

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, December 4, 2014

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

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

Guests:

Arnie Cohen, 19 Mountfort Road

Lesley Cohen, 19 Mountfort Road

Rena Getz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Mildred Hutchinson, Newton Highlands Community Development Corporation

Dianne Khalaj, Newton Highlands Village Merchants Coalition

Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Maureen Meagher, Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Larry Rosenberg, 153 Lincoln Street

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 November's meeting. It was moved that the minutes be accepted as read. These were approved unanimously 5-0 by those present without change.

Groot then presented the Treasurer's Report. As of November 24, we had \$8,249.37 in our accounts, but \$2,500.00 of that is restricted to projects on the Walnut Street Bridge. In effect, we really only have \$3,997.37 unencumbered cash to potentially budget over the next several months. The problem is that Village Day revenues were under projections. The Silent Auction drew fewer bidders than in past years, and several bidders never came around to pick up and pay for the items they placed bids on.

The following items were discussed:

Paul Green's Suggestions

Srdj and Groot reported on a phone call received from one of our constituents, Paul Green, who is concerned that there may be a lack of attention paid by the NHNAC to the area south of Route 9 regarding programs and agenda items developed and discussed by our Area Council. He believes we should engage in advocating for more projects on the side of the Village south of Route 9. He also had questions about financial records from past years of the Area Council.

Rodney, who has been involved with the Council first in the 1970's, noted that he knew of no detailed record keeping of income and expenses during these early years. John stated that we have indeed given attention to programs and activities south of Route 9, the most recent being the Area Council's support of the complete rehabilitation of Newton Highlands Playground which has been a top priority for south of Route 9 residents for many years. Srdj also pointed to our successful effort in 2013-14 to bring additional parts of these neighborhoods into our service area so that residents on those streets are now eligible to formally run for office for the Area Council. A number of Council members suggested that we make a greater effort in encouraging residents in that area to run in the next election for Area Council.

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 put on hold until the final design for the Newton Highlands Station is completed.
2. Construction of traffic and safety improvements at Lincoln and Walnut and at Allerton and Centre Streets are still on schedule for this coming spring. New items since last month include plans to establish 3 additional pedestrian crossings on Centre Street. The City is also looking at new pedestrian safety signs, bold lines on the streets, and perhaps other traffic calming controls at Hartford and Lincoln Streets.

143 Lincoln Street

Discussion continued from the NHNAC November meeting on a developer's plan to seek a "special permit" from the Board of Aldermen to transform a

nonconforming two-family dwelling at 143 Lincoln Street into two attached dwellings that would exceed allowed FAR requirements.

It will be recalled from November's meeting that several Council members were deeply concerned 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 and Mountfort Streets specifically.

It will also be recalled from that meeting that Steve Feinstein agreed to touch base with Larry Rosenberg who lives close to close to the site and who is apparently organizing the neighborhood to provide further input as part of the Special Permit process, particularly regarding neighborhood impacts related to the proposed size and scope of the project. Steve also offered to work with the neighbors to ascertain their concerns about the project and how they would like the Area Council to help address their concerns. A public meeting has been scheduled to be held on the proposal and John Rice will email us about when this will take place.

Larry Rosenberg was present at the meeting along with Arnie and Lesley Cohen. All live next to or near 143 Lincoln Street. They voiced considerable displeasure with the scope and size of the proposed development and the impact it would have on the character of their streets and neighborhood. Rodney stated his opinion that the proposed development would have "deplorable consequences for the neighborhood and Lincoln Street.

Ron stated that the developer would have to get a special permit to put in something this big since it called for two attached dwellings where there is currently only one, along with a double garage and carport.

The members of the Area Council then engaged in a discussion on how to react to this project, especially regarding whether we support or oppose the issuance of a Special Permit. The consensus was that we did want to oppose it.

Ron and Rodney also argued that approval of a project of this magnitude could trigger a "domino effect" that could affect construction throughout Newton Highlands. It could set a negative precedent that would set a new standard for building other large attached dwelling homes because the scope and dimensions would have already been approved for this Lincoln Street project. This is what has already happened in parts of West Newton and the results have intrinsically altered the character and ambience of several streets in that village.

Ron emphasized that the immediate tasks at hand for the Area Council regarding this project are two-fold: (1) to inform as many homeowners as possible in the vicinity of 143 Lincoln Street to understand fully what this project will mean for their street and neighborhood; and (2) to draft a memo for the Board of Aldermen to fully understand what a serious threat this one project poses for our entire village because of the serious considerations noted above.

An extended discussion took place on formulating a workable strategy and other items directly and indirectly related to this issue. Groot proposed that we draft a letter to the Board outlining our findings and observations and stressing that the proposed 143 Lincoln Street development is simply out of character with the neighborhood and just doesn't "fit in". Srdj asked Ron if he would draft such a letter and Ron said he would. Bob made a formal motion for the Council to ask Ron to draft said letter. The motion was approved unanimously on a 7-0 vote.

Proposal for a Local Historical District

Rodney gave a short update on the results of the recent meeting of the Newton Highlands Historic District planning Subcommittee that was held on November 10 at the Brigham House. The agenda item was an extended discussion and vigorous but friendly debate over what parts of Newton Highlands should be recommended for inclusion in a future Local Historic District and how large the proposed District should be.

Rodney stated that some on the subcommittee felt we should propose a large part of the Highlands for inclusion in the new District and pare it back if necessary during discussions with the City and neighbors. The argument was that we should put forward an ambitious proposal at first and compromise down if necessary. Others felt, however, that the best shot of launching a District with broad support from City Hall and within the Village would be to start with a set of streets and roadways around Lincoln Street to include the oldest and some of the most stately parts of the Highlands. Proponents of this approach also noted that the City had indicated that it didn't have the resources to oversee a really large part of the village, but that a smaller area would probably be acceptable and manageable

Bob then distributed a map of Newton Highlands that he presented for discussion purposes only. It had been presented first at the November 10th meeting of the Historic District Subcommittee. Bob's annotated map included a set of streets and roadways and the Lincoln Street business district.

The tentative proposed area is bounded by Hartford Street and Erie Avenue on the south down to Woodward Street, then up both sides of Lincoln Street to Walnut Street and north and west to include all roadways to the Sudbury Aqueduct, Mountfort Road and Oak Terrace and then to include all roadways between Lincoln Street and Duncklee Road. These include Hillside Road, Raeburn Terrace, Terrace Avenue, Chester Street, and Columbus Street, Standish Road, Forrest Street, Bowdoin Street and the side of Walnut Street from Duncklee Road to Lincoln Street. The majority of Area Council members were supporting of this initial proposal.

Rodney then proposed that the Council approve the sum of \$300.00 to compensate Gretchen Schuler for her invaluable support and guidance in launching the campaign for a local historic district in the Highlands. Rodney detailed her extensive professional background at successfully establishing local districts in Newton and throughout the northeast. We need her support to see our way through this, Rodney concluded. The \$300.00 would be allocated for Gretchen's assistance and participation in 4 of our upcoming planning session @\$75.00 a meeting. Srdj seconded the motion with an addendum that the Council should also voice support for everything the planning group is doing to push this forward.

The vote to approve funding for Gretchen Schuler's services was approved 6-0 with one abstention.

Plans were also discussed for a general community meeting of Newton Highlands residents to be held on Sunday, February 8th from 2-4pm at the Hyde Center. At the earlier planning meeting, John stated that he would be willing to include an announcement letter about the meeting in the upcoming Hyde Center Newsletter that is mailed to every household in the village. Rodney and Bob stated that they would draft this letter and get it to John by a deadline of early January.

Zervas School Working Group

Srdj reported on new developments regarding Zervas. The Project Team's proposal for a new 78K square foot, 3-story building has been approved by the Board of Aldermen. The purchase and demolition of the three existing homes near the school has also been approved.

It is unlikely that any further changes will be made to the Zervas site plan. Students are due to move out of the building by January 2016 and the new building is anticipated to be available for occupancy in September 2017. It is likely that there will be redistricting of streets and neighborhoods to achieve the

goal of having close to 500 students in the new building. Although not formally announced, there is a belief that students in Newton Highlands near and west of Walnut Street who now attend Mason Rice will be re-assigned to the new Zervas district.

Unfortunately, none of the recommendations put forth by the NHNAC Zervas Working Group beginning in the summer of 2014 had been adopted. These recommendations and proposals were as follows:

- Parking: reduce parking in the front setback and put it in the rear to encourage a safer, more pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Orientation of the building: reorient the building towards the majority of pedestrians who come from the south side, rather than towards the parking lot. Also, orient the gym to be adjacent to the playing fields and not the parking lot.
- Entrance and access to the building: place the main entrance on the sunny south side and not the shady, dark north side where snow and ice will be slow to melt in the winter.
- Transportation plan: remove the unnecessary, inefficient and potentially dangerous right turn lane from Beethoven to Beacon, and do not widen the roadway as this will not improve traffic flow and may worsen safety. Also, orient buses to approach the school from Beethoven Avenue as they do now, rather than taking a longer and more circuitous route on Beacon Street.
- Lack of adequate windows and natural lighting in the proposed school: increase the size and number of windows to allow for natural lighting, especially in the library, the cafeteria, and the gymnasium.

Council members expressed their frustration at the lack of implementation of ANY of the recommendations proposed by the NHNAC working group. Many Area Council members felt that the school site selection and design process failed to adequately consider community concerns about walkable neighborhood schools and instead proceeded to implement a greatly enlarged commuter school in the midst of an otherwise quiet, residential neighborhood adjacent to a park and wetlands.

In spite of the failure to affect the outcome of the Zervas site plan, the majority of Council members believed that engagement in the process was worthwhile and are hopeful that bringing up some of these issues increased the general awareness of factors that are important to community members.

The Area Council thanked the NHNAC Zervas Working Group for its efforts.

Other Items

- Srdj talked briefly about the future of zoning reform in Newton now that the Phase 1 review of existing requirements is in the process of being completed. Area Council members agreed that the NHNAC will set up a “working group” to address how zoning, planning and development concerns of Newton Highlands will be addressed as part of the zoning reform process. The Working Group will work to further review and develop materials as part of the ongoing “Envisioning Newton Highlands” process that the Area Council has been working on over the past year or so, and will make every effort possible to engage the broader community in this process.
- Groot announced that Eunice from Bread and Chocolate has requested \$250.00 to cover general activities by the merchants during Village Day. Council members were in agreement of being supportive to village merchants, but felt we should approve that amount upon receiving more information about the specific project for which the money is being requested. We would then vote to approve the request.
- John reported that work on this winter’s ice rink is well into the final planning stages. Paul Gilbert is donating his time for construction and the Area Council will allocate funds for one of Paul’s employees to help set up the rink, as well as to cover the cost of any materials that may be required. A motion was made by Groot that we appropriate \$800.00 for our portion of the construction and maintenance costs of the ice rink. This carried on a 7-0 vote.
- John also announced that we will have some very nice lights in the village center on Lincoln Street, hopefully at some point in 2015, thanks to the efforts of both the merchants and the City.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council