

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, August 7, 2014

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Steven Feinstein, Groot Gregory, Ron Mauri, Carol McPherson, Srdj Nedeljkovic, Robert Solomon

Ex Officio Aldermen: John Rice, Dick Blazer and Cheryl Lappin

Past President: Janice Bourque

Guests:

Laura Fitzmaurice, Historic Newton

Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation

Carol Rose, Newton Council on Aging

Adam Peller, Newton Transportation Advisory "Group"

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

Ron then presented the minutes from July's meeting. These were approved unanimously without correction.

Groot presented the Treasurer's Report. As of July 24, 2014, there was \$8,293.37, all of it in our checking account. During the month, there were two transactions; \$592.36 to JSR for Village Day t-shirts and \$250.00 to Newton Highlands Beautification for flower pot flowers in the village center.

The following items were discussed.

Proposal for Local Historical District

Carol, Rodney, and Laura Fitzmaurice updated their earlier presentations on what we need to do to make portions of Newton Highlands a Historical or Architectural District.

Rodney again outlined the steps and criteria that would have to be taken to set up a local historic district in the Highlands. He told the Area Council that the request by the council to begin the process of establishing a local historic district could be presented to the Historic Commission at the end of this month and that Rodney would request a vote to proceed. The Council voted again to endorse going forward on this 6 yes, 1 no and 2 absent.

Zervas School Working Group

Steve and Srdj updated Council members on developments pertaining to Zervas during the past month. Srdj distributed copies of 4 comparative schematic designs that showed various stages and proposals for the school. These included:

1. Aerial shot by the City of the existing school and grounds
2. Aerial shot of the City's development proposal with 75 parking spaces on land taken by eminent domain, 4 bus drop-off spots, 20 car drop off spots, and other features.
3. Schematic--the City's plan for the main floor of the expanded school building
4. Schematic -- the City's plan for the main floor gym, cafeteria, etc.
5. Schematic--alternative plan developed by Zervas Community Engagement Group and endorsed by our Area Council that rearranges location of school buildings and requires no eminent domain land for parking.

Apparently the School Committee still wants the Board of Aldermen to approve the City's expanded school and parking lot proposal in September. They are going ahead quickly with feasibility studies and with plans to buy up needed home properties adjacent to the existing school. The discussion paralleled that of earlier statements on Zervas, but there was some disagreement on exactly how hard the Council should act to alter the City's plan.

A frank and spirited discussion took place on what specific steps our Area Council should take as a collective body to rally support for the Engagement Group's Alternative Plan. Srdj stated it was vitally important that he and other members of the Engagement Group draft a final easy to understand alternative plan that they expected to get to the Board of Aldermen well in advance of when it would be acting to approve or disapprove the City's proposals to acquire houses and property and provide funding for the project. Time is really running short and Srdj thought the Board might be asked to vote sometime in mid-September.

Village Vision Process Update

Srdj gave a quick update on the Village Vision Process outline he initially presented to the Council in June. Srdj focused in on how we might develop and articulate specific property based zoning changes needed to make our visions a reality.

Transportation and Transit Update

Adam Peller gave a power point presentation on a proposal for constructing a long dividing island in the middle of the long, wide stretch of Center Street that leads past Allerton Road. Adam outlined the specific benefits of such a project in terms of slowing down and directing traffic in a more orderly fashion along this part of Center where vehicles often to speed well in excess of the speed limit. Council members thought the proposal was well thought out and well grounded.

The only drawback, as Adam acknowledged, was that the City seemed ready to proceed with the “bump outs” and crosswalk improvements that the Council had earlier endorsed and pushed for. It might be difficult to hit them with this at this time, but the Council seemed eager to push this if the right approach at the right time could be pinned down.

Robert reported that he met with the Mayor who has fully endorsed and signed off on the handicapped upgrade for the Highlands T Stop. As noted in earlier minutes, the Governor had already signed the Bond for it and it was just the Mayor designating it a top priority that put the final pieces in place. We still need a lot of fervent advocacy and cajoling to make certain it happens. The Mayor wants to hold a community meeting on this and other transit issues and he encouraged the Council and other advocates to “turn your people out.”

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 Center Street. There are no significant changes from earlier versions and there will be a public hearing on the proposed plan sometime in the fall.

John announced that Bill Paille should be available to meet with the Council in September or October. John believes that the bump outs and other traffic calming measures at Allerton and Center Streets will be constructed this fall. If it doesn't happen, the Area Council should reach out to Bill to encourage movement of this and other transportation projects.

Other Items

1. John reported that the Summer Concert Series has been a big success with a diverse set of cultural and musical programs that includes two performances by the Boston Shakespeare Performers.
2. Preliminary meetings are underway with Parks and Recreation on the Annual Halloween Party at Hyde Center.
3. A proposal to allocate \$1,000.00 for a hose system to water the Officer English Garden was approved unanimously.
4. Bruce Blakeley on Richardson Road is concerned about the uneven care the MWRA gives to certain stretches of the Sudbury Aqueduct open space that run close to his home. John said he would raise the issue with Mark Welch at Urban Forestry and Jennifer Steele with the Conservation Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council