

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, February 6, 2014

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Ron Mauri, Srdj Nedeljkovic, Robert Solomon

Ex Officio Aldermen: John Rice, Dick Blazer and Cheryl Lappin
Past President: Janice Bourque

Guests:

Bruce Blakely, Richardson Road, Newton Highlands
Carol McPherson, Newton Highlands resident
Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation
Cheryl Lappin, Ward 8 Alderman
Sallee Lipshutz, President, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Carol Rose, Newton Council on Aging
Chris Steele, Newton Economic Development Commission
Kathy Winters, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Srdj called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM and determined that we had a quorum to conduct business.

Bob then presented the minutes from January's meeting. These were approved unanimously without correction.

Srdj then presented the February Treasurer's Report. As of January 24, 2014, there was \$8,091.57, all of it in our checking account. During the month, checks for \$495.00 and \$255.00 were paid to Mark Taylor for services related to the ice rink and \$75.00 to Dave Moulengaro, also for services related to the ice rink. John stated that we still owe \$825.00 for additional ice rink services. The Treasurer's Report was then unanimously approved without change by the Council.

The following items were discussed by those present:

Zervas School Building Committee

Sallee announced that the first meeting of the Zervas School Building Committee was being held this evening. It will be recalled that this Committee was established at the behest of the Zervas Working Group which had been charged with setting the framework for developing and monitoring construction activities

at Zervas and providing for public involvement by parents, students and village interests directly affected by the agenda the Committee has been charged with implementing.

Bob stated that he had attended the monthly meeting of the Upper Falls Area Council in January where a frank and heated debate took place between three members of the School Committee versus all members of the Area Council and Alderman Yates about opening up discussion on the Building Committee to the possibility of placing a 16th elementary school in Upper Falls.

Srdj then presented what he saw as the arguments for and against a 16th School in Upper Falls versus an enlarged and expanded school on the Zervas Site. He did this, he said, to set the framework for consideration of whether or not the members present believed that we should request that a member of the Area Council be appointed to the Building Committee. Ron asked whether anyone had a handle on whether there is any interest in the broader Highlands community about how this issue is resolved. The discussion on this was inconclusive, but it also turned out that no member of the Council felt they could participate on the Committee.

Area Council Maps and Boundaries:

Srdj announced that he met with residents from Waban and Upper Falls to review the boundaries of the Waban, Upper Falls and Highlands area councils. Two “orphan” areas were discovered that were between Area Councils but not officially included on the list of streets belonging to any of them. To add these areas to an Area Council would require signatures from 20 percent of the residents in the affected areas. A proposal was made that the area near Four Corners around Beacon Street may be added to the Highlands Council. It was suggested that an area of Beacon Street closer to the Zervas School would be added to the Waban Council. Further adjustments to the Highlands Area Council would also include single streets like Richardson Road which Bruce Blakely brought to our attention in October. It will take consultation with affected in these “orphan” areas and approval by the Board of Aldermen to make any changes official.

Winter Soup Social:

The Winter Soup Social was a great success spearheaded by Barbara and John and supported by other Council members. A motion was made to formally thank Barbara for all she did to make the Soup Social a success and this was approved unanimously by all Council members present.

Pizza Social, Summer Concert Program and Appeal for Volunteers

John reported that plans for the Pizza Social and summer concert program were progressing on schedule. Among other events, he's lining up some great bands with a variety of musical genres, a live Shakespeare performance, and other events.

John is very concerned about the drop off in volunteer support for this and other events we sponsor in the Highlands. As one example, we need volunteers to help obtaining support and donations for the summer concerts. Everyone seems to love these events, but few Highlands residents seem to have the time or the inclination to help. He's been able to pay young people to help set up tables, chairs and other equipment for the summer concerts and other events, but increasingly the burden of getting things done is falling on fewer and fewer people. Ron stated that it's imperative for more Council members to help with all these events.

Village Day

John gave an update on Village Day planning and projected activities. One big challenge that recurs every year is trying to develop effective entertainment programs for the kids so parents will stick around for the Silent Auction and other money making events. If the kids get bored, the parents leave. We're looking for a series of smaller events. The big rides of previous years no longer seem to be practical. What we need is something John termed "lesser rides" that will still do the trick. The Road Race will probably be cancelled because fewer people sign up to run or to oversee the event. We're really suffering somewhat from our own success. So many other villages have copied what we did. They now have their "Village Days" and there are more other events going on in June, so we are no longer the only village day in town during the year.

Goals and Priorities for the Highlands

Srdj kicked off a lively and extended discussion about what Council members feel should be our priorities for the next two years and beyond. He stated that a major objective should be for us to be preemptive and forward thinking in forming and articulating a clear vision of priorities so that the people of Newton Highlands have at least as much influence in what happens here as developers and special interests. One common thread heard throughout the City is that residents of any village quite often do not get involved in some development scheme until it's well on its way to becoming a "fait accompli" because other interests whose chief

interest may rest outside our village are there at the start shaping what ultimately gets approved.

Here are some of the priorities that were listed.

Transportation and Transit: Robert recommended that a top priority should be to press the Governor to move the \$2 million bond for making the Highlands T stop fully handicapped accessible. We also need to continue our efforts to make all of our streets and sidewalks safe and walkable.

Vitality of the Village: Rodney suggested that improved vitality of the entire village and particularly the Lincoln Street corridor was an overarching priority. We somehow have to find a way to involve landlords and merchants in all of this. People and all parties simply have to find a way to think beyond their narrow parochial or financial interests to what's needed for the health and diversity of the entire village.

Elderly Programs: Carol Rose made a strong appeal for a sharpened focus on the needs for seniors in terms of transportation, community engagement and housing. Seniors are too often an afterthought at best when it comes to planning and priorities.

Proactive Planning and Zoning Reform: Srdj and Ron again restated the desperate need for zoning reform that encourages responsible development that is in harmony with the Highlands village, specific neighborhoods and all our streets and roadways. We need first and foremost, an inventory of what we have and what we stand to lose. Srdj called for a vigorous involvement of Area Council members and the broad community in the "Envisioning Newton Highlands" exercise to create a starting point for discussion.

Historical Preservation: Bob and Rodney touched on the specific need for historic preservation in the broader village coupled with encouraging the people of the Highlands to have a debate about becoming a formal historic district as Upper Falls and parts of Newtonville have already done. There's fear we could lose some of our lovely Victorian houses and other architectural treasures to new construction if we fail to act now.

Safety and Security Issues at Hyde

Under new business, Robert raised the issue of broken doors at Hyde which are so faulty that kids can easily circumvent them and gain access to the building. He

said that this has been reported to the Newton Housing Authority, but their staff haven't successfully been able to solve the problem. He also reported that the elevator that serves handicapped residents at Hyde is potentially dangerous. It drops suddenly without warning. Robert said he would write these items up if the Council agreed to send the complaint in a letter to the Housing Authority. The Council agreed unanimously to ask Robert to do so.

Carol McPherson Elected as New Council Member

Attention then turned to the need to fill 2 vacancies (the 8th and 9th seats on the Area Council. Rodney nominated Carol McPherson to one of these positions and a second was made. The Council voted 5-0 (Barbara having left the meeting) to elect Carol to the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council