

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, April 3, 2014

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Ron Mauri, Carol Mcpherson, 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
Steve Feinstein, Zervas School Parent
Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation
Sallee Lipshutz, President, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Maureen Meagher, Waban Neighborhood Area council
Carol Rose, Newton Council on Aging
Chris Steele, Newton Economic Development Commission
Kathy Winters, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Brian Yates, Alderman-at-Large, Ward 5

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 March's meeting. These were approved unanimously without correction.

In Groot's absence, Srdj presented the Treasurer's Report. As of March 26, 2014, there was \$7,841.57, all of it in our checking account. This is current, but does not reflect an amount we still owe the City for expenses related to last year's Halloween party. The Treasurer's Report was then unanimously approved without change by the Council. The following items were discussed by those present:

Village Vision Process

Chris Steele distributed a report that he, Ron Mauri and Carol Rose have put together to organize a public discussion on the evolving process for "Envisioning Newton Highlands". Chris stated that it was more a set of questions to stimulate discussion than a set of formal recommendations. It deals with issues and challenges related to zoning, parking and transportation. An extended discussion took place on the following points from Chris's presentation.

- 1. Zoning. We need to consider the effects of housing demolition on the character and integrity of our neighborhoods, zoning changes to better revitalize our Village Center, the benefits of making parts of the Highlands a Historic District and where we should place single family and multi-family housing and the future of the Hartford Street parking lot.
- 2. Parking. We need to consider the benefits and problems of various measures to improve residential street parking, and related programs involving parking permits, metered parking and other possible initiatives such as limiting parking to one-side of every street, building another public parking lot and requiring village businesses and/or new residential units to provide more parking spaces.
- 3. Transportation. Specific items related to shuttle bus service from the Village Center to Needham Street and design improvements to improve safety on Center Street and Needham Street.

Concepts for Place Excellence-Residential Neighborhoods

Srdj presented a short paper titled “Concepts for Place Excellence—Residential Neighborhoods” as another dynamic guidance component for the Envisioning Newton Highlands process. In a nutshell, Srdj noted that Newton Highlands has a lot going for it. We have a healthy mix of single family homes with a smaller number of two family homes and only a few multi-residential buildings. There is also a clear and distinct sense of place including a strong village center, Crystal Lake and Cold Spring Park.

The first step in Srdj’s proposal would identify aspects of our residential neighborhoods that require specific preservation and protection and the kinds of changes that would adversely affect the quality of place that currently exists.

The second step would develop proposals to preserve place excellence and prevent adverse changes in our residential neighborhoods and provide a strong framework so that only appropriate changes take place.

The final step would be to employ specific instruments that are vital to implementing the overall goals of preserving and protecting the character of our neighborhoods and village. These include architectural and design guidance, zoning code changes, inspectional services regulation adjustments and Historic Commission recommendations.

Information and Early Warning System on Major Development Projects

Bob then presented a third discussion paper on specific ways the three area councils representing Waban, Newton Upper Falls and Newton Highlands could work together to identify a range of commercial and residential development projects for their impacts on neighborhood character, traffic and other deleterious effects. Bob sees a strong and positive role for the Area Councils because of the diverse backgrounds and talents of their memberships and because all of them have placed concerns about overdevelopment high on their list of neighborhood concerns. He also sees this as an opportunity for the City and the area councils to work constructively together since all want development to take place under applicable zoning rules and construction mandates.

Village Day

Srdj gave a further update on Village Day which appears to be progressing on schedule. There are still concerns and a few loose ends with regard to the Silent Auction and getting as many donors as possible to participate.

Sallee Lipshutz suggested that the Newton Highlands and Waban Councils organize and coordinate a combined drive to get as many merchants and donors as possible to support both Village Day programs. No formal vote was taken, but all members present were receptive to the idea and it was agreed that Sallee would meet with Srdj and others to plan and organize this combined campaign.

Carol Rose discussed the need for a new kind of tee shirt at this year's Highlands Village Days. The printed old photographs of the Highlands were becoming a bit redundant. Carol said she would find a more modern design for this year's event.

Transportation and Transit Update

Robert announced that the Mayor told him he had talked with Rich Davey at the MBTA who told him that the handicapped upgrade for the Highlands T Stop is "a definite go". We just need a final schedule. The Mayor told Robert that he is pushing hard to make certain that every trolley and train station in Newton becomes fully handicapped accessible.

Robert also met with Bill Paille who told him the Center Street project will definitely take place this spring. Improvements at the intersection of Lincoln Street and Walnut including curb cuts will also be underway shortly along with a much needed

intersection improvement at Lincoln and Hartford Streets that will make U Turns there illegal. Robert is advocating for limitations on cell phone use while driving in dense pedestrian areas such as the Village centers.

State Traffic Improvements on Winchester and Centre Streets

Srdj discussed State plans for 3 new sets of traffic lights at the redesigned rotary at the intersection of Winchester and Centre streets and in the frustratingly entangled area where Centre Street intersects with Route 9. Srdj is not sure when work will begin, but plans to follow up on it.

Walnut Street Lighting

The problem of inadequate street lighting on portions of Walnut Street between Lincoln and Centre streets was discussed with possible help by the City with new street lighting and some of the merchants who may be able to install the small, Christmas Tree style lights on some of the trees that line the street. Dianne from Walnut Foods suggested this. John is trying to see what he can do to get electricity into the area for the tree lights.

Zervas Update

Srdj distributed a handout by the City on various factors related to expansion at the existing Zervas site. This included a map of usable and unusable land at the existing Zervas site, various possible development plans including a pinwheel plan, 2 story box plan, 2 story elbow plan, 2 story elbow plan with split parking, 2 story elbow plan with parking in front and 2 story pinwheel plan with parking in front. A general discussion took place and several concerns were raised about the overall feasibility of what is being proposed, the composition of the Zervas Planning Group, and the apparent haste with which the expansion in enrolment at Zervas was decided and presented. Alderman Yates believes that any expansion at the site will have a difficult time contending with anticipated additional parking and dealing with water and wetlands issues.

A motion was made to create a Zervas engagement group under the auspices of the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council. This group would seek input from interested members of our community regarding the Zervas project, including those residents who do not have children in the Zervas school but will likely be affected by the project. The NHNAC Zervas engagement group will also review plans and proposals put forth by the City and School Committee and their consultants with a critical eye to insure that the project which is being planned is consistent with

community needs. Finally, the Zervas engagement group will do their best to attend various meetings related to Zervas and present information and proposals to the NHNAC for consideration.

Srdj proposed that the Zervas engagement group be led by Steven Feinstein, and also include non Area Council members Rena Getz and Bruce Henderson. Srdj will contact all of the individuals to confirm their participation. Steven Feinstein agreed to head this group.

Waban Area Council Sponsored Citywide Zoning Forum

Sallee Lipshutz announced that the Waban Neighborhood Area Council is sponsoring a very timely citywide meeting on a range of zoning and development related issues at the War Memorial Auditorium on Thursday, May 1st beginning at 7:30 PM. This meeting is intended to be “a primer” for all Newton residents about how the City’s regulatory process works for new developments. Rather than deal with the details of any specific ongoing projects, they’ll discuss how the process works and where, when and how citizens can become involved and have a say for a given process. The panelists include:

Candace Havens, Director of Planning and Development
James Freas, Chief Planner, Long Range Planning
Alderman Marcia Johnson, Chair of Zoning & Planning Committee
Brooke Lipsitt, Zoning Board of Appeals
Kathy Winters, Moderator, Neighbor and Member of the Waban Area Council

Sallee announced that members of the Waban Area Council will be going door to door distributing leaflets and asked members of our Council to help if they possibly can.

Steve Feinstein Appointed as our 9th and Final Council Member

Attention then turned to the need to fill the 9th seat vacancy on our Area Council. Ron nominated Steve Feinstein and Bob seconded the nomination. The Council voted 6-0 to elect Steve to the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council