

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, February 4, 2015

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

Guests:

Pia Bertelli, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Alicia Bowman, Safe Routes To School
Maxine Bridger, Newton Upper Falls Neighborhood Area Council
Andrea Downes, Transportation Advisory Group
Jennifer Kohl, Newton Upper Falls Neighborhood Area Council
Schyler Larrabee, Newton Highlands
Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
David A. Olson, City Clerk
Chris Pitts, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Diane Prunte, Winchester Street

Ex Officio City Councilor: John Rice

State's Open Meeting Law

Before the formal meeting began, Newton City Clerk David Olson discussed the State's Open Meeting Law and how its provisions apply to our Council members. A lively and informative discussion followed on specific items related to just what kinds of meetings and discussions between members of our Council trigger provisions of the Open Meeting Law. Mr. Olson urged all of our members to conduct as much on line business as possible through our Newton City Government email address.

Secretary's Report and Treasurer's Report

Srdj opened the meeting at 7:45 PM. The Secretary's Report for January was reviewed and approved with one minor correction.

The Treasurer's Report included the following. As of January 31, 2016, we had \$11,009.93 in our checking account, of which \$8,369.93 is currently available. In addition, there is \$120.00 available in cash.

\$400.00 is still owed to us for Village Day activities and we still owe Steve \$300.00 for expenses related to that event.

Accessibility Options at the Highlands MBTA Station

A presentation was made by Schuyler Larrabee about state proposals to make the Newton Highlands MBTA station handicapped accessible. Schuyler is a professional architect and a long-time Newton Highlands resident. He manages several complex programs with the State for major capital projects and he is a long time expert and aficionado of all things associated with railways, rail travel and train stations.

It will be recalled that we spent a good deal of time in past meetings discussing the 4 options and the complex arrangements associated with each that the state put forward at our October community meeting as possibilities for making the Highlands MBTA station handicapped accessible.

Schuyler informed us that it is unlikely that ADA requires all 4 entrances to be constructed. It would be preferable to have one ADA-compliant entrance on each end, with a preference for constructing the Hyde Street entrance on the inbound side only. Schuyler again stressed that the State is required to consider all 4 options as part of the planning process. The real problem is that the state has spent approximately half a million dollars for the consultant reports, leaving little money readily available to actually construct the project. This frustrating paradox exists with many other state capital projects.

A wide and ranging discussion followed. There was a strong consensus that the next step should be to draft a letter to seek her help in expediting funding to actually complete the accessibility project at the Highlands T station.

Planning for a Better Newton: Future Planning efforts

Srdj updated the group about the recently held meeting he and Chris Pitts organized in January about the initiative to hold joint and coordinated planning meetings by the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council and the Waban Neighborhood Area Council. The January meeting included a presentation of existing conditions in the Highlands and Waban and outlined an inventory of landscapes and areas that may be subject to change and development. The meeting enabled participants to provide opinions on the format and desired outcome of the upcoming planning process.

The next Future Planning meeting will be held on Monday, February 29th when the presentation and discussion will focus on evaluating whether there are areas for potential positive mixed use development in the two village centers of Waban and the Highlands. The group will also evaluate other non-residential zones, particularly in Newton Highlands, including the Needham Street corridor, 4 Corners and what was formerly known as “Eliot Village”, that cluster of shops along both sides of Route 9 where it intersects with Elliott and Woodward streets.

Later sessions will focus on residential change and development.

Traffic Plan for Zervas School

Andrea Downes provided an update on the City's traffic plan for Zervas. She told us that the City is still "sitting on the plan" at a time when we need to see what they have in mind in order to address concerns we have about the adverse effects of increased traffic that is certain to result from the newly enlarged school. It will be recalled that these concerns related to developing safe routes for students who walk to the school; issues related to traffic flow on Beacon, Beethoven and Evelyn Roads, and; safe and effective drop off and pick up locations at the school itself.

Andrea and Sallee stated that our next step is to get up a meeting or meetings with neighbors around the school area to focus in on initiatives to make walking and biking safer. "We don't need a formal neighborhood plan for this, but we do need a consensus of what should and should not be done."

John recounted how the transportation planning process evolved on Angier to involve a design committee and members of the School Committee and City Council. A meeting is scheduled for the second Thursday in April and Sallee stated that DPW should be there as well as others mentioned earlier. Other crucial participants mentioned were the Zervas Principal, Steve Siegel and Alicia Bowman.

The Area Council agreed that Andrea and Srdj would develop materials for the April meeting. This would include visual and descriptive items that would present current conditions and address concerns for mobility, access, and safety around the new school. Various options are to be developed, which will be reviewed at a subsequent Area Council meeting prior to the main meeting on Thursday, April 14.

Newton Highlands Local Historic District Update

Rodney and Bob discussed the schedule for completing the final letter and information sheet to Newton residents along with a completed street list and map of the proposed district. We will distribute copies of all three items in time so they can be discussed at our March meeting.

Rodney and Srdj announced that we have booked the auditorium at the Newton Highlands Congregational Church on the afternoon of Sunday, April 3rd for a community fundraising event to support accomplishing our documentation requirements for the Local Historic District. Amy suggested we include an item about the April 3rd event in the final letter and Bob and Rodney readily agreed to this suggestion.

Traffic and Transportation Update

Rodney stated that he is totally dissatisfied with the new pedestrian sidewalk configuration at Allerton and Centre Street. The use of so-called bumpouts is ridiculous. Barbara also added that conditions at Hyde and Centre streets are not good. It's very dark and the traffic does not slow down. Barbara said she would write a letter to the City about these observations.

Items in Brief

- Barbara also reported her observations about the good and the bad of the City's snow removal effort to date in the Highlands.
- John reported that ice skating is over for the season not just because we are into February, but because vandals have damaged the rink.
- John also reported that the winter soup social will be taking place on Saturday evening, February 6th. The only thing he needs help from the Area Council is with cleanup. There are plans afoot to really upgrade this event next year with entertainment and games to make it more of a community fun event. Amy expressed interest in taking a lead on this effort.
- Planning continues for the Summer Concert Series at the Hyde Pavilion and bandstand continues apace. We have slots for 15 performers, but 30 have approached John to say they would like to perform. The U.S. Army Band may perform at one of these events.
- Groot said that the Area Council should review our bylaws. This is rather intricate and demanding task, but it may help us understand our role in engaging with our service area and promoting various projects on our agenda.
- Steve stated that we need to get input into the Charter Commission about ways to strengthen and promote all of Newton's area councils, particularly with measures involving integration, funding and communications.
- Steve will outline his plan for Village Day and what each of us will be asked to contribute at our March meeting.
- Rodney stated that he would like to discuss the City's "Housing Production plan at our next meeting in March.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council