

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, May 1, 2014

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Steven Feinstein, 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
Peter Donnelly, Orchard Street, Waban
Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation
Carol Rose, Newton Council on Aging
Chris Steele, Newton Economic Development Commission
Mary Ann Tricarico, Orchard Street, Waban

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

In Groot's absence, Srdj presented the Treasurer's Report. As of April 24, 2014, there was \$8,091.57, all of it in our checking account. There were no transactions reported during the month. The Treasurer's Report was then unanimously approved without change by the Council.

The following items were discussed by those present:

Area Council Boundaries

Srdj distributed a city map of the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Area as of 2005, so it didn't include the streets that were recently included in the Winchester Street and Countryside School areas. He used the map to describe his discussions about exchanging certain streets with the Waban Neighborhood Area Council to make both areas more contiguous and fluid. Srdj also distributed documents establishing the Highlands Area Council dating back to the late 1970's to show the historical processes for establishing our Council and for including new streets in the Service Area during subsequent years.

Several proposals have been put forth to harmonize the area council boundaries, especially with regards to Waban and Upper Falls. Attention was given to the area near Four Corners as well, which would seem to fit best within the Newton Highlands Area Council zone. The Waban folks apparently would like to obtain signatures on Amy Circle for their service area.

Bruce Blakely gave an update on his efforts to collect signatures on Richardson Road to have it included in our Service Area.

Srdj offered to produce a document that identifies the streets and households that the Newton Highlands Area Council may approach in the process of harmonizing boundaries, and will distribute this to the group in the next couple of weeks. Bruce volunteered to obtain a few more signatures in the Richardson Road area. Once all of the signatures are collected, we will submit them for validation at the Elections Office as a single application.

Proposal for Historical or Architectural District

Carol, Rodney, and Laura Fitzmaurice gave an extended presentation on possibilities and needed steps for launching a campaign to make portions of Newton Highlands a Historical or Architectural District.

This was accompanied by distribution of “Newton Historic Preservation Guidelines” completed in 2012 as criteria for CPA funding and Massachusetts Historical Commission Grants. There is extended detail about the criteria for setting up local historic districts.

Srdj also noted that the 3 steps in the Concepts for Place Excellence he discussed at last month’s meeting offer a coherent and complementary framework for addressing our historic preservation goals. It will be recalled that these three steps would:

1. 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.
2. 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.

3. 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,

Rodney noted that Wellesley has an Architectural Review Committee that Newton should emulate. Laura presented an extended briefing on just what steps would be needed to get the planning for a historic district underway. One option to start things would be for the City to set up a Design Review Committee. Rodney made a motion to ask the City to do so, and this was approved unanimously by the Council.

Steve made a motion on an action item that was a follow up to Rodney's motion. The motion was to set up a study committee to investigate for a Historic District and other historical preservation measures. This, too, was approved unanimously by the Council, although it was not defined who would be involved in that committee. The group agreed to hear a further presentation on this topic by Laura, Rodney and Carol at our next meeting.

Village Vision Process Update

Carol Rose gave an update on the presentation she, Chris Steele and Ron Mauri made last month about public involvement in the Village Vision and Envisioning Newton Highlands projects. A community meeting for "A Vision for Newton Highlands" is being scheduled for Thursday evening, June 12th as an opportunity to get this process off the ground and as a potential recruitment tool for volunteers. There are probably many issues and good ideas that members of the Council would benefit from learning from our neighbors and through community participation. Carol talked about the benefits of organizing inputs through small groups within Newton Highlands around the following general questions.

- What about Newton Highlands is most important to you?
- What new things for the Village do you want?
- What trends have you observed in the Highlands that you do not like?

Zervas Update

Steve and Srdj continued last month's discussion about the impacts of a significantly larger student body at a renovated and enlarged Zervas School. They distributed a summary of the goals of the "Zervas Community Engagement Group" that has a 12 point set of proposals for mitigating the costs and adverse impacts that members perceive will affect traffic, students, parents and the neighborhood.

Apparently the School Committee is going ahead quickly with feasibility studies and plans to buy up needed home properties adjacent to the existing school. Srdj and Steve voiced frustration that time was running out rapidly and that there is ample evidence this could be a deeply flawed project. They said we needed a survey and an alternate plan for the school renovation and we need an open forum and open dialogue involving all those affected from both sides of the issue.

A motion was made on an action item to support the alternative plan outlined and articulated by the Zervas Community Engagement Group. The motion was approved unanimously. The NHNAC Zervas group will draft a letter based on the points discussed and approved at tonight's meeting and forward to the school committee and others involved in the process.

Orchard Avenue Name Game

Peter Donnelly and Mary Ann Tricarico from Orchard Avenue in Waban came before the Council to ask our support for their campaign to prevent having the name of their street changed. The City is considering changing the names of several streets and roads in Newton because there is more than one street with the same name and there is a concern that emergency vehicles (police, fire and ambulance) may go to the wrong place, perhaps on the other side of the City.

Peter and Mary Ann pointed out that Orchard Avenue is still a "private road" and is the oldest road in Newton with the name Orchard in it. They are frustrated that the City has determined before the fact that there is no available technology (such as "Enhanced 911" or "Smart 911") that can sort through the confusion of these names in a crisis situation.

They would like our support to at least get the City to fully examine all reasonably available technical alternatives to changing their street name before a final decision is made. All members of the Council felt that was a reasonable request

and Srdj offered to write a letter to the appropriate City officials to let them know we feel this further examination is in order and only fair.

Transportation and Transit Update

Srdj announced that Bill Paille told him that the State has rolled out the latest plan for Needham Street and its extension into the Highlands on Centre Street. There are few significant changes from earlier versions and there will be a public hearing on the proposed plan sometime in the fall.

Robert announced that plans for the “bumpout” on Walnut Street and Station Avenue at the Newton Highlands T Stop has been developed. The handicapped upgrade for the Highlands T Stop is still “a definite go” as the Governor has signed the Bond for it. We still need a lot of fervent advocacy and cajoling to make certain it happens.

Robert is still pushing for a ban on cell phone use while driving in the Village and he thinks it is time for all the signs on the fence to come down. He believes they are an additional distraction to drivers and an eyesore for the community.

Community Engagement Video

Robert presented a proposal from Jacob Sussman of Wayland High School to do a video about Newton Highlands. Jacob has produced several very professional and sophisticated videos and Robert showed one of these to the Council. Robert said that Jacob could produce a really first rate and powerful video for \$2,000.00 which Robert stated to be a fraction of what other firms would charge.

There was an extended discussion. Members acknowledged the professional quality of Jacob’s work. Steven pointed out that Newton High School students might also be capable of producing a video on behalf of Newton Highlands. A discussion ensued regarding the cost of the project. Members seemed open to hearing from Jacob personally and welcomed a further presentation on the proposal at our next meeting. Robert said he would follow up with Jacob on the matter.

Village Day

Plans for Village Day proceed apace. Here are the issues and problems discussed.

- John announced that he is proposing moving the affair from the Square and Rodney Parker Plaza to the Hyde Playground. He believes we can better hold events for kids there that will keep the parents engaged and buying things at our auction.
- Ellen Fisher can't handle the entire T shirt project because of a family illness, but she will do the design and Wes Bockley will produce the shirts.
- Volunteer activities for Council Members were solicited and announced. Looks like good Council participation in all events and programs.
- Steve gave an encouraging update on the Silent Auction.

Other Items

John announced that our Newsletter is going out soon to our electronic mailing list. Half of the funds will be covered by our Area council and half by the Hyde Community Corporation.

John also announced that traffic will be shut off for 15 minutes on parts of Lincoln Street this coming Saturday for the Annual Taiwan Day parade.

The Jamjuli Restaurant is closing because the rent is simply too high for them to maintain a sustainable business.

The New England Book Fair would appreciate our business. Everyone was urged to support it whenever possible.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council