

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, February 2, 2017

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Steve Feinstein, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdj Nedeljkovic, Julius Starkman, Amy Wayne

Ex Officio Present: John Rice

Guests:

Fred Arnstein, Neighbors for a Better Newtonville
Peter Bruce, Newtonville Neighborhood Area Council
Stephen J. Buchbinder, Schlessinger and Buchbinder
John Burrows, Carpenters Union, Auburndale, Massachusetts
Kathleen Kouril Geiser, Newton Village Alliance
Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation
Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Maria @Michael Kanellias
Barry Keady, Plumbers Local 12
Diane Prunte, Newton highlands Historic District Study Group
Alan J. Schlessinger, Schlessinger and Buchbinder
Peter Standish, Northland Development Corporation

Secretary's Report and Treasurer's Report

Srdj opened the meeting at 7:37 PM. The Secretary's Report for January was reviewed and approved without corrections.

The Treasurer's Report included the following. As of January 24, we had figures provided were from our January meeting. It will be recalled that on January 1, we had \$14,225.07 in our checking account; \$7,389.00 is currently available plus \$120.00 available in cash. There was no update on other items from the January 1 report.

Northland Project on Needham Street

Newton lawyers Stephen Buchbinder, Alan Schlesinger, along with Northland Senior Vice President Peter Standish came before our Council to present Northland's plans for a major new development on the site of Marshall's Plaza on Needham Street in Upper Falls.

The 28-acre parcel would include:

- 950 apartment units
- 175,000 Square Feet of office space
- 200,000 square feet of retail space.

Peter Standish outlined the project's main components of the plan that includes retail and restaurant space. It would essentially double the amount of retail space that is there now.

Buildings and apartments would be of different heights and balanced. In many cases, the apartments would be built over the stores. Many of them would be positioned on a new "Main Street" style road that would run perpendicular to Needham Street, extending toward the Upper Falls Greenway. Northland sees this as a healthy balance of office, retail and residential.

Peter acknowledged that the three biggest challenges are increases in traffic, the impact on schools as families with children move into the apartment complexes. Northland had no plans to pay for a new school.

A vigorous and extended discussion then took place. There was much concern about what this would add to existing traffic on Needham Street. Srdj asked how many parking spaces would be needed and if there were plans to reduce the number of cars by providing alternative transit. Peter said there would be shuttle services for students, people working in the office and retail stores.

Amy was concerned that past developer and City of Newton projections about the impact of new development on school populations have been greatly underestimated. She was particularly concerned about the impact this would have on Countryside School. And she suggested that Northland should seriously consider funding construction of a new school to accommodate what she was certain would be a relatively large influx of new students to the south of Newton.

There was additional concern that this project would not contribute positively to our 40B problems and that, in fact, it would add to the deficit that what would have to be addressed with future projects.

John Burrows from the Carpenters Union suggested Northland reach out to find contractors and construction workers from Newton to work on the development project.

Srdj's Briefing on Light Rail Supplement

At the end of the briefing and question session Srdj gave a short presentation on how commuter and traffic challenges from the Northland Project could be mitigated through completion of a long envisioned light rail project that would run from the Newton Highlands MBTA Station to Needham Heights along a long abandoned rail line. Srdj envisions a stop along the way at the Upper Falls Greenway where commuters could be dropped off and shuttled the short distance to the offices and stores in a completed Northland. Srdj also stressed that there was enough room along the rail line to accommodate both this new light rail supplement and the Upper Falls Greenway.

Newton Highlands Local Historic District

Rodney and Bob announced that it's very likely the Massachusetts Historical Commission will announce review findings on our Local Historic District Study Report at their February meeting. We will probably have to provide some additional information, but Gretchen Schuler and Katy Holmes seem confident they will have nice things to say about what we have done.

We had our first community outreach right here in the Brigham House earlier this evening. 28 homeowners who live within the proposed district attended. The tone of the meeting was very positive.

John said he would help initiate talks with Village center landlords about the LHD.

Here's what we accomplished during January.

1. Electronic copies of the study report were sent to all 24 members of the City Council;
2. We completed Door-to door Distribution of the first of three or four short and issue specific leaflets to every home and business within the proposed district. This announced the completion of the study, where to access it on line, information about this evening's open house at the Brigham House and reference how and where homeowners and others within the district can become involved in the process.

3. We continue compiling computerized telephone and email mailing list of homeowners within the District.
4. We continue to put together historical and architectural inventories of all undocumented properties within the proposed district.
5. We are beginning to put together the groundwork for door-to-door canvassing, block and street coffees and other outreach meetings from mid-March to the end of April.

Items in Brief

- John provided a progress report on the proposed “subtrail” student walking route from Cold Springs Park to Zervas.
- Nathaniel reported that the Charter Commission has accepted our recommendations for how area councils would operate and interact with the City during any transition from an old to new charter.
- The Soup Social was a great success. Large crowd and people enjoyed the performances and opportunities to mingle. Amy promises that next year’s event will be even better.
- John reported that the ice rink was terminated early because of the warm weather. The good news is that a lot of the materials that were scheduled for use this year will be saved for next year’s rink.
- Steve is looking for help with Village Day. The date is Sunday, June 11th. Chris Pitts is handling the music. We don’t be having any expensive bands this year.
- Srdj believes we should continue to openly press the State to place all utilities underground as the Needham Street project progresses.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council