

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, June 1, 2017

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

Ex Officio: Dick Blazar and Cheryl Lappin

Guests:

Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Council

Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation

Diane Prunte, Newton Highlands LHD study group

Brenda Noel, candidate for Ward 6 City Council

Secretary's Report and Treasurer's Report

Srdj opened the meeting at 7:35 PM. The Minutes for May were reviewed and approved with two corrections. The Treasurer's Report included the following. As of May 29, 2017, we had \$14,771.00 in our checking account; \$9,178.00 is currently available plus \$120.00 available in cash.

MBTA Station Update

Robert Solomon provided an update on the progress and pitfalls of the MBTA Accessibility Project. According to Robert, we are at a standstill on 30 percent design because the MBTA's System wide Accessibility program is requiring that two ramps be constructed on both sides (a total of 4 ramps) to make the system fully compliant with ADA requirements.

Robert, however, did stress that the money for this project is still in the system, so we just have to let the process play out because a green light from System wide Accessibility is the key for moving this forward expeditiously.

Once that is completed, we can move forward with the 30 percent design to the entire Highlands community. Robert again stressed that there is nothing to fear. The money is still in the pipeline for this project. It's just that these full accessibility issues must be dealt with first.

Newton Highlands Village Day

Steve presented a detailed budget for the June 11th festival along with the latest update and progress report.

- We are grateful to all the sponsors. They include Whole Foods, Anna's Taqueria, the Village Bank, Salon Capri, the Brookline Bank and the Highlands Wine and Spirits.
- Lincoln Street will be closed to traffic from 9AM-5PM, (except for vendors who can unload till 10 AM. We already have more than 60 vendors signed up for booths.
- The Road Race starts at 10 AM. You can register to run either on line or on the day of the race. The first 150 runners that sign-up will get a free T-shirt designed by Eunice Feller.
- This year we are introducing food trucks including falafel/Mediterranean and Trolley Dogs. Trucks will be set up in the parking lot near the Brookline Bank Fun Zone.
- Other food options that will be open include Anna's Taqueria, Bread & Chocolate, Newton Pizza House, Walnut Market, O'Hara's, Fleck Coffee and Indulge.

- There will be two stages of live music. Headliners include Stacey Peasley, Ebinho Caroso, and Newton's own Chris Pitts who will lead a jazz jam at the first stage.
- There will be free face painting, caricature and the usual bouncy houses. The Ligerbots will be coming, so all the kids can try out a robot.

Newton Highlands Local Historic District

Rodney and Amy updated the Council on events since May's meeting. The May 8th formal hearing on the Highlands LHD was chaired by the Zoning and Planning Committee in cooperation with the Newton Historical Commission. The turnout was high. Chairman Ted Hess Mahan asked for a show of hands to determine the number of supporters and opponents present. The vote was split almost evenly between proponents and opponents

It will be recalled from last month's meeting, that the City Council is expected to have an up or down vote on the LHD proposal sometime in September. What we didn't know until the public hearing was underway was that the City is also planning to send a two question survey to every property owner in the proposed district. The first question asks if they want to see a LHD established in the Highlands. The second question asks if they want their property included in this proposed district. The City's best estimate is that this survey (which will also be sent to property owners in the proposed West Newton LHD) would be sent out during the last week of June.

It's hard to determine what the split turnout means in terms of support or opposition within the proposed district. On the one hand, we've been told that there are always more opponents than supporters at these kinds of public hearings.

Our task now is to determine what we should do as a follow on to the public hearing, the upcoming survey and the ultimate City Council vote in September.

We will also be meeting with the Church Council of the Newton Highlands Congregational Church to discuss concerns that they and the other two Highlands churches (Saint Paul's and Christian Science) have about some of the impacts of a LHD on their properties and congregations. We're working to set a date and hopefully we can have at least one member from one of the 4 established Newton LHDs to help answer questions related to the specific concerns.

Delay on Needham Street

It was reported that the Metropolitan Planning Agency (MPA) met during the past month and voted to delay the start of the Needham Street Project until 2019. The reason for the delay revolves around the need to communicate with and reach out to 135 neighbors in adjacent areas who will be impacted by the construction.

Srdj noted that the delay may provide one last opportunity to get the state to seriously consider placing all the electrical and other utilities underground. Many councilors concurred that the opportunity should be seized, but others questioned whether it would really make a difference at this stage of the project.

Pedestrian safety on Beacon Street Sidewalk

In response to concerns expressed at May's meeting, Srdj distributed copies of a letter he drafted and sent to David Koses, Chair of the City's Traffic Council on June 1st. The letter noted that parked vehicles often obstruct the public sidewalk in front of the retail establishment at 1144-1152 Beacon Street where parking encroaches upon and obstructs the sidewalk in front of the Dunkin Donuts. This is a serious safety hazard to pedestrians, particularly to students who use the sidewalk to get to Zervas.

Srdj's letter requested that physical barriers be put in place such as bollards or curbing, which will prevent vehicle encroachment of the public sidewalk on this section of Beacon Street.

Fall Candidates Forums

Sallee reported that there would be two candidate forums in the fall, both at Angier School. October 8th will feature all contested at-large City Council positions and all contested School Committee races. October 22nd will feature the two finalists for Mayor and the proposed new City Charter.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM.

Bob Burke, Secretary, Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council