

MINUTES OF THE UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL

DATE: October 18, 2018

LOCATION: Emerson Community Center

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anil Adyanthaya	Nina Kochs
Julie Irish	Marie Jackson
Maxine Bridger	Susan Huffman
Jeff Riklin	Jack Neville

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Carol Stapleton

PUBLIC:

Betsy Hewitt	K. Brearly	David Ohanian
John Bulian	Leslie Friedman	Bill Humphrey
Jen Kohl	Jerry Reilly	Jane Frantz

A. Approval of Minutes

September minutes were approved.

B. Public Comment

The proposed new Senior Center has morphed into a Multigenerational Center. So, a petition is being proposed which requests that a section of the new facility be set aside specifically for seniors. On Nov. 16 there will be a discussion at the Emerson Community Center about the new facility. There is also a meeting next Tuesday at the Walnut Street Center. More info about the times of the meetings can be found at the City website.

The bocce course is being built on the Greenway near the Depot. The Upper Falls community is building the bocce court with a donation of materials from the Dept. of Public Works and financial help from the CDC. Saturday morning volunteers will help Jeff finish building the frame. 3 to 4 people are needed for this. Then, volunteers are needed to shovel stone dust into the frame. They also need rakes, wheelbarrows and shovels. There is no bocce team yet but there is already a challenge from Nonantum.

C. Treasurer's Report

The net amount is \$4503, and with in-kind added, \$5408. We received \$2078.40 from Northland, and \$24 from the raffle.

D. Presentation by Opt-Out Newton

Karen Sherman, a concerned Newton resident spoke on behalf of Opt-Out Newton. She said that the Police, the Fire Dept. and Health and Human Services supported the Opt-Out position. She claimed that alcohol and tobacco are the two most deadly substances because they are legal and so normalized and widely used. She mentioned the brains of children under 25 are primed for addiction. Also, not enough is known about long-term effects of marijuana use. We do not know what a safe level of THC is. She also mentioned that that joints today are 20% to 30% THC, rather than just 3%. She is worried that Marijuana will be cheaper on the black market, and that the perceived risk of harm goes down when something is legal and widely available. She said that smoking is a turn-off, but edibles aren't. She claimed that users have a false sense of confidence in their driving and that marijuana traffic fatalities went up 150% in Colorado.

She mentioned that the host agreements expire in 5 years and that the revenue they bring to the City can only be used for related expenses. In Colorado revenue is less than the costs of the problems, she claimed. Dedham opted out.

The marijuana stores will have to be windowless, cash only, and an ID will be needed to enter. The Opt-Out group is not against medical marijuana, or growing your own, or use. They feel Newton should opt out now. We can opt-in later after we see what happens in other communities.

There are two questions on the ballot: one is to opt out and have no recreational marijuana stores, and the other is to have 2 to 4. The Opt-Out people want a yes vote on Opt-Out and a no on 2 to 4. Without these Newton has to allow up to 8. Garden City has already applied for a recreational use license.

Q: Have a vast majority of communities opted out?

Comment: Brookline, Watertown, Somerville, Cambridge have not opted out. Needham voted no and opted out but will watch and wait.

Claim: Some people who voted for legalization didn't mean stores in their neighborhood.

E. Presentation by Responsible First Step

Jerry Reilly and Jane Frantz spoke for Responsible First Step. He noted that a large chunk of the previous argument should have been made in 2016, when the legalization vote was on the ballot. But marijuana is now legal in MA, so not part of the discussion. The problem of driving under the influence of marijuana is not a new problem. Recreational marijuana is here and problems of driving have nothing to do with stores in Newton, he said. Some people who support Opt-Out didn't want to legalize it, but it is here.

So, stores in our community. It was pointed out that the stores are well-regulated by the state, and locally, as to look, hours, etc. not like liquor stores. These stores will be paying extra taxes that no other stores will be paying, 3% to the City and a dedicated tax to cover other costs that may arise. In an empty shabby shop Cypress Tree will put a nice store, Jerry said. If you are a vegetarian don't go to a butcher shop.

Susan commented that there is a medical marijuana shop in Brookline Village, with 0 problems.

The Responsible First Step People recommend a no vote on opt-out and a yes vote on 2 to 4.

Jane Frantz recommended voting for 2 to 4 because it is a nice compromise. She pointed out that it will be difficult to get a license. The stores will not be in village centers or within ½ mile of each other.

It was mentioned the stores will need special permits.

Question: Jerry, your argument is we should do this because it is legal. Why should we do this just because it is legal?

Jerry: Newton voted to legalize it. Newton shouldn't regulate any legal retail place (McDonalds isn't regulated though it sells unhealthy food). What do we gain by opting out? The problems are state wide; they will still be there whether Newton opts out or not.

Jeff: There will be tax revenues and the stores will be controlled, regulated. We can insure quality.

Susan pointed out that if Newton residents had to drive to Framingham, or some other town to buy edibles, they might well drive back stoned. Better if they could buy stuff here.

Comment: They are opening places in Brookline and Framingham. Why shouldn't we get the revenue. The social problems will be there in any case, but we won't have the money to solve them.

Needham Selectman, John Bulian, said: Don't underestimate the value of money. You are still fighting the 2016 battle. Don't underestimate the value of job creation.

Question: How many MD's who want to opt out prescribe opioids?

Comment: Revenues that go to the State go into the general pot.

Question: Has anybody's mind been changed?

Comment: I came to hear the other side.

Comment: These are new stores, new businesses.

Comment: People are selling pot in Newton at the High Schools and Middle Schools and these sellers have guns and pay no taxes.

F. Status of Zoning Amendments for Recreational Marijuana Establishments

It is recommended they be in commercial strips outside of village centers. Places not recommended include village centers, mixed use areas, buildings with residential units, and manufacturing zones. There is to be a ½ mile buffer between stores and the stores are required to have security plans in place checked by the police. State law allows communities to work out their own zoning.

They will not be allowed on Needham Street near Dedham Street because of the playground.

G. Proposal for Area councils to Collaborate on New Art Center Improvements and the Wider Role of the Arts in Newton.

Needs to be brainstorming of the role of arts in Newton and improvements to the Art Center. The Art Center was involved with the Greenway art. The Art Center building needs expansion and handicap access. Note Needham has a coffee house. The Newton Art Center has summer camps and 2/3 of its budget goes for classes. A request was made that Anil forward emails about the Art Center to the whole Area Council.

H. Upper Falls T-Shirt Update

No news.

I. General Upper Falls News

Northland has already set up a Ferris Wheel in the parking lot behind Jean and Lee's.

In November a small Shop and Stop will open near AAA.

J. Public Comment/Questions

K. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:30.