

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

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

Absent: Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Ron Mauri

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

Guests:

Andreae Downs, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation
Dianne Khalaj, Newton Highlands Village Merchants Coalition
Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Chris Steele, Newton Economic Development Commission
Brian Yates, Alderman at Large, Ward 5

Barbara 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 October's meeting. It was moved that the minutes be accepted as read. These were approved unanimously 7-0 by those present without change.

Groot then presented the Treasurer's Report. There was no change from the October report that noted we had \$8,293.37 in our accounts, \$5543.37 of which is currently available. The only change was that the bill final bill for Survey Monkey came in at \$104.00 instead of the \$78.00. In October, we voted to pay Steve Feinstein the \$78.00 he spent from his own money to set up our Survey Monkey program before we decided to move on to another outreach program. A motion was made by Bob to reimburse Steve the full \$104.00 for his expenses on Survey Monkey. This was approved on a 7-0 vote.

The following items were discussed:

Transportation and Transit Update

Robert updated the Area Council on major transportation and transit developments since our last meeting. These included:

1. The Newton Highlands community meeting on handicapped and other transit related problems with MBTA and City officials has been scheduled for later this month. We are shooting for Friday, November 21th. Jim Fries, John Lojack and Bill Paille are fine with that date. We are working to set up a meeting with Jim, Srdj and Robert to set guidelines and a final date and time for this meeting. The Mayor is planning to attend.
2. Construction of traffic and safety improvements at Lincoln and Walnut and at Allerton and Centre Streets has been pushed forward to next spring. A higher level priority forced the City to delay work that had been schedule for this fall.
3. The MBTA is going to install handicapped assist lifts at the Chestnut Hill Station as part of an ongoing effort to improve handicapped access throughout the System. Plans are also underway for a major supermarket to be located at the old Sears Building near the Fenway stop. This will provide much needed food shopping opportunities for people who rely on public transit to take them to shopping. The absence of food stores along the D line has been a source of frustration for many residents who do not have cars.

143 Lincoln Street

Discussion next turned to a request by developer Charles DeMarco to convert a nonconforming two-family dwelling at 143 Lincoln Street into two attached dwellings that would exceed allowed FAR requirements. The area is currently located in a single-family zoning district. In order to construct the project as proposed, the applicant must obtain a "special permit" from the Board. Copies of an architect's plan for the project were distributed. Several members of our Council commented that the very large size of the proposed project would probably change the character of the surrounding neighborhood. It was also noted that there were neighbors that were quite concerned about the project's size and impact on the neighborhood and on Lincoln Street itself.

As a first step, Steve Feinstein will touch base with Larry Rosenberg who lives close to close to the site and who is apparently organizing opposition to the size and scope of the project. Steve will try and ascertain how many neighbors are concerned about the project and what they would like us to do to help address their legitimate concerns. A public meeting must be held on the proposal and John Rice will email us about when this will take place.

Proposal for a Local Historical District

Rodney announced that two meetings of those interested in working on establishing the Local Historical District in the Highlands had been held since our October meeting. The required documentation could be a very expensive and time consuming project, but we are looking for ways to fund what has to be done and to simplify and streamline things as much as possible. We are getting a lot of help from the City and from Aldermen Yates and Rice, Historic Newton and former members of the Historic Commission. We've been working particularly hard to solicit information and insights from citizens of Newton and others who worked on setting up historic districts in other villages. The next meeting of the planning group will be this coming Monday, November 10th at the Brigham House. We may be able to post a preliminary Historic District proposal for feedback from the community after Monday's meeting. But this is by no means certain.

It's also clear that we need to hold an open public meeting with residents of Newton Highlands before trying to docket anything. Another planning meeting is scheduled for this coming Monday at the Brigham House and we hope it will produce a firmer strategy and clearer direction for us to proceed.

Zervas School Working Group

Steve reported on new developments regarding Zervas. It was generally agreed that much of the City's plan for Zervas is on a fast track. Members of the NHNAC Working Group believe that we should try and get constructive design changes for the Site Plan including those that pertain to alternative parking spaces on Beacon Street. This site plan will be submitted to a Finance & Public Facilities joint meeting on Wednesday, November 12th. All interested parties should attend.

An extended and vigorous Discussion revolved around the opinion held by some that the Conservation Commission would rule against parking in the rear of the School close to the wetlands. Steve questioned why putting parking there could not be done with appropriate mitigation measures and Bob asked if putting parking in the rear couldn't be accomplished with essentially the same protection for wetlands as putting the parking adjacent to Beacon Street where the 3 soon to be purchased properties are located. John said that the Conservation Commission was always going to approve whatever proposal would afford the best possible protection to wetlands. It favored parking on the 3 lots for that reason.

Andreae stated that parking at Zervas still hasn't been completely decided. The City may still propose a Parking Management Plan that would limit and regulate further the number of cars allowed to park at the School.

Mayor's Meeting with Area Councils

Steve, Groot and Barbara led the discussion recounting last week's meeting between the Mayor and members of all the City's area councils. Much of the meeting focused on zoning reform with the Mayor proclaiming that it is going forward as quickly as possible. Phase 1 of the Zoning Reform process is nearing an end. This has mainly been an attempt to look at all the constituent parts of the existing zoning requirements and organize them for further examination. Actual changes to Zoning won't take place until Phase 2 is underway.

He said that there is consideration underway that would divide the City into 5 zones or categories based on the current character of a particular village, neighborhood or region and what the desired forms of development are. The Mayor did not elaborate on what the criteria would be for each of these five categories. The Mayor also stated that the City might be exploring the feasibility of setting aside 1.5 percent of the area of the City for affordable housing, which is an "alternative criteria" to the 10% metric.

Sudbury Aqueduct Walking Trail

Andreae Downs from the Waban Neighborhood Area Council came to this meeting to essentially solicit our support for a proposal asking the MWRA to authorize and permit public access to that portion of the Sudbury Aqueduct which runs through Newton Upper Falls, Waban and Newton Highlands. Andrea submitted three pertinent papers and documents pertaining to the permitting process and outreach to homeowners abutting the Sudbury Aqueduct in Newton Highlands. These documents included:

1. The MWRA's Guidelines governing public access to all MWRA lands which must be followed by all groups and entities before the Authority will approve and permit public access.
2. Maps that show the portions of the Sudbury Aqueduct from Framingham to Chestnut Hill that are available for public access.

3. A map showing the length of the Sudbury Reservoir through Newton from Echo Bridge at Hemlock Gorge to Chestnut Hill with the location of abutters in the Newton Highlands portion.
4. A letter from the Waban Area Council to Mayor Warren asking him to submit an official request to the MWRA to install wooden stairs over the Sudbury Aqueduct between Stanley Road in Waban and Canterbury Road in Newton Highlands.

The main initiatives Andreae hoped our Council would take would be to add our support to the request for opening the Highlands portion of the Aqueduct to public access and for constructing wooden stairs over the aqueduct at the Waban-Newton Highlands border. The real task for our Council members would be to canvass every abutter along the Highlands portion of the Aqueduct to allay fears about what public access would entail and hopefully to solicit their support.

An extended discussion took place on all for items and the Council voted 7-0 to accept and approve every measure and proposal Andreae presented. A motion was made by Groot to:

Canvas or write every abutter along the Highlands portion of the Aqueduct to inform them of the benefits, safeguards and responsibilities of permitting these spaces for public access and to solicit their support for responsibly opening these lands to public use.

The motion was seconded by Bob and carried unanimously on a 7-0 vote.

Outreach to Merchants and Landlords

Chris Steele from the Economic Development Commission reported on a meeting that he, John Rice and Newton Economic Development Director Nancy Hyde had with three owners of business properties in the Village to discuss ways that we might be able to direct more diverse types of businesses into the Highlands. This was only a start, but perhaps a promising one. The merchants believe that the City and our area council should look at ways we might help create a more attractive environment that would draw people into the village during after hour periods by for example, streamlining and expediting parking permits for businesses and by amenities such as better lighting. The merchants suggested that the two sides meet on a quarterly basis to continue this discussion.

Other Items

- A planning meeting involving our Area Council, the Hyde Center and the Newton Highlands merchants will convene in January and we will let Sallee from the Waban Area Council know our results for Silent Auction planning.
- There was a brief discussion of how the “Envisioning Newton Highlands” report might be the basis for guiding a village initiative by the City’s Planning Department. We will ask Srdj for an electronic copy of our Envisioning report for submission to the Mayor, Planning Department and other Area Councils.
- John reported that plans for next year’s Summer Concerts at the Hyde Bandstand will also include a patriotic program with a military band over Memorial Day weekend to kick off the entire series.
- John reported that work on this winter’s ice rink is well into the final planning stages. The only change from last month’s report is that the rink will be somewhat smaller than we were informed it would be last month and would be closer to the bandstand. A proposal was made that the Hyde Center and our Area Council each donate \$500.00 to cover costs for constructing the rink. This was approved unanimously without further discussion on a 7-0 vote.
- John also reported that planning for the Soup Social is proceeding on pace for Saturday Evening, January 24th. The big change from last month’s report is that it will be merged with a major fundraiser for the Hyde Bandstand. As a result, the Hyde Center will take over full responsibility for organizing and setting up this combined event.
- There was a wrap up on the Halloween Haunted House which by every account was a smashing success.
- Further discussion of installing the hose system at Officer English Garden was postponed until December’s meeting.

- It was reported that talks are underway between Brookline's Anna's Taqueria and a Highlands landlord to set up a new fast food restaurant in the space previously occupied by Baker's Best and the Rox Diner. Several members believe this very popular addition will bring a lot of new traffic into the Village that will likely benefit other businesses as well.
- Dianne reported that the 2nd Newton Highlands Holiday Stroll and Sing Along will be held the evening of Friday, December 5th and will be co-sponsored with the Newton Cultural Alliance.
- Steve further updated us on the progress of our Google Electronic Community outreach program and minor updates to our website. We now have more than 100 participants and some of the discussions are quite lively.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council