

Newton Upper Falls Area Council 2019 Annual Report



NEWTON UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL



January 29, 2020

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 2019.

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. Since then, Area Councils have been established in Waban and Newtonville.

The nine members of the Area Council were elected during the city elections in November 2017 and were sworn in in January 2018. The nine members of the 2018-19 Area Council are in alphabetical order:

Anil Adyanthaya (Tamarac Road)
Jo-Louise Allen (Indiana Terrace)
Maxine Bridger (Champa Street)
Susan Huffman (Indiana Terrace)
Julie Irish (Columbia Avenue)
Nina Kochs (Cottage 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. Ward Five At-Large City Councilors Deb Crossley and Andreae Downs provided much appreciated support for our work.

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 in 2018, 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.



DEPARTURES

2019 was unfortunately a year of significant transition for the Area Council as we will head into 2020 without the official and unofficial contributions of several who have given us so much over the years.

Brian Yates



In March, longtime City Councilor Brian Yates passed away. In addition to his many years of service on the City Council, Brian was the founder and president of the Friends of Hemlock Gorge and a contributor to more community projects than we could name here. Brian was indispensable to the Area Council, both for his knowledge of city bureaucracy and for his passionate support for all things Upper Falls. Even after he left the City Council, he continued to attend Area Council meetings and provide valuable contributions. He is greatly missed. One of our goals for 2020 is to establish an appropriate memorial for all he did for the village.

John Rice



Ward 5 City Councilor John Rice announced his retirement from the City Council in 2019. Councilor Rice is the person who originated the idea for an Upper Falls Area Council. Beyond that, he been an invaluable partner for the Area Council as we learned the ins and outs of city government. We will miss his cheerful demeanor and can-do attitude greatly.

Julie Irish, Maxine Bridger, and Jo-Louise Allen

The Area Council also said goodbye to three valuable members in 2019. Julie Irish was not only a regular source of good ideas, but was someone who backed up her ideas with hard work. Her most valuable contribution may have been modernizing the organization of Village Day, which has led to its significant growth. Maxine Bridger provided wise counsel on a variety of issues and served as our Secretary, where she was an accurate and detailed chronicler of our meetings. Jo-Louise Allen was another source of good ideas and helped us secure significant financial support for Village Day. We hope we will be able to replace their contributions on the Area Council.

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 2019, the work of the Area Council could be broadly defined as falling within six main categories: Newton Elections, Development, Public Safety, Community Building, Communication, and Street Management. Work in future years might involve new categories.

NEWTON ELECTIONS

Ward Five City Council



At various meetings over the summer, the Area Council hosted the three candidates who were vying to replace John Rice as the Ward Five City Councilor: Bill Humphrey, Kathy Winter, and Rena Getz. We also co-hosted a debate (with the Waban and Highlands Area Councils) among the three candidates in September.

Area Council Candidate Forums

The Area Council worked with the other three Area Councils (Waban, Highlands, and Newtonville) to host two forums for all candidates for City Council and School Committee.

Charter Revisions

The Area Council worked to oppose proposed revisions to the city charter article on Area Councils that we believed would weaken the Area Councils. Thanks to the efforts of the Area Council and others, these proposed revisions did not leave the Programs & Services Committee for consideration by the full City Council.

DEVELOPMENT

Northland Project



In 2016, a proposal to redevelop the Marshall's shopping center was announced by Northland Properties, the owner of the parcel. In 2019, the proposal moved before the City Council for review and the special permit was granted in December 2019. Throughout 2019, the Area Council provided comments to the City Council in August about its thoughts on the project. Of particular concern was the entrance/exit at Oak Street and its effect on traffic in the Village, the overall number of rental units (approximately 800), the height of the buildings, and spillover parking concerns for the neighborhoods adjacent to the project. We will continue to monitor these issues in 2020.

Cypress Tree

A company called Cypress Tree Management, Inc. proposed opening a medical marijuana dispensary at the former Green Tea restaurant site. Although the Green Tea site is located outside our coverage area, the siting of a cannabis-related facility next to the Upper Falls was obviously of great interest to the Upper Falls community. We hosted Cypress Tree at a January 2019 meeting, where they provided details about their plans and answered questions from the Area Council and the community about topics such as traffic and security. We will continue to monitor the progress of this project.

Oak Street and Christina Street Intersection Improvement



The planned reconstruction of the intersection at Oak and Christina Streets was completed in 2019. The intersection added left turn signals for traffic turning off of Needham Street. However, many in the community were concerned about the removal of the staggered lights for the Oak and Christina Streets and the lack of any left turn signal for turns onto Needham Street. The Area Council communicated with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation about this issue and will continue to do so in 2020.

Renovation of the Oak/Chestnut/Ossipee Property

The Area Council has been monitoring the ongoing renovation of the building that borders Oak, Chestnut, and Ossipee Streets. We hosted Mauruuru Properties LLC, the property owners, at an Area Council meeting in May 2019 to learn more about the project.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Coyotes



At some point over the past couple of years, a pack of coyotes made its home in Upper Falls. Residents continue to report sightings and encounters with them. As a result, we will continue to disseminate warnings about coyote sightings through our usual communication channels.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

One of the main goals of the Area Council has always 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 2019:

Newton Upper Falls Village Day



Newton Upper Falls Village Day was held again next to the Upper Falls Greenway along Chestnut Street. This year was perhaps the biggest in the event's history. Vice President Jeff Riklin and Councilors Julie Irish and Marie Jackson co-chaired the Village Day Committee. As in past years, we relied on the leadership and organizational experience of Councilor Rice, the financial support of the Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation, donations from area businesses, and the assistance of many volunteers. Village Bank was also a major sponsor. We look forward to holding the event on the Upper Falls Greenway again in 2020 and look forward to growing the event.

Upper Falls Soup Social



We held a soup social in March that featured delicious soups and bread from several Newton restaurants and catering companies. We were honored to have Mayor Ruthanne Fuller in attendance. At our December meeting, we voted to rename the event the John Rice Upper Falls Soup Social in honor of Councilor Rice's many contributions to the Upper Falls.

Historic Upper Falls T-Shirts



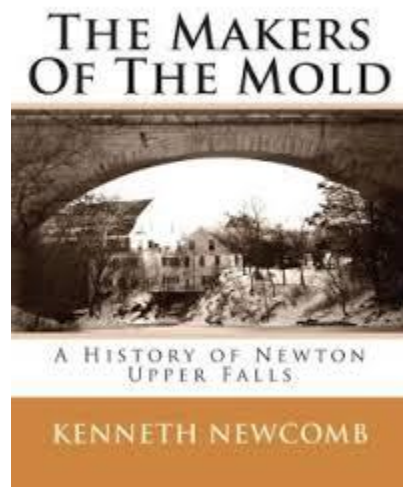
Thanks to the generous support of the Newton Upper Falls Community Development Corporation, the Area Council continues to sell Historic Upper Falls t-shirts. The shirts have been good advertisements for our village and we believe they inspire a sense of community. The Area Council is very appreciative of the support of Bob's Sub Stop on Elliot Street, which has taken a lead role in advertising and selling the shirts. In addition to shirts bearing the iconic Echo Bridge logo, we are still exploring the creation of a second design with a local artist.

Food Drive



We were pleased yet again to participate in the Mayor's 13 Villages One Community program by working with the Newton Food Pantry to collect food donations during Village Day. We also collected donations during the Upper Falls Soup Social in March.

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 is 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. No award was given in 2019.

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 uses an online community messaging platform called Next Door (https://newtonupperfalls.nextdoor.com/news_feed/) that is specific to Upper Falls residents. Membership has increased from 488 to 697 by the end of 2019 or approximately 31% of the 1787 households in Upper Falls.

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. Former 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. Margaret Alexander, the new Editor in Chief, has done a great job in continuing Jerry's efforts and bringing her own ideas and spirit to the publication. The Upper Falls News has readership of a few hundred 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 and the Newton Patch on occasion.

- 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 2019 were:

- Cypress Tree Management
- City Councilor Jake Auchincloss
- Kathryn Ellis, Newton Economic Development Director

- Wendy Wolf from Studios Without Walls
- Benji Kissin (Upper Falls Greenway Plant Education Project)
- Representatives from the Waban and Highlands Area Councils
- Lower Falls-Riverside Committee

BEAUTIFICATION

The Area Council has been involved in various efforts to beautify Newton Upper Falls:

Newton SERVES Greenway Cleanup



Thanks to leadership of Area Councilor Julie Irish and former Upper Falls resident Jim Lerner, the Area Council helped promote and members assisted in the NewtonSERVES project in April to clean up trash along the Upper Falls Greenway.

Upper Falls Greenway Art Project



The Area Council met with Parks and Recreation and representatives from Studio Without Walls to discuss various issues related to the Upper Falls Greenway art installation that took place from June through September. These issues related to vandalism of the art and the content of exhibits.

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:

Ellis Street

Residents on Ellis Street are investigating ways to improve safety for pedestrians who need to walk along this street, which lacks sidewalks in some places. Improvements were made to the intersection of Ellis and Chestnut, including more visible crosswalks and improved signage. This remains an issue of concern.

Traffic Calming

The Area Council continued its efforts to identify Elliot Street as a priority for traffic calming efforts to be performed by the Transportation Department. The Area Council will be looking to contribute to the Transportation Department's 2020 traffic calming list as well.

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 \$3,759.79 in its bank account at Village Bank, which was approximately \$4.00 less than we ended with in 2018.

http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/neighborhood/upper_falls/default.asp