

Newton Upper Falls Area Council 2014 Annual Report



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

NEWTON UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL



January 27, 2015

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 2014.

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 in January 2014. 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 had established various subcommittees to address specific issues more efficiently, but decided to dissolve the Streets and Schools subcommittees, as those topics were best addressed by the full Area Council. The Emerson Playground Restoration Subcommittee remains, but its purpose has been met.

Emerson Playground Marie Jackson
Restoration Subcommittee 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 2014, 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 2014:

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 Newton 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



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

Thanks to the considerable efforts of Parks and Recreation, and Carol Schein in particular, the City was able to secure a grant from the state's Our Common Backyards Program to complete a full restoration of the Emerson Playground. Area Councillor Marie Jackson and Newton Upper Falls resident Charlie Russel led the effort to publicize the need for a new playground and the effort to raise funds. We raised \$8,387.68, which we were proud to contribute as part of the City's contribution to the project. The funds were raised through a combination of efforts, such as Village Day and the sale of reprints of *King's Handbook of Newton*, an 1889 history of Newton. Newton Upper Falls resident Jerry Reilly arranged for the reprints and organized the distribution of the books.



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

The new playground was dedicated on December 2 in a ceremony attended by Mayor Warren, Massachusetts Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Maeve Vallety Bartlett, Parks and Recreation Commissioner DeRubeis, various aldermen and many other members of the Newton Upper Falls Community.

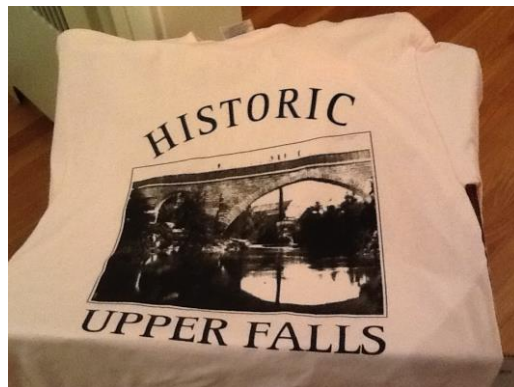
School Issues

The Schools Subcommittee actively examined the question of whether a new school should and could be built in Newton Upper Falls and will continue to do so. The Area Council continued its efforts to seek waivers of the bus fee for Newton Upper Falls families due to the lack of safe walking options in the village. We were pleased that such fees were eliminated. Area Council members Maxine Bridger and Mark Bridger also led the effort to reduce the use of buffer zones. These zones have been regularly applied to Newton Upper Falls and have a negative effect on the village's sense of community, as children in the same neighborhood can be assigned to different schools.

Feast of the Falls

The Feast of the Falls was a privately organized event that involved a dinner for over 250 Newton 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 Newton Upper Falls business owners Seana Gaherin (Dunn-Gaherin's) and Christopher Osborn (Better Life Food) and Jerry Reilly. The Area Council assisted in promoting the event.

Historic Upper Falls T-Shirts



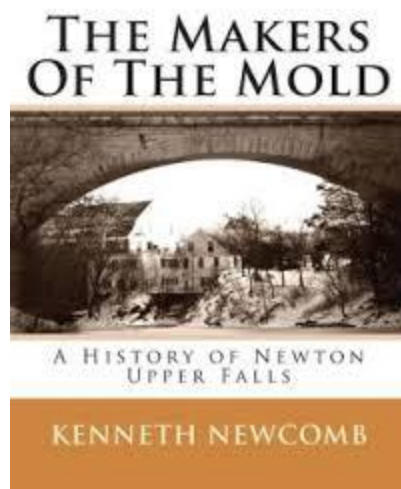
Thanks to the generous support of the Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation, the Area Council was able to print another batch of Historic Upper Falls t-shirts. The shirts have been good advertisements for our village and we believe they inspire a sense of community.

Food Drive



We were pleased to participate in the Mayor's 13 Villages One Community program by collecting food donations during Village Day. Newton Upper Falls resident Jen Kohl led this effort and we worked with the Newton Food Pantry. In addition to the contributions from the Newton Upper Falls community, Wegman's in Chestnut Hill also gave a generous donation of food.

Ken Newcomb Upper Falls Book Award



The Area Council has established an award to be given annually to a Newton Upper Falls high school junior. The winner will be chosen by the Area Council and criteria include grades, character and contributions to the school and community. The award will be given at the Feast of the Falls this summer. The award is named after longtime Newton Upper Falls resident and historian Ken Newcomb. Mr. Newcomb's book about Newton Upper Falls, *The Makers of the Mold*, will constitute part of the award along with a gift certificate to New England Mobile Book Fair.

COMMUNICATION

Another priority for the Area Council was to improve the lines of communication between Newton 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:

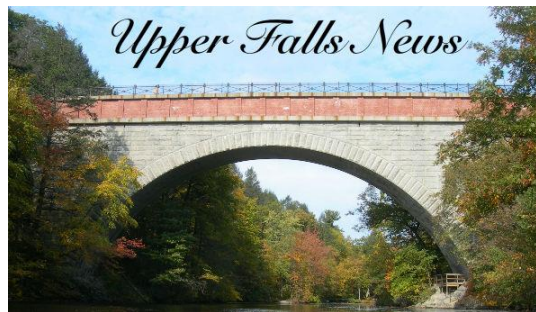
- Web page on the city website - http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/neighborhood/upper_falls/default.asp

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 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

The Area Council places notices of its meetings and other hosted events in the Newton TAB. We no longer utilize the Newton Patch after it moved to a more national focus.

- 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 meetings in 2014 are:

- Gaelyn Spencer from Next Step Living, to discuss energy saving programs
- Srdjan Nedeljkovic, President of the Newton Highlands Area Council, to discuss school issues
- Carol Schein, Parks and Recreation, to discuss the Emerson Playground restoration
- Sarah Quigley, Newtonville resident, to discuss Newton-specific ballot questions
- Andrae Downs – chair of the Transportation Advisory Group, to discuss access to the Sudbury Aqueduct

BEAUTIFICATION

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

Newton Upper Falls Greenway



Photo credit: Jan Huffman

Area Council members Susan Huffman and David Ohanian participated in the city's MBTA Right of Way Working Group that is shepherding this project to completion. While significant progress was made in 2014, such as the paving of the Oak Street crossing, the project has stalled and the Area Council has been working with our Ward 5 Aldermen and the city to develop a plan to bring the project to completion. The Area Council has also monitored issues with the site, such as the installation of safety tape around the Sunset Deck buildout, and is working with Carol Stapleton of Parks and Recreation to address while the project awaits completion.

Newton SERVES Greenway Cleanup



Photo credit: Jan Huffman

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.

We also worked with students from Mt. Ida College to clean up the Greenway in September. Upper Falls resident Jan Huffman managed this effort.

STREET MANAGEMENT

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

Handicap crossing on Cottage Street

Council Member Nina Kochs identified grading issues with a handicap crossing and is working with Alderman Rice to address.

Crossing on Ellis Street

The Area Council continued to work with the Department of Transportation to have a pedestrian crossing lane installed on Ellis Street. The project was to have been completed in the spring of 2014, but has encountered some design challenges.

Parking on High Street

The Area Council continued monitoring 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. This became a more pressing issue due to the number of construction projects now taking place on this street.

Needham Street Improvements

Area Council members monitored this project and kept Newton Upper Falls residents informed of the progress. One particular area of concern for residents was the intersection of Oak and Christina streets. We are pleased that this is also a priority for the Department of Transportation.

Braceland Park

The Area Council investigated concerns about trash being left in the Braceland Park parking lot and worked with Parks and Recreation to remedy.

Elliot Street

The Area Council investigated complaints about jackhammering on Elliot Street.

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 \$1,393.02 in its bank account at Village Bank. The Emerson Playground Account was closed with the dispersal of the funds to the City for the restoration project's local contribution.