

Newton Upper Falls Area Council 2013 Annual Report



Photo credit: Mark Bridger

NEWTON UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL



February 10, 2014

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 2013.

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 2013 and were sworn in on January 9 and 16, 2013. The nine members of the Area Council are in alphabetical order:

Anil Adyanthaya (Tamarac Road)
Mark Bridger (Champa Street)
Maxine Bridger (Champa 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	Maxine Bridger
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 2013, 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 2013:

Newton Upper Falls Heritage Day (aka Village Day)



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

With the leadership and organizational experience of Alderman Rice, who led the Newton Highlands Village Day for more than a decade, 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.



Emerson Playground

In June, the Area Council held a kickoff event for the campaign to raise funds to replace the Emerson Playground equipment, which is nearing the end of its useful life. Thanks to Boston Sports Club, there were plenty of games and fun activities for the kids. Approximately \$600 was raised.

School Issues

The Schools Subcommittee actively examined the question of whether a new school should and could be built in Upper Falls and will continue to do so. The Area Council is also seeking representation on the Zervas School Building Committee. The Area Council investigated the question of bus fees charged to Upper Falls families and requested that such fees be waived for Upper Falls families due to the lack of safe walking options in the village.

Feast of the Falls

The Feast of the Falls was a privately organized event that involved a dinner for over 250 Upper Falls residents. It was sponsored by the Tzu Chi Foundation, supported by the Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation and was the brainchild of Upper Falls business owners Seana Gaherin (Dunn-Gaherin's) and Christopher Osborn (Better Life Food) and Upper Falls resident Jerry Reilly. The Area Council assisted in promoting the event and Area Council members served as "celebrity" waitstaff.

Tri-Council Candidates Night

The Area Council worked with the Newton Highlands Area Council and prospective members of the newly created Waban Area Council to host a Candidates Night for Ward 5 residents. The event was held at Emerson Community Center and attracted city wide candidates for Mayor, the Board of Alderman and the School Committee.



Photo credit: Christopher Pitts

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:

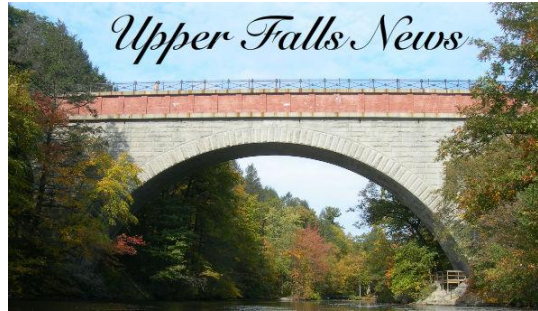
- Web page on the city website - http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/neighborhood/upper_falls/default.asp

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 has increased its email subscriber base 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:

- Discussion of an Upper Falls School and other school issues
 - School Committee Chairman Matt Hills
 - School Committee Vice Chair Margie Ross Decter
 - Ward 5 School Committee Member Steve Siegel
- Improvement to Streets and Sidewalks
 - James Freas, Chief Planner Long Range Planning
 - Alicia Bowman, Pedestrian Coordinator
- Upper Falls Greenway

- Jerry Reilly , Newton Bicycle/Pedestrian Task Force
- George Kirby, Newton Bicycle/Pedestrian Task Force

BEAUTIFICATION

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

Newton Upper Falls Greenway



Photo credit: Newton Bike/Pedestrian Task Force

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. Groundbreaking for the project took place in October and was attended by Mayor Warren and the Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation Richard Davey, as well as other state and city dignitaries.

Newton SERVES Greenway Cleanup

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

STREET MANAGEMENT

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

Visibility on Elliot Street

The Area Council worked with residents to address the installation of a mirror on Elliot Street to assist with visibility on the 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. Temporary fixes were implemented with the helpful assistance of the Department of Public Works.

Crossing on Ellis Street

The Area Council worked with the Department of Transportation to have a pedestrian crossing lane installed on Ellis Street in the spring of 2014.

Parking on High Street

The Area Council is working to address the tight parking that exists on weekdays on High Street. This presents a concern in that it could affect the passage of emergency vehicles and trash vehicles.

I-95/Route 128 Add-A-Lane Project

Area Council members monitored this project and discussed potential traffic effects with residents from Waban and Newton Highlands.

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 had \$7,820.61 in its bank accounts at Village Bank. The General Account held \$1370.65 and the Emerson Playground Account held \$6,449.96.