

# Newton Upper Falls Area Council 2012 Annual Report



Photo credit: Mark Bridger

# NEWTON UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL



January 26, 2013

Board of Aldermen  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Ave  
Newton MA 02459

Dear Honorable Members of the Board of Aldermen:

Pursuant to Section 9-10 of the City Charter, the Newton Upper Falls Area Council is pleased to provide you with this Annual Report of its activities for the calendar year 2012.

Sincerely,



Anil Adyanthaya  
President

## **About the Newton Upper Falls Area Council**

2012 was the inaugural year of the Newton Upper Falls Area Council. Newton Upper Falls was the second of Newton's villages, following Newton Highlands, to take advantage of the Newton city charter's provision allowing for the creation of an area council "to encourage citizen involvement in government at the neighborhood level by permitting limited self-government." Following a petition drive and a public hearing before the Programs and Services Committee, the Board of Aldermen approved the creation of the Newton Upper Falls Area Council on March 21, 2011.

The nine members of the Area Council were elected during the city elections in November 2011 and were sworn in on January 21, 2012. The nine members of the Area Council are in alphabetical order:

Anil Adyanthaya (Tamarac Road)  
Mark Bridger (Champa Street)  
Betsy Hewitt (Winter Street)  
Susan Huffman (Indiana Terrace)  
Nina Kochs (Cottage Street)  
Marie Jackson (Spring Street)  
Jack Neville (High Street)  
David Ohanian (Columbia Ave)  
Jeff Riklin (High Street)

Ward Five Alderman John Rice is an ex officio member of the Area Council.

Carol Stapleton, Manager with the Parks & Recreation Department, while not an official member of the Area Council, attends every meeting and has provided invaluable organizational guidance and other assistance to the Area Council.

At a subsequent Area Council meeting, the following officers were elected by a vote of the Area Council:

President	Anil Adyanthaya
Vice President	Jeff Riklin
Secretary	Betsy Hewitt
Treasurer	Susan Huffman

The Area Council has established various subcommittees to address specific issues more efficiently:

Street Subcommittee: Jeff Riklin  
David Ohanian

Alderman Brian Yates has been an important resource in addressing particular street concerns.

School Subcommittee: Susan Huffman  
Marie Jackson  
David Ohanian  
Nina Kochs  
Alderman Brian Yates participates in an advisory role.

Emerson Playground Restoration Subcommittee Marie Jackson  
Jeff Riklin  
Joan Tanner, Director, Countryside Children's Center  
Glen McEachern, Countryside Children's Center  
Jesse Crandall, Countryside Children's Center  
Charlotte Russell(resident)  
Qinjuin Li (resident)  
Karen McDaniel, Upper Falls Nursery School

The Area Council President is an ex officio member of all Subcommittees.

## **Work of the Area Council**

The work of the Area Council is varied and addresses numerous aspects of life in Newton Upper Falls, both as it relates to life within the village and within the city. For 2012, the work of the Area Council can be broadly defined as falling within four main categories: Community Building, Communication, Beautification and Street Management. Work in future years might involve new categories.

### **COMMUNITY BUILDING**

One of the main goals of the Area Council has been to restore and improve upon the great pride and affection residents feel for Newton Upper Falls. Accordingly, the Area Council undertook the following community building efforts in 2012:

#### **Newton Upper Falls Heritage Day (aka Village Day)**



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

With the leadership and organizational experience of Alderman Rice, the financial support of the Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation, donations from area businesses and the assistance of many volunteers, the Area Council held Upper Falls' own village festival in September. The event included numerous vendors and community groups and entertained a few hundred residents throughout the day.

## **Newton Upper Falls Soup Social**



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

The Area Council began its year with a free soup social in January. Several local restaurants and markets donated the soup and other foods. This event was held in Emerson Community Center and was combined with the swearing in of the Area Council members.

## **Emerson Playground**

The playground outside of Emerson Community Center needs to be renovated, as many of the play structures are nearing the end of their lifespans. The Area Council has formed a subcommittee to lead the effort to replace the existing structures and to make other improvements. This work will involve fundraising, vendor selection and teardown and construction of the playground.

## **Historic Upper Falls T-Shirts**

The Area Council reintroduced the Historic Upper Falls T-Shirts that were very popular in the village when last offered.



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

## **Newton Upper Falls Historic Walking Tour**



Photo credit: Historic Newton

As part of Newton's inaugural Walk-Bike Week in September, the Area Council, along with Historic Newton, sponsored a walking tour of some of the more significant architectural and geographic sites in Upper Falls.

### **Newton Upper Falls Post Office**

The Area Council drafted a letter to Post Office and various elected officials opposing the possible closure of the Newton Upper Falls Post Office branch, citing both its value to the village and its profitability as a branch.

### **Village Summit**

Members of the Area Council attended the Mayor's Village Summit at Newton North High School in November 2011 and offered perspectives about forming an area council to interested residents from other villages.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Another priority for the Area Council was to improve the lines of communication between Upper Falls residents and the city. It is important that residents have accessible means to communicate with the city and for the city to be able to communicate with residents. Effective communication is also important to community building efforts.

The Area Council has developed and fostered various methods of communication:

- Web page on the city website - [http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/neighborhood/upper\\_falls/default.asp](http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/neighborhood/upper_falls/default.asp)

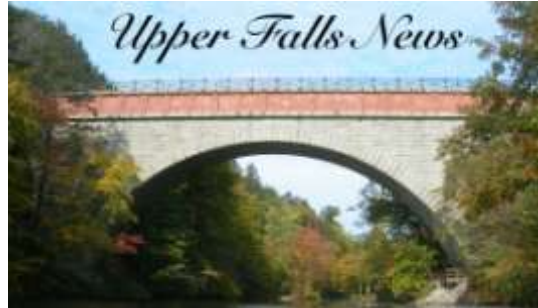
This page provides visitors with all information about the Area Council, including upcoming agenda items and contact information for Area Council members. Council member Mark Bridger manages the Area Council web page.

- Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Newton-Upper-Falls-Area-Council/113969745300108>

The Area Council maintains an active Facebook page that keeps subscribers up to date on various news and events within or relevant to Newton Upper Falls.

- Upper Falls News



This is perhaps the Area Council's most important communication tool. Upper Falls News is the brainchild of Upper Falls resident Jerry Reilly. Mr. Reilly is also the Editor in Chief. The Upper Falls News is distributed via email to over 250 subscribers and is also available via our Facebook page. The Upper Falls News provides news, anecdotes, history and updates about Newton Upper Falls. Past issues are archived at the following site:

<https://sites.google.com/site/upperfallsnews/11-09-12-news>

- Newton TAB and Newton Patch

The Area Council places notices of its meetings and other hosted events in the two major news sources serving Newton.

- Monthly Meetings

The Area Council meets on the third Thursday of at least ten months during the calendar year. These meetings take place at Emerson Community Center and are open to the public. In addition to conducting Area Council business, these meetings provide an opportunity for interested residents to hear presentations on various matters. Some of the speakers who have appeared at Area Council meeting are:

- Carol Schein, Open Space Coordinator and Landscape Designer for Newton Parks and Recreation Department, to discuss improvements to Braceland Park
- Jayne Colino, Director of Senior Services, City of Newton, gave a presentation on Senior Services in Newton



- Anatol Zukerman and Russel Feldman, Newton architects, presented their Needham St. master plan
- John DiMiceli from the Newton Tree Conservancy discussed tree conservation efforts in Upper Falls
- Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Community Services Bureau Commander, Newton Police Department, gave a presentation concerning crime and safety issued in Upper Falls
- Ben Harel from Next Step Living (Energy Smart Newton) and Jay Walter from Newton EcoProject gave a presentation on energy saving opportunities for Upper Falls residents
- Marc Welch, Director of Urban Forestry, City of Newton, presented on tree planting opportunities in Upper Falls
- Outreach to Upper Falls Business Community

The Area Council sent an introductory letter to approximately 50 Upper Falls businesses to let them know about the Area Council, inform them of Village Day and to encourage future communication.

## **BEAUTIFICATION**

The Area Council has been involved in a number of efforts to beautify Upper Falls:

### **Newton Upper Falls Greenway**



Photo credit: Sean Roche

The first major act of the Area Council was to hold a public hearing about the proposal to build a pedestrian and bicycle path along the abandoned rail trail that runs along Needham Street. Over 100 interested persons attended the hearing, following which the Area Council voted

unanimously to provide its support to the project. Three Area Council members, Betsy Hewitt, Susan Huffman and David Ohanian, participated in the city's MBTA Right of Way Working Group that is shepherding this project to completion.

### **Newton SERVES Greenway Cleanup**

The Area Council helped promote and members assisted in the NewtonSERVES project to clean up trash and overgrowth along the proposed Upper Falls Greenway.

### **Braceland Park Tennis Courts**

The Area Council worked with the Parks and Recreation Department on the CIP-funded reconstruction of the Braceland Park tennis courts, which is Phase 1-A of the Park's Master Plan. The scope of the project included: new fencing, bollards, an accessible entryway with benches and shade trees, a new crosswalk across Chesnut Street, a reconfigured and lined parking lot with two accessible parking spaces plus a new park identification sign.

### **Braceland Park Flowers**



Photo credit: Carol Stapleton

The Area Council put out a call for help in beautifying the new Braceland Park sign and Upper Falls resident and landscape designer Liz Riklin answered the call with this heart shaped tribute.

### **Tree Planting**

The Area Council is currently working with both the city's Division of Urban Forestry and the Newton Conservancy to take advantage of public and private tree planting programs that are available to the Upper Falls. This work involves both promoting the programs and assisting in appropriate siting for new trees.

## **STREET MANAGEMENT**

During the past year, the Area Council has received many inquiries about issues related to the streets within Upper Falls. Included among these are the following:

### **Improved signage for the curve at Elliot Street and Mechanic Street**

In response to a request from a resident about the speed of cars travelling along the curve along Elliot Street near Mechanic Street, the Area Council worked with transportation engineers with the Department of Public Works to install new signage warning drivers of the curve.

### **Improved visibility for curve at Elliot Street and Mechanic Street**

Members of the Area Council worked with a local resident to make landscape changes that improved the visibility for drivers along Elliot Street.

### **Tamarac Road**

The Area Council is working with residents of the Elliot Hill neighborhood on ways to address the poor condition of Tamarac Road, a private road that serves as a connecting road for that area.

### **Parking on Indiana Terrace**

The Area Council facilitated discussion among residents and local businesses concerning the parking situation along Indiana Terrace, a residential street that borders the village center.

### **Condition of the Parking Lot at Emerson Community Center**

In response to concerns about potholes and other hazards, the Area Council sent a letter to the condominium association that is responsible for the maintenance of the parking lot that serves Emerson Community Center. The conditions were subsequently addressed.

### **Pettee Street Pavement**

The Area Council has been monitoring the condition of the pavement along Pettee Street, which dips in various sections.

### **Area Council Finances**

The Area Council does not receive any direct funding from the city and has to rely on donations and its own fundraising efforts. The Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation has been a significant benefactor, underwriting many of the projects described above. At year end, the Area Council's had \$1,443.95 in its bank account at Village Bank.

2013 looks to be an important year financially as the Area Council will need to raise funds sufficient to finance the necessary renovation of the Emerson Playground. The cost of the renovation could approach \$100,000.