

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, October 5, 2017

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

Ex Officio:

John Rice, Ward City Councilor, Ward 5

Richard Blazar, Ward City Councilor, Ward 6

Guests:

Kathy Anderson, 14 Bowdoin Street

Bob Cleveland, 55 Bowdoin Street

Abby Cohen, 30 Erie Avenue

Phil Emmanuel, 60 Bowdoin Street

Rena Getz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Mark Hooker, 73 Erie Avenue

Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation

Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Patrick Moriarty, 9 Hillside Road

Brenda Noel, Candidate Ward 6 City Councilor

Dick and Linda Osterberg, 291 Lake Avenue

Dan Powdermaker, 119 Lincoln Street

Chris Pitts, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Barbara Smiley, Newton Highlands Local Historic District Study Group

Stuart Snyder, 30 Erie Avenue

Peter Tamm, 24 Norman Road

Thoughts on the Passing of Rodney Barker

Srdj opened the meeting at 7:35 PM and noted that this meeting would have a very sad tinge to it because of the passing of Rodney Barker earlier in the week. There were many expressions of appreciation for Rodney's service to Newton and to this area council, and that nothing would ever be quite like it was with him not there.

John announced that a memorial service for Rodney would be held on Saturday, October 21st at the Newton Highlands Congregational Church.

Secretary's Report and Treasurer's Report

The Secretary's reports for September was reviewed and approved as written.

The Treasurer's Report included the following. As of September 30, 2017, we had \$12,410.00 in our checking account; \$7,802.00 is currently available plus \$120.00 available in cash.

Local Historic District

Bob opened the presentation by recommending that the Area Council vote to withdraw the proposal for further consideration by the City Council. It would be done "without prejudice" to keep open all future options. Bob further stated that he made this recommendation with deep sadness because of the honest and open effort that had gone into this project by many people over the past two years. But he noted that a majority of homeowners who did return the City's survey opposed the initiative.

The actual survey results were 57 households supporting the Proposed District and 86 opposed. Bob and others on the Council felt that withdrawing the Proposed District now would demonstrate that we respect the decision of most surveyed homeowners, and also that doing so might help advance other initiatives for identifying and advancing preservation goals for the Highlands that both supporters and opponents of the proposed LHD could work to achieve.

Bob then made a motion to withdraw the proposal which was seconded by Barbara. The motion was approved 6-0-1. A spirited and largely amicable discussion then followed between members of the Area Council and several opponents who were attending the meeting.

Srdj noted that the City Council is tasked with deciding whether the proposed Highlands District met the two criteria under Chapter 40 C for the neighborhood in which it was proposed. The proposed district did, in fact, contain the requisite historical material, but clearly lacked a majority of community support.

He noted that he and members of the LHD Study Group had met recently with members of the Newton Planning Department who recommended that the Council consider the following five options to advance preservation goals in the Highlands.

- A. Review significantly smaller LHDs where a majority of owner support can be assembled and documented;
- B. Encourage participation of new study reports for local historic districts that allow an opt-out option;
- C. Approve individual local historic districts whereby owners obtain city council approval for Chapter 40 C protection of their own properties;
- D. Create Neighborhood Conservation Districts where protections for historic properties may be determined by owners and do not strictly adhere to 40 C;
- E. Encourage the use of Preservation Restrictions and easements on historic properties when owners are interested in preserving properties in perpetuity.

Communications Challenges

It was agreed to put all these options on the back burner for consideration at a future date, but discussion then gravitated to related concerns improving communications between the Area Council and homeowners and residents in the Highlands Service area. The following points were discussed at various times during the course of the meeting.

- We have a major challenge just letting people in our service area know our area council exists. Few people seem to know exactly who we are or what we do.

- The problem seems more pronounced among new residents and among parents with young kids in the school.

- Residents have largely tuned out to established forms of communications such as landline phones, the Newton Tab and postal mail.

- Public focus on the village as a community is not as strong as it once was.

- This is compounded by the fact that families with kids and aging parents are under a lot more stress and have more work, school and family obligations.

- The results of the Local Historic District project showed pretty convincingly that many homeowners were tuned into the process from beginning to end, but others seemed not to be aware it was even going on.

- Steve suggested that a combination of communications resources and social media will help to bridge these problems.

- The need for a comprehensive email list of residents was discussed, but there was general agreement it should be used sparingly.

- A suggestion was made to mail a postcard to everyone living in the 02461 zipcode to encourage them to sign up for the Newton Highlands Google Group.

- There was a suggestion to have one website for all 4 existing Area Councils in Newton.

It was universally agreed that efforts to improve communications between our area council and the residents of Newton Highlands would be a major priority during the next two years.

Fall Debates and Forums

Sallee Lipshutz reported that the two fall election debates are still proceeding on schedule. Newton TAB editor Andy Levin will moderate the October 8th event. It will feature the contested races for City Council. Marjorie Arons Barron will moderate the October 22nd event featuring the two finalists for Mayor, the candidates for School Committee, and the proposed new City Charter. Sallee needs volunteers to come at 12:30 PM to help with setup. Several folks promised they would be there to help. Sallee also asked people to submit questions for the two debates. Again, several said they would do so.

A debate between the 2 candidates for the City Council Ward 6 seat that had tentatively been scheduled as part of next month's area council meeting has been changed to Thursday, October 12th at the Newton Highlands Women's Club. A motion was made that our area council contribute \$150.00 to support the rental charge. The motion was seconded and approved 6-0-1.

Items in Brief

- Barbara moved that we donate \$500.00 for the haunted house at this year's Hyde Center celebration. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously on an 7-0-0 vote.
- Barbara also reported that the sidewalk improvements at 183 Lake Street have been completed.
- John reported that the Hyde Summer concerts were again a smashing success.
- John also reported that the Hyde Center's 50th Anniversary Celebration would be held on Saturday, November 4th.

- There was a brief discussion about concerns that the village center is too dark at night and that we need improved lighting. John suggested we ask Newton DPW's Nina Wing to come to a future meeting to discuss this item.
- We need volunteers to help replace dead trees in the Highlands.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Bob Burke, Secretary, Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council