintaining this small area of parkland. Plans are moving forward to designate the intersection of Lincoln Street and Walnut Street as John O'Hara Square, with a dedication ceremony during the upcoming Village Day. The O'Hara's will contribute a sign and may be willing to help support maintaining the Officer English Garden.

Wellesley Office Park Proposal:

The proposal to demolish parts of an office park in Wellesley that is just off of Route 9 westbound and to create a large mixed-use development on this parcel will be discussed at the January 9th meeting of the Waban Area Council. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that the project would be improved if a pedestrian and bicycle bridge were build across the Charles River between the project and Quinobequin Road, specifically where it intersects with Lakespur Road.

Waban Center Development Proposal:

Waban Area Council Vice President Rena Getz noted that a development proposal for 24 residential units in Waban Center was recently approved and that the project will include underground parking.

Administrative Items:

Approval of the December Minutes: A motion was made to approve the December minutes. The minutes were approved with no revisions 6:0 with three Area Council member sabsent.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer's Report was presented to Area Council members by Groot Gregory. No transactions have been recorded since the prior month other than an administrative exchange of funds with the Hyde Center. Groot will be working on an annual budget to be presented at a future meeting.

Annual Report: Srdjan Nedeljkovic noted that he will work on submitting an Annual Report of Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council activities before the next meeting.

New Business: No additional New Business was discussed.

Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 PM.