

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Meeting Minutes, April 4, 2013

Attending: Rodney Barker, Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Srdjan Nedeljkovic (arrived 9 pm), Greg Reibman

Ex Officio Aldermen: John Rice and Dick Blazer

Guests:

Rena Getz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Mildred Hutchinson, 92 Lincoln Street
Nelson Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Sallee Lipshutz, Waban Neighborhood Area Council
Ron Mauri, Newton Parking & Residential Development
Carol Rose, Newton Council on Aging
Robert Solomon, MBTA Accessibility Issues

Barbara called the meeting to order at 7:40 after determining that a quorum was present. Bob presented the minutes from March's meeting that were accepted with two corrections.

Groot then presented the Treasurer's Report. There was no change from March's report. As of February 22, 2013, there was \$7,418.20 in our checking account and \$15.00 remaining from cash donations. We still owe \$300.00 for last year's Haunted House and \$100.00 for expenses related to the Council's Parking Survey.

1. Issues Related to Signs on the Walnut Street MBTA Bridge

Groot reported that the Council is now officially out of the business of regulating signs on the bridge. Barbara stated that she has talked with Annabelle and they plan to meet in the near future to determine her specific concerns and intentions. Barbara stated that, in general, we should support businesses in any way possible and do so by specifically giving Village merchants a free hand to decide what they want to place on their section of the bridge.

2. Add A Lane Briefing by Proto Waban Neighborhood Area Council

Three members of the Proto Waban Neighborhood Area Council updated us on their concerns about the impact on traffic in Newton's from the State's Add a Lane plan for the Route 128/Route 9 Intersection.

Proto Waban Council member Sallee Lipshutz updated the Council on the impacts of the 128 Add A Lane on traffic in Newton generally and more specifically on roadways that run through Waban and Newton Highlands. She read from the draft of a prepared statement that the Waban members plan to hand deliver to the Mayor and other City officials. She focused on Route 9 traffic and traffic on side streets leading off it including Woodward, Elliott, and Quinnoequin Road.

The State has designed a very impressive reconstruction at the 128/9 intersection itself, but has not adequately addressed mitigation for the project's impact on traffic in streets and neighborhoods along the Route 9 corridor. The project "wiggles along Newton's Western border" and includes a set of traffic lights that will almost certainly cause traffic backups and dump a lot of traffic onto our roadways from motorists trying to bypass the inevitable delays.

The Proto Waban Council is primarily concerned about the failure of state agencies to communicate with Newton residents about the impacts of the project on their streets and neighborhoods and the failure to include Newton's residents and Newton officials at State public hearings. They also feel that reaction to these traffic impacts by both the Board of Aldermen and the Executive Office of Newton's Government has been detached and essentially passive. The City's Transportation Director feels that the State's plan is a "done deal" that the City cannot change.

Sallee included her presentation by stating that one of her primary goals was to enlist support from both the Newton Highlands and Upper Falls councils to ask the City Government generally and the Mayor specifically to become directly involved in asking the State to develop effective traffic mitigation measures before construction at the interchange gets underway. Several Council members spoke in support of Waban's proposal.

A motion was made as follows.

“The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council recommends that the Proto-Waban Area Council, the Newton Highlands Area Council and the upper Falls Area Council join forces to find a solution together by meeting as a sub-committee of all three local areas expecting negative impact from the DOT 128-9 re-designs.

Further, the Newton Highlands Council recommended a joint meeting of this sub-committee with Mayor Warren.”

The motion was approved unanimously by all Council members present.

3. Village Day and Silent Auction

John is beginning the process of obtaining all the necessary permits for Village Day and organizing rental space for booths. One big problem is that the company that has organized the kiddy rides and other young folk entertainment events at the last several Village Days is not available to help with this year’s activities. We think there’s a promising chance that another company will step in.

It’s imperative that we have something for the kids in place in order to hold parents with young children in the Square for the afternoon’s Silent Auction. We hope we can sell enough tickets on the “Jumpy Machines” to break even. The success of the Silent Auction depends on this.

We should decide at next month’s meeting whether to give our Annual Award to a Village business or to an individual.

4. Community Meeting Rescheduled to May 21st

Barbara announced that the Community Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 21st at the Women’s Club beginning at 7:30 PM. Items that have already been placed on the agenda include:

- Outreach to Village Business Community
- Proposed Business/Commuter Parking Plan and Parking Survey

- Impacts of the Add A Lane Project
- Water Quality Issues at Crystal Lake
- Plans for Summer Concerts at Hyde Playground

5. Hyde Bandstand

John reported that Commodore Construction is still on target to complete the bandstand by Village Day. The formal dedication will take place appropriately on “Flag Day”, Friday, June 14th. A dozen or so musical groups are ready to perform for the summer season and we are working on enlisting the services of some very talented theatrical groups from both Newton North and South to put on live theatre at Hyde.

6. Cold Springs Dog Park Issues

Barbara attended two contentious meetings of the Off Leash Committee at City Hall. She announced that the City now has a dog officer on the trails, but that he has no power to issue citations to dog owners for any violations. Bob DeRuobeis added that most police officers don’t particularly like to be on dog details.

Barbara also reported that Lee McIntyre, who advocated strenuously for dog owners at our February meeting, was there to argue against placing any kind of fence at Cold Springs although he was open to a natural fence in the form of shrubs and trees. Rodney and others present simply believe that a natural fence would be totally ineffective in separating dogs from other park owners. Barbara and Rodney said they would continue to follow up on this.

7. MBTA Accessibility Update

Robert Solomon provided another update on MBTA Accessibility issues that built on his report at our March meeting and Srdj’s presentation in February. He continues to work with Bill McClellan of the T on an accelerated training program to improve the time it takes to put wheelchairs on MBTA Trolleys and buses. This is showing real progress. Last month, Robert reported that the time had been cut from close to half an hour to about 5 minutes. This month, the time has been reduced to little more than a minute.

Robert has prepared three articles for the Tab describing the trials and tribulations of trying to maneuver wheelchairs in the City's crosswalks. These are now in the paper's pipeline and the first article should appear before our May meeting.

Robert continues to work with Bill McClellan on structural improvements in the lifts at Chestnut Hill. He also proposed that the City send the MBTA a letter thanking them and Bill McClellan for what they have done to date.

8. Parking and Transportation Related Issues

Srdj noted that the biggest hurdle with our business/commuter parking plan may be its recommendation that proceeds from the on-street parking permits be allocated to the Highlands Area Council. But he also believes that following the new parking plan involving on street parking around Newton North, that transportation and parking officials are increasingly willing to consider comprehensive village plans for parking rather than an almost ad-hoc street by street approach.

Discussion turned to parking problems on Woodcliff Road and at the intersection of Centre Street and Allerton Road. Dick Blazer stated that it was imperative for Woodcliff Residents to fully organize, determine what specific on-street parking restrictions they prefer and make Newton officials aware of these preferences.

Transportation Commissioner Bill Paille will be at the May Meeting. Among other things, we anticipate that they will make a presentation on specific safety, traffic improvement and traffic calming measures they believe should be put in place at the Centre Street/Allerton Road Intersection.

9. Non-Conforming Lot Briefing by Ron Mauri

Ron Mauri reported that the full Board of Aldermen voted overwhelmingly, as expected, to endorse the decision by the City's Zoning Board of Appeals to revoke permits for the construction of two houses on Goddard Street that were already under construction. There are still several unresolved problems because of other improper building permits that were issued by the City.

10. Update on Project Envisioning Newton Highlands

Srdj distributed a further draft of “Envisioning Newton Highlands which asks all Highlands residents to consider what we want our Village to look like in the future and what improvements are needed to make that a reality. It considers specific areas in the Village are most in need of improvement and what specific transportation, renovations and other initiatives are needed to fulfill this vision.

The report looks at 12 specific locations and their “perceived” positive and negative attributes along with 11 locations where specific transportation improvements are needed to enhance the overall village.

Srdj asked all Council members to look this report over carefully and have comments ready for May’s meeting.

11. Winter Farmers’ Market Update

John reported that the Farmers’ Market at the Hyde Center continues to be successful and well attended. There were 250 customers last week. Plans are underway to move the market outdoors in May when the weather improves.

12. Newton Sidewalk Cafes Get Boost

Srdj reported that earlier in the week the Board of Aldermen approved a new sidewalk café ordinance that essentially creates a “one step” application process for restaurants seeking to have outdoor dining. There will be looser regulations and no seasonal restrictions. Groot said this was a “win/win” for just about everyone. These new rules also allow a restaurant to offer outdoor dining in any season which includes the winter months if an unexpected warm spell occurs. 26 restaurants offered sidewalk dining this last year, but this number is expected to expand considerably with the new rules. O’Hara’s has already stated that it is eager to expand outdoor seating.

13. Rodney Appointed to an Aldermanic Committee examining Area Councils

For almost 40 years, Newton Highlands had the only functioning neighborhood area council in Newton. During the past two years another area council has been established in Upper Falls and 2 others are being formed. The Program and Services Committee has set up a subcommittee to examine how Area Councils can best function and they have asked each area council to send a representative. Srdj asked Rodney to be our representative in large measure because he has been on the Highlands Council since it was established in the mid 70's. Rodney said he was pleased to accept the nomination.

13. Robert Solomon Elected to Fill Council Vacancy

Robert Solomon was elected to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Ken Leonetti last month. He was the only candidate. Robert said he wanted to use his position "positively" to "make good things happen for handicapped people and for all other residents who live and work in the Village." The vote to elect Robert was unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Burke, Secretary,
Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council