

Newton Upper Falls Area Council 2015 Annual Report



Photo credit: Mark Bridger

NEWTON UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL



January 29, 2016

City Council
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Ave
Newton MA 02459

Dear Honorable Members of the City Council:

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 2015.

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 2015 and were sworn in in January 2016. The nine members of the Area Council are in alphabetical order:

Anil Adyanthaya (Tamarac Road)
Maxine Bridger (Champa Street)
Susan Huffman (Indiana Terrace)
Julie Irish (Columbia Avenue)
Nina Kochs (Cottage Street)
Jen Kohl (Elliot Street)
Marie Jackson (Spring Street)
Jack Neville (High Street)
Jeff Riklin (High Street)

Ward Five City Councilor 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 addresses all issues in full session and currently has no 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 2015, 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 2015:

Newton Upper Falls Village Day



Photo credit: Anil Adyanthaya

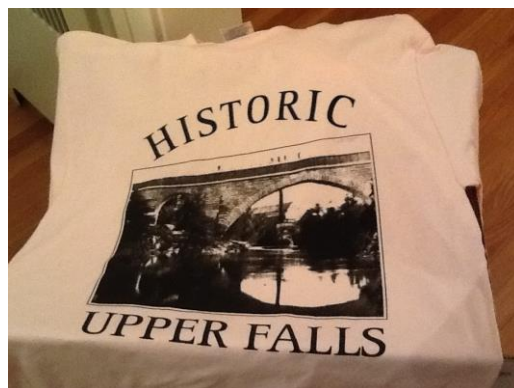
With the leadership and organizational experience of Councilor Rice, who led the Newton Highlands Village Day for more than a decade, the financial support of the Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation, donations from area businesses and the assistance of many volunteers, the Area Council held Newton Upper Falls' own village festival in September. The event included numerous vendors and community groups and entertained a couple hundred residents throughout the day. We will be evaluating whether to continue holding the event in the late summer/fall or perhaps move the event to the spring.

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 Gahein (Dunn-Gahein'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



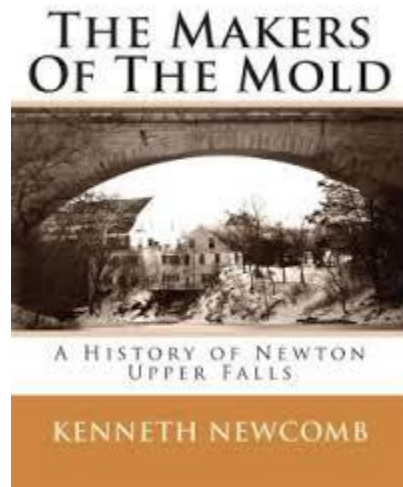
We were pleased to participate in the Mayor's 13 Villages One Community program by working with the Newton Food Pantry collecting food donations during Village Day. In addition to the contributions from the Newton Upper Falls community, Wegman's in Chestnut Hill also gave a generous donation of food for a second consecutive year.

Newton Upper Falls Good Neighbor Award



This year, the Area Council established an award to recognize those residents and businesses who go above and beyond to help their fellow neighbor. The first recipient of the award was the owner of Bob's Sub Stop, Jian Wang, who opened her restaurant to children who had been waiting too long in subfreezing temperatures when their school bus was late. We look forward to presenting more of these citations in the years to come.

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 was chosen by the Area Council and criteria include grades, character and contributions to the school and community. 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. Two Newton South juniors, Amanda Michel and Alex Frankel, were the inaugural recipients of the award.

Ward 5 Candidates Night



Credit: Waban Area Council

The Area Council, led by Councilor Marie Jackson and resident Kim Hokanson, worked with the Waban and Newton Highlands Area Councils to hold a candidate's forum. This year's event was especially complex, as events were held not only for all citywide city

council and school committee races, but also for the twenty-plus Charter Commission candidates. In addition, due to timing constraints, the events had to be held in two different locations. The event was a good opportunity to work with the other Ward 5 area councils and to highlight issues of importance to the southern part of the city.

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 learned of an online community messaging platform called Next Door (https://newtonupperfalls.nextdoor.com/news_feed/) that had been used in other villages. We contacted the company and learned that some Upper Falls residents were already part of a nascent group. The Area Council worked with Next Door to redefine the Upper Falls village boundary and promoted the site to village residents. Membership has increase from approximately 20 to over 150 in a few months time.

Other methods of communication the Area Council has utilized include:

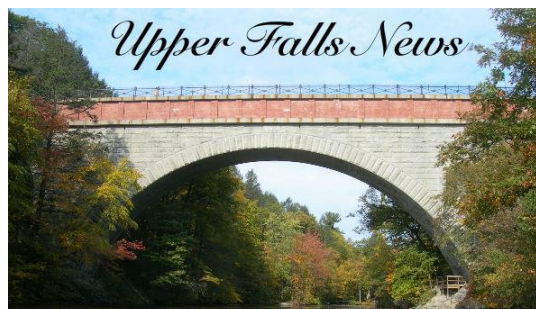
- Web page on the city website - http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/neighborhood/upper_falls/default.asp

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



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.

- 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 2015 were:

- Jake Auchincloss, Candidate for Alderman at Large
- Christopher Osborne, to discuss his and his sister Karen's plans to purchase the St. Elizabeth Center, renovate it, and offer it as a community resource in addition to other private uses.
- We realize that not all Upper Falls residents have online access. This year, one of our priorities will be to examine ways to communicate with those residents and implement if possible. One idea proposed has been a limited distribution of printed copies of the Upper Falls News. We will need to identify funding sources if we undertake this effort.

Newton Solar Challenge



The Newton Solar Challenge is a partnership of Green Decade Newton, various community organizations and private solar companies. The Challenge gives Newton residents a choice of solar companies and residential solar loan options with a goal of increasing solar system ownership. The Area Council worked with Green Decade and private solar companies to promote workshops and open houses to inform people about

the Challenge. The Area Council also hosted one workshop at Emerson Community Center.

BEAUTIFICATION

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

Newton Upper Falls Greenway



Photo credit: Jerry Reilly

We are proud to say that thanks to the efforts of Mayor Warren, Parks and Recreation and Public Works, the Upper Falls Greenway is largely complete. After the city's original partner failed to complete its obligations, Mayor Warren committed to completing the Greenway in 2015 and this was accomplished. Further cosmetic work, such as benches, are still needed. We expect a formal ceremony to open the Greenway will take place in the spring.

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.

Expansion of the Newton Upper Falls Historic District



There is a proposal before the Newton Upper Falls Historic Commission to expand the Newton Upper Falls Historic District. The Area Council was asked by the Commission to conduct a survey of Upper Falls residents on this issue to determine what support there is for expansion of the Historic District and where the support is. The Area Council is working on the survey and the logistics of distributing it.

TRANSPORTATION

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:

Comprehensive Parking Plan

In October, Councilor Rice and Area Council President Adyanthaya met with the Traffic Council and learned more about the process and effort needed to establish a comprehensive parking plan for the village similar to what other parts of the city have done. We are also considering pursuing more neighborhood-specific solutions in order to alleviate pressing concerns more quickly. These neighborhood-specific solutions include the possible establishment of two-hour parking on Indiana Terrace, Pennsylvania Avenue, Cottage Street and Columbia Avenue to deal with commuter parking congestion.

Elliot Street Bridge Repairs

The Elliot Street connection between Newton and Needham will be closed from July to December for the repair of the Elliot Street Bridge (also known as Cook's Bridge). The work is necessary, but will cause significant disruption for residents and businesses who rely on that connection. The Area Council will serve as an information conduit for this important project.

#59 Bus

We heard complaints about the frequency of this MBTA bus route that serves the Upper Falls. Resident Lois Tarpinian is pursuing the issue with our state representatives. A ridership survey was discussed and may be released this year.

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.

Needham Street Improvements

As in 2014, the Area Council continued to monitor 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.

Cottage Street

The Area Council investigated complaints about jackhammering near Cottage Street. The Area Council worked with Councilor's Rice, Yates and Crossley to recommend changes to the city's noise ordinance. Area Council Vice President Jeff Riklin worked with Inspectional Services on this topic as well.

High Street

The Area Council, led by Vice President Riklin, monitored the restoration of High Street following the various construction projects done on the street in 2015.

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 a gross amount of \$3,339.10 in its bank account at Village Bank.