

# **Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, April 6, 2017**

Attending: Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Steve Feinstein, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdj Nedeljkovic, Julius Starkman, Amy Wayne

Ex Officio Present: Dick Blazar and John Rice

Guests:

Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation

## **Secretary's Report and Treasurer's Report**

Srdj opened the meeting at 7:35 PM. The Minutes for March were reviewed and approved after some minor edits.

The Treasurer's Report included the following. As of February 25, 2017, we had \$14,103.28 in our checking account; 9,349.00 is currently available plus \$120.00 available in cash.

A discussion was held to approve additional allocation of funds for Local Historic District planning and efforts. Since \$3075 has been raised for LHD implementation, the Area Council voted 8-0 to approve \$600 for costs related to the LHD.

## **Newton Highlands MBTA Accessibility Project**

Srdj briefed our Council on communications that Robert Solomon recently had with the MTBA Design Team. The update is that the design work is progressing. Srdj was unclear how the roof that has been proposed will be constructed. A community meeting should be held this Spring, but nothing has officially been announced.

It appears that some preliminary soundings have been done near the central walkway on the westbound side.

A discussion was held regarding the roof over the platforms. Some council members expressed their opinion that if a roof is actually going to get built, it should be consistent with the old station design, rather than a metal roof like the one at Reservoir. An update will be provided by Robert during our May meeting.

## **Needham Street Follow-up**

Srdj mentioned that the MPO has recommended that the Needham Street project reconstruction is delayed for up to 2 years. The reason for the delay is the extended time it is taking to acquire bits of property in the corridor to enable a consistent roadway width.

A discussion about undergrounding utilities ensued. There was general agreement that more needs to be done to insure that undergrounding is being considered as part of the planning process for roadway reconstruction.

Srdj welcomed the delay in the project, stating that this is an opportunity to have a better project in the long run. Since we've waited over 20 years to get to this point, another year or two is not a great time to wait if a better project is the result.

Steve continues to see school capacity problems as well as serious and unresolved problems with traffic.

## **Zervas School Transportation Follow-up**

Srdj mentioned noted that a meeting took place in March at the Waban Library where the latest plans for Beethoven and Beacon Street were discussed. The plans now call for no widening of Beethoven, which was an outcome supported by many area council members.

Efforts are being made to improve access for students across Cold Spring Park. However, the school committee is not allowing any entry via a door in the fence that separates the rear of the school property from Cold Spring Park. Instead, students are being forced to walk towards Beacon Street in order to circumnavigate the fence.

The reason for this decision is that we are in a “post 9-11 world” and that it is being done to enhance student safety. Members of the Area Council generally felt dismayed by this decision and are hopeful that it will be reconsidered, at least during drop off and pick up times.

Further discussion ensued regarding the proposed crosswalk on the east side of Beacon and Beethoven. The plans call for the crosswalk to be set back further east on Beacon Street, thereby creating a longer and less direct path for pedestrians to cross the road. There was a general consensus by Area Council members that this crosswalk should be moved back to its current location, right at the intersection.

## **Newton Highlands Local Historic District**

A vigorous discussion took place regarding outreach to the community. The City Council will hear the proposal for a Local Historic District at its May 8<sup>th</sup> meeting. Members of the LHD committee are expected to give a presentation about the proposed LHD at that time. In addition, Katy Holmes from the Planning Department will give a presentation at the meeting.

The importance of further community outreach was strongly agreed upon. Efforts to engage with residents of the proposed district, along with any others, will take place during multiple dates in April. Meeting times were discussed for hosting these gatherings. In addition, further drop offs of materials related to the LHD will take place.

Finally, the Congregational Church meeting room has been reserved for Sunday, April 23 at 2 pm to hold a larger community meeting. The purpose of the meeting will be to update the community and to gather additional feedback about the proposed LHD. Several members of LHD Commissions from other villages (Newtonville, Upper Falls, Auburndale) will attend the meeting and create a panel during the discussions.

Several Area Council members agreed to distribute leaflets announcing the April 23 meeting. Srdj agreed to help moderate the meeting.

## **Charter Commission Update**

Nathanial provided an update on the latest proposal for Charter Reform. The Charter Commission has decided to eliminate the Ward councilors in favor of only at-large councilors, one from each ward and 4 who could be elected from any ward. The total number of councilors would be reduced by half, from 24 to 12. In addition, term limits would be set for City Council, limiting time in office to 12 consecutive years.

In terms of Area Councils, the new charter has preserved them. However, the Area Councils and their roles and functions are not explicitly defined and are subject to future decisions made by the City Council.

A discussion ensued regarding the new Charter. Most Area Council members were dismayed at the potential loss of Ward councilors. It was felt that local representation may suffer, and that the involvement of the at-large councilors in Area Council activities and meetings would likely be less.

The Area Council supports an effort to schedule a debate regarding the pros and cons of Charter Reform, most likely in October. This will be an effort coordinated with other area councils, and especially with the Waban Area Council.

## **Village Day**

Steve gave an update regarding the excellent progress he and his team of volunteers have made regarding Village Day. Barbara will be handling booth registration this year.

Steve has managed to obtain promises for donations from several businesses in the community. Planning for the Road Race is progressing, and Maureen Oates has confirmed that she will help organize the Road Race event. Chris Pitts is helping to assemble music for the event.

Additional discussion ensued about some of the additional programming for the event. Since Steve will not be in Newton on the day of Village Day,

other Area Council members will need to be even more involved in making sure that all of the tasks related to the event are handled.

The Council members thanked Steve for his efforts to make Village Day a success again this year. The date for Village Day is Sunday June 11<sup>th</sup>.

## **Other**

As time was running short, there was only a brief update about activities at the Hyde that are planned for the summer. John Rice has quite a program planned, as usual.

The Highlands Service Station was apparently purchased by an international investor, but there are no known plans for the property. It has closed for business.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Srdjan Nedeljkovic  
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council