

# Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

## Meeting Minutes, October 3, 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 Councilors Brenda Noel and John Rice

### **Guests:**

Bill Humphrey (candidate for Ward 5 councilor), Kathy Winters (candidate for Ward 5 councilor), Lisa Gordon (candidate for Ward 6 councilor), David Berman, Sarah Kenney, Mildred Hutchinson, Carol Carroll, Larry Rosenberg, Karen Sherman, Mark Shooman, Amanda Theunissen

Meeting called to order at 7:35 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes.

### NewCAL proposal update (John Rice)

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. Councilor Rice has been one of the City Councilor representatives on the NewCal building committee. This process has been going on for 19-20 months. The working group reviewed possible sites for the center and started with 124 potential sites. The list was then narrowed to 24 sites, then 6 sites, and finally the group proposed locating the facility at the Albemarle playground. At a meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Commission determined that all other previously proposed sites should not be considered. The Parks and Recreation commission, which is appointed by mayor, has jurisdiction over what happens on parkland. There has been significant public feedback about the process. At end of the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting to discuss the 6 sites under consideration at the time, there was a vote that 5 of the sites should be withdrawn from consideration, but to allow further evaluation of the Albemarle site and to proceed with a feasibility study.

After the Albemarle site decision, a joint meeting was held of the City Council Programs and Services and Public Facilities committees. Members of the NewCal working group led by Jane Colino (Dept of Senior Services), Bob DeRubeis (Parks and Recreation), and Josh Morse (Public Buildings) made a presentation about the proposal. Afterwards, a public hearing took place at Day Middle School that was attended by a large gathering of people. The proposal was presented for a building on a 2 to 2.5 acre site that would include space for parking and building. The proposal would rebuild the Gath pool and turn hardscape at Albemarle into a new building site. When this proposal was presented to the community, there was a lot of opposition to this plan from the

neighbors. People voiced opinions that they did not want to lose the existing tennis courts and basketball courts. Councilor Rice noted that the Gath Pool is failing structurally and losing 16,000 gallons of water per day. The pool is in need of repair. At the start of each swim season, holes in the pool are patched before the season starts. Community members would like to see the pool replaced, but without a NewCal building on the site. At this time, the Albemarle site remains under consideration as a potential site.

After the community meeting at the Day school, the Mayor's office has proposed that the Newton Centre triangle be considered, and the Parks and Recreation Department has proposed that another city owned site is considered that is not parks and recreation land. At the Newton Centre triangle, the current parking lot has 120 spots. If a senior center is located there, an underground garage would need to be built to include the current number of spaces plus spaces for the new center. A multilevel building would be necessary. The underground parking would likely cost \$5 to \$10 million to construct.

Councilor Rice noted that many people have asked why the City isn't considering having senior center programming distributed at multiple sites. Jane Colino, the head of the Department of Senior Services, feels that programming cannot be accommodated at multiple sites. By creating one building, then programming can be provided more consistently. Councilor Rice noted that most other cities have only one central building as a Senior Center.

Srdjan Nedeljkovic expressed an opinion that this process was ill conceived from the beginning because the idea of a centralized senior center was not desired. Senior citizens and others certainly should have improved facilities and access to various programs, but many seniors would be glad to see existing decentralized facilities improved and maintained. Bill Blakely commented that the senior center may not need all of the space being considered, such as a gymnasium. Srdjan Nedeljkovic commented once more that the New Cal process was conducted "top down" and that many seniors want access and improvements at multiple sites over the city, like Crystal Lake and Cold Spring Park in Newton Highlands.

Lisa Gordon pointed out that many seniors she has spoken with have expressed opposition to a large, central facility. John noted that many Parks and Recreation buildings are already full and there is a need for more space. Amy Wayne noted that the city should consider using the gyms at the high schools and other schools to provide space to seniors. She also asked why can't we make Crystal Lake a senior friendly facility that provides year round programming. John Rice remarked that the current Senior Center facility is inadequate. Carol Carroll noted that the Senior Center provide recreational programs and social services, but that we may not need to bundle the social services with the recreation piece. We may not need to bundle a gym and swimming facility within the new senior center. John Rice reiterated that a central facility is needed to support staff 7 days a week and during evenings. Also, if the center had its own pool, seniors would not need to use pools at Boston College or at the High School. The idea is to put Senior Services and Recreation options in one place together. Karen Sherman asked about using the former Rashi School at the Aquinas site. John Rice noted that schools are being renovated and are moving and that Lincoln Eliot will be moving to Aquinas. This is a 6-acre site, but once a school is located there, inadequate space will remain for a Senior Center.

John Rice noted that the Natick Senior Center has a 10,000 SF gym. Seniors may want to have these kinds of services available, and the Parks and Recreation department would like to rent out space to basketball leagues. Mildred Hutchinson noted that the gym will be used in several different formats, and as a multipurpose room. It may be used as a meeting room or a yoga studio. If the gym is removed, then the space will need to be added elsewhere in the building to accommodate these purposes. John Rice noted that the schedule for future meetings about the NewCal process is on the NewCal website.

### Northland Proposal (Nathaniel Lichtin):

The Public hearing about the Northland project was closed at the last meeting and City Council will be deliberating. One of the discussion points is related to off site mitigation for transportation impacts. The current list of options of mitigation includes: extending the Greenway to Newton Highlands via Curtis Street. In order to do this, parts of the electrical substation facility may need to be moved. The path would then go to Winchester Street and then to Floral Street, ending in Newton Highlands. Another mitigation proposal involves extending the Greenway to Eliot Station via a path through the DPW yard and then via Francis Street, Margaret Road, and Suban Place. Another mitigation involves coordinating traffic signals at Winchester Street and Route 9 and Walnut Street. Another proposal involves enabling bus priority on Needham Street. Another proposal is to conduct a road safety audit for the Centre Street and Walnut Street intersection. Another options is to review traffic operations at the MBTA Newton Highlands station, including drop off and pick up for shuttle buses. Finally, the city plans to conduct a feasibility alternatives analysis for infrastructure improvements on Winchester Street, a possible Green line extension on the Greenway, the use of shuttle buses on the Greenway, and moving the Eliot MBTA station to behind the CVS.

Srdjan Nedeljkovic supports the Green line extension. This is the only method to substantially improve mobility in the corridor while reducing traffic impacts. Bruce Blakely asked if there will be funding to maintain the Greenway. It was noted that the Greenway is a stone dust trail, and that it is not plowed in winter. Carol Carroll asked if the Northland transportation plan takes into account MBTA improvements at the NH Station, with accessible ramps from Hyde Street. John Rice was asked if shuttles could drop off at the Eliot T station, but there is no good spot to drop off at Eliot.

Nathaniel Lichtin noted that public comments are still being accepted by City Council. There will eventually be buses every 10 minutes for 16 hours per day once it is fully built. There are three shuttle buses used by hotels.

### Halloween and Haunted House

Barbara Darnell noted that she, John Rice, and Groot Gregory have been planning the Haunted House event and that the theme of this year's Haunted House is the Wizard of Oz. There will be a haunted poppy field. The Haunted House will be taking place on Sunday, October 27 before Halloween. Parks and Recreation supports the event and has brought membership up through their promotion of the activity. Amy Wayne will be the makeup artist for the event and requested \$50 for makeup. Groot Gregory suggested \$300 of funding for Haunted House to cover additional labor expenses. The motion was approved: 7/0. The Hyde Center is spending \$400 on costumes and

splitting the costs with the Parks and Recreation department. It was noted that the Senior Prom will have same theme of Wizard of Oz. Volunteers are welcome. Materials need to be non-flammable.

### City Elections and Area Council Debates:

The Newtonville Area Council is organizing the candidate debates. The debates will take place in Newton North High School on October 20 and October 27. On October 20<sup>th</sup>, there will be a debate for City Council and School Committee for Wards 1-4 at Newton North from 2 pm to 5 pm. On October 27<sup>th</sup>, there will be a debate for City Council and School Committee for Wards 5-8 at Zervas School from 2 pm to 5 pm. The organizing committee is still working on questions, so please contribute questions for candidates. We have already appropriated funds. The organizing committee includes Chris Pitts and Peter Bruce. Ken Parker and Marcus Breen are moderating the debates for Wards 1 to 4. For Wards 5 to 8, the moderator will be Andy Levin. Volunteers may be needed.

### Local and City Updates:

#### Union Twist marijuana dispensary:

Amanda Theunissen expressed concerns about the Union Twist dispensary that may be opening. She does not feel that this store is consistent with the nature of this neighborhood. It will be a 2500 sf store and plans to be open 7 days per week. Ms. Theunissen looked at the same owners proposal for a Framingham Store, which would be located next to a Walmart and the Natick Mall. She is concerned that the new store will draw excessive numbers of people She is concerned about traffic on the roads. She is also concerned that the store is being sited surrounded residential neighborhoods. Ms. Theunissen noted that all other stores opening in Newton are on Washington Street or on Boylston Street. The Union Twist is also inappropriate because it is right on a walking route to the Zervas school, and a high school bus stop is nearby. Cold Spring Park is nearby. Ms. Theunissen is concerned that the proposed facility is projecting over 300 visits per day. She is also concerned that the name of store suggests it is selling a harmless product.

Bruce Blakely noted that the City Council can make it a condition of the permit that the store will be by appointment only, which may be every 5 minutes. It was noted that the store in Brookline generates 2500 visits per day. Ms. Theunissen expressed that she would not want the dispensary open on Sunday. She noted once again that a zoning requirement is that it cannot change the nature of neighborhood. The City council can put restrictions on these facilities. Bruce questioned when should we petition the city to ask for restrictions, but currently there is not a proposal for permit of the dispensary at that location before the city. It was noted that there can be as many as 8 marijuana stores in the city. Ms. Theunissen questioned about Public Safety, and believes that the proposed facility poses a risk to Public Safety. It was recommended that complaints about this proposed facility may also be made to the Cannabis Control Commission.

Another option would be to request a change in zoning to eliminate this site for a marijuana dispensary. In order to have a referendum vote, a petition with 6000 signatures is needed to bring it to City Council. It was noted that this proposed facility does not meet certain permitting requirements such as that it cannot change the nature of the neighborhood and that it needs to be near public transit. This item will not likely come forward to City Council until January. Lisa

Gordon noted that the cannabis industry is lobbying to overturn the law that does not allow on-site consumption.

### Development at 956 Walnut Street:

Council President Lichtin gave an update about the 956 Walnut Street project. The proposed development was discussed at a public hearing at which a large number of neighbors were present. Most attendees spoke against the proposal, except for the group who had negotiated for changes to the project and who took a neutral position. The parcel is zoned for an FAR of 0.4, whereas the proposed project would result in an FAR of 0.6. The current proposal includes 5 parking spaces above ground and 14 parking spaces below ground. The developer has agreed to split the development to 3 buildings which would consist of two buildings of 2 units and one building of 3 units. Most neighbors felt the project was too big, with too many units, and that it would make traffic difficult on Walnut Street. There are also legal questions if the project has sufficient frontage. City Council will take it back up again later in the year.

### Walnut Street Bridge:

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell discussed moving the signs on the bridge. Signs have been contained and flowers have been placed. Docket item for John O'Hara Square at Lincoln and Walnut. Officer English garden will have a new sign.

### Aqueduct Update:

Area Councilor Bruce Blakely reported about a meeting concerning the Sudbury Aqueduct. Parts of the aqueduct from Echo Bridge to Cold Spring Park are owned by the MWRA, and access has not been allowed for public use. However, cities may get a permit to allow legal access to the Aqueduct for recreational purposes. The city will be moving forward to get a permit to allow public access to the aqueduct from the MBTA tracks to Route 9. This will allow for recreational use. An existing fence will be opened allowing a path from Stanley Road to Cragmore Road that allows access to Eliot T station. The city will build stairs to facilitate this connection. Waban Area Council President Kathy Winters pointed out that school buses drop off children near this crossing, and the connection to Stanley Road would now be accessible. There was no opposition at the public meeting.

### MBTA Long Term Improvements:

Council President Lichtin reported that by 2040, the MBTA plans to double capacity on the Green line. They will be purchasing new 115 ft trains, and at first will be running only one car at a time. Then the MBTA intends to run 2 of them together when they have the power to allow it. The Newton Highlands T stop is fully funded, and is at 100% design completion. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic expressed concern about the issue of costs ballooning to \$22 million and believes that an audit is necessary to insure that these costs are reasonable and justifiable.

### Climate Action Plan:

Nathaniel Lichtin summarized that the Climate Action Plan is looking at how to reduce carbon emissions and get to net zero by 2050. There will be a public hearing in the next month or so.

#### Washington Street Vision Plan:

Nathaniel Lichtin noted that this Vision Plan will be going forward, and that people had mixed opinions at a recent public event. Some people do not like density, whereas others want more affordable housing. The Plan will be going to City Council for a vote.

#### Area Council Ballot:

There are 5 people on the ballot. Nathaniel suggested that interested candidates not on the ballot could conduct a write-in campaign.

#### Administrative Items:

#### Approval of the June Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the September minutes, and this was accepted 7:0.

#### Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer's Report was submitted to Area Council members by Groot Gregory. There are no updates from the prior report.

#### New Business:

Carol Carroll went to Historical Commission and noted there are 4 houses with demolition permits in a small part of Newton Highlands. As properties turn over, there will be changes. It was noted that Walnut Market may be in the process of being transferred. The smoke shop has been banned from selling vaping products. It was noted that if they close down, then another smoke shop will not be approved. Graffiti in the village has been cleaned.

Soup Social is on Saturday February 8<sup>th</sup>. Marcia and Bea may be honored at the event. Brookline Bank put benches for the bus stop with plantings. Village Kids will become the site of an exercise facility. An ice skating rink will not be part of Northland. No ice skating rink here this winter. The water flow at the fountain has slowed to a trickle.

#### Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.