

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, July 11, 2019

Area Council members attending:

Bruce Blakely, Bob Burke, Carol Clark (not present), Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Bill Roesner (not present), Amy Wayne

Ex Officio:

City Councilor John Rice

Guests:

Bill Humphrey (start of meeting), Holly Ryan (start of meeting), Alan Noguee

Meeting called to order at 7:34 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. This was an extemporaneous meeting of the Area Council due to the July 4th holiday.

NewCAL site selection process, Cold Spring Park, and Crystal Lake

The City of Newton is engaging in a process to site a Newton “Center for Active Living” to meet the needs of senior citizens and other members of the community. One of the sites being considered for this 2.5-acre project is within the borders of Cold Spring Park. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic spoke about his concern about using parkland to construct a building and parking lot. He believes that we should preserve and enhance our existing parkland and open space, while improving our existing recreational facilities. For example, the bathhouse at Crystal Lake needs significant updating, renovation and most likely replacement.

Srdjan believes that rather than building a \$16 million, 38,000 SF building on parkland and open space, smaller amounts of funds can be used to upgrade and modernize existing facilities. For example, a design-build competition could be held for a new Crystal Lake bathhouse, capping the cost at several million dollars. The bathhouse and park at Crystal Lake could be made a full season facility that includes space for small-scale arts and cultural events as well as having a modest scaled wellness facility to enhance health and fitness. The new Crystal Lake facility would include programs for all ages, including senior citizens and everyone else.

Alan Noguee from Friends of Cold Spring Park, spoke about the impact of climate change and the loss of diversity of species. He noted that we need to preserve our green spaces to maintain ecological diversity. Cold Spring Park is one of the most diverse habitats we have in the area. It is already functioning as a multigenerational gathering center. The trail in the park is used by 150-225 people per day, including people of all age groups, from toddlers to seniors. We know that parks are critical to good health. People who live near parks and walk in parks tend to be healthier than those who do not. Alan said that we cannot afford to lose more green space in Cold Spring

park or in any of our parks. He is concerned that the site selection list has been whittled down to 24 places, and 19 of them are parks. The ranking system for site selection seems to be pointing to Cold Spring park as a possible site for the NewCAL. The park is in a central location and offers room for building and expansion. Many members of Friends of Cold Spring Park are concerned with this.

Alan provided thoughts on other ways we could use funds at Cold Spring Park if they were not spent on NewCAL. We need to have the trail around the park resurfaced with stone dust and wooden walkways. We need to improve the signage in Cold Spring Park, put up some educational material, and create a long-term management plan to deal with invasive species. We could restore the small meadow near Beaconwood, which could become a beautiful native meadow. People who use the dog park have been begging for water to be restored to the dog park. With a million dollars, we could build a real boardwalk through the swamp, a wetland trail that could become a great educational resource. We could also work with the Newton Cemetery to create a trail from Bullough's pond through Cold Spring Park to the Aqueduct. Having playing fields is great, but the trails in Cold Spring Park are used by more people of all ages from toddlers to seniors. Trails are the most demanded resource in parks in the Commonwealth, but they have been sadly neglected.

Holly Ryan, running for Councilor Lappin's seat, asked if the money from the Paramount film crew is being used to support the park. Alan noted that this source of funding will allow for half of one of the trails in the park to be constructed. A group of doctors from Newton Wellesley Hospital will be helping construct the trail in the Fall. There will be a Wellness Day planned in the Park.

A motion was made to draft a letter to oppose selection of Cold Spring Park as the site of a NewCAL center. Alan and Srdjan agreed to write a letter to this effect so that a draft of the letter is available at the next Area Council meeting for public review and comment.

Regarding the NewCAL facility having a gymnasium, Bruce Blakely asked how many gymnasiums does the City own, in addition to those at the many schools? John Rice noted that additional gymnasiums were available at the Hamilton Community Center and Emerson Community Center. Also, the list of city recreation facilities includes the Hut in Newton Center. The Armory building has large hall, which has been used as a gymnasium. Also there are existing facilities at Pellegrini, the YMCA, and the Jewish Community Center.

Area councilor Bob Burke suggested that we need to focus on getting renovations done at the existing Newtonville Senior Center.

City Councilor John Rice noted that he sits on the Building Committee for the Senior Center. The group looked at 20 Senior Centers around the state. The demand for senior services will be higher in the near future. Many communities have newer buildings with more space and more activities. The existing Senior Center building is historic and cannot be easily changed. The Senior Services department is advocating to have a central location for everyone to come together. They are concerned about efficiency of scale. The City wants a building that is open 7 days per week.

Area Councilor Bob Burke pointed out there are different ages of seniors, and that some older people just want a place to sit and talk. They may not want a gymnasium.

John Rice pointed out that the NewCAL center will be considered a recreational space both indoors and outdoors. There have been 40 meetings thus far where people have already provided feedback. Regarding site selection, in addition to Cold Spring Park, other areas that are nearby to Newton Highlands include Weeks Field and Braceland playground. The Northland property has also been considered as a possible site.

Nathaniel will add Friends of Cold Spring Park as an affiliated organization with the Area Council.

Village Day summary:

Barbara Darnell thanked Amy Wayne for all of her support and effort in organizing and running Village Day. Everyone agreed that Village Day was well attended and a large success. Revenues were up. Booth sales were up by \$1000 and the Road Race was up by \$2000 compared to last year. We had 20 runners come from Fannie Mae. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell suggested that the Area Council may want to raise the booth prices next year. We may want to charge \$100 for a booth next year. We did not raise the prices for this year. Sponsorships were up a bit as well. Not all funds have yet been deposited.

A number of issues related to this year's Village Day were discussed. Barbara would like to change the booth registration form to understand what is being sold at Village Day. This would help with organizing locations for each vendor. The Area Council is aware that there was a grilled food vendor who was popular and that his presence at Village Day may have reduced sales for village restaurants. The jazz music at the end of Lincoln Street was well attended. Area councilor Amy Wayne suggested that the jazz musicians rotate with the main bands under the main tent at Hartford Street. The Greek restaurant may play music at their site.

For planning Village Day for next year, it may be worthwhile to have additional organizational meetings. A draft timeline has been placed on the Area Council website to help start organizing Village Day for next year. Last year, the Area Council provided gift certificates to Steve Feinstein, Chris Pitts, and Maureen Oates (\$50) in appreciation for their support for Village Day. Barbara made a motion to provide gift certificates for \$50 from O'Hara's to these individuals once again. The Area Council voted 7 yes, 0 no, no abstentions. Area Councilor Groot Gregory volunteered to go to O'Hara's to get the gift certificates. It was reiterated that most people felt that Village Day was a very good experience. Barbara and Amy suggested that it may be helpful to mark the booth locations a bit earlier, perhaps the night before. It was noted that Area Councilor Barbara Darnell had sent a message to thank the auxiliary police for their help with Village Day.

City Elections and Organizing Debates:

Every two years, the Area Councils have collaborated to host debates for candidates who are running for office. This year, the Newtonville Area Council is organizing the debates. They are looking for two members to join the organization committee. Area Councilors Barbara Darnell and Bob Burke volunteered to be our representatives. The debates will take place in Newton North High School in the Fall, both on October 20 and October 27. We will ask NewTV to videotape the event. There are 11 races for which candidates have pulled papers. The coordinating committee

from the Area Council will determine the budget for conducting these debates. Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin reviewed the contested races thus far. In Wards 5 and 6, there are races for Ward 6 ward councilor and Ward 5 ward councilor, as well as Ward 5 and Ward 6 at large councilors. Also, there are races in Ward 8 and there are school committee races in Ward 5 and Ward 6. The Newtonville Area Council will organize 2 days of debates for the 11 contested races: ward councilors for 5 races and at-large and school committee for 6 races.

Area Councilor Groot Gregory suggested that our Newton Highlands Area Council host a separate debate for the candidates running for local races in Ward 5 and Ward 6. A discussion ensued if this should be a debate only for the ward councilors: Bill Humphrey, Kathy Winters, Rena Getz (Ward 5), and: Lisa Gordon and Brenda Noel (Ward 6). If we hosted debates for at-large council seats, the candidates who have pulled papers thus far are: Vicky Danberg, Greg Schwartz, and Alicia Bowman (Ward 5), and Deb Crossley, Andreae Downs, Paul Colletti, and Rena Getz (Ward 6). It was noted that there may need to be a preliminary election for ward councilor if there are 3 candidates running for the Ward 5 seat. Groot Gregory has budgeted \$400 for all debate events. We will look to do our local Ward 5 and Ward 6 debate on Sunday, October 6th at 7 pm at the Women's Club in Newton Highlands. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell stated that she will make the call to reserve this time and date at the Women's Club. Area Councilor Groot Gregory made a motion to allocate \$150 to support this event. The Area Council voted 7 in favor, 0 opposed.

Area Council Nomination Papers:

Nomination papers for Area Council will be available August 7 and need to be returned on no later than September 20th.

Parking and Transportation:

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that the filming of the motion picture "Defending Jacob" will be taking place in the village of Newton Highlands on July 15th. People will be able to get to businesses between the shooting of scenes. The Municipal Parking Lot will be shut down for the day. The Hyde Center is being rented for the day of the filming. There are about 200 people involved with the filming.

The MBTA is working to repair the train tracks at night between Newton Highlands and Kenmore Square. They are working in multiple locations each night. There are about 8 buses parked or awaiting passengers in Newton Highlands each night. At times it was noted that the buses are blocking Lincoln Street. Construction will continue from now until December. There are no updates regarding the Newton Highlands MBTA station accessibility project. There may be a community meeting in the Fall, but that is uncertain. It was noted that the holes on the MBTA bridge at Walnut Street have been repaired.

There have been complaints about parking near Crystal Lake, now that the summer season is in full swing. In addition, on Allerton Road there is cut-through traffic from Centre Street that is sometimes speeding down the street. Area Council President Lichtin said that he will invite Police Sergeant Lee to address this issue at our August meeting. Area Councilor Darnell noted that some

people would like to ban parking on Lake Avenue. A discussion ensued about seasonal parking bans, that that there are some areas near Crystal Lake where seasonal parking bans are in effect.

The new Northland transportation plans call for shuttles every 10 minutes from the Northland site to Newton Highlands. The shuttles will be open at no charge to users. There was concern about congestion of buses and vans in the Highlands. The next Land Use Committee meeting about Northland is on August 6th.

Development at 956 Walnut Street:

Council President Lichtin gave an update about the 956 Walnut Street project. At this time, the developer is reworking the plans with the neighbors. One of the by-right development parcels near this site has been cleared, demolishing the previously existing house there. In the new plans now being considered for the development, the new plans may show that the buildings on the site may be separated to 3 building sets, and there will likely still be underground parking

Aqueduct Issues:

City Councilor Downs wants to hold a meeting about establishing the right to public access to the Sudbury Aqueduct from the MBTA tracks in Newton Highlands to Route 9. There needs to be a public meeting and an application process in order to allow public access on this section. The meeting is planned for September 26th, a Thursday evening. Motion to support this process was made and passed 7 to 0.

Administrative Items:

Approval of the June Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the June minutes with some minor spelling corrections and revisions, and this was accepted 5:0, with abstentions from Area Councilors who were not present at the June meeting.

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer's Report was submitted to Area Council members by Groot Gregory. There is no further information than what was discussed previously under the Village Day discussion.

Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.