

Newtonville Area Council meeting: July 9, 2020

Kartikey Trivedi/Peter Bruce co-hosts on Zoom

NAC members: Peter Bruce, Susan Reisler, Jessica Aker Archer, Dana D'Agostino, Carolyn Gabbay, Martina Jackson, Pam Shufro, Kartikey Trivedi,

Guests: City Councilor Emily Norton, Andrea and Neil Steenstrup. Marcia Johnson, Sallee Lipschutz, Chris Pitts, Bob Burke, Robert Jampol, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Tom Elkind, Carol Todreas, Kathy Pillsbury, Dinah Bodkin, Isabelle Albeck, Helen Nayar, John Vasilakis, Lorraine Sanik, and Maureen Reilly Meagher.

Peter Bruce called the meeting to order at 7:03. Jessica Aker Archer resigned as secretary. Martina Jackson is the new secretary.

Andrea Steenstrup asserted that the NAC had a negative bias toward transit-oriented development. Peter Bruce responded she was mistaken.

There was a discussion about the narrowing of Walnut Street, and Dana D'Agostino mentioned that her husband was in a minor fender-bender there. Susan Reisler suggested that accidents there should be documented.

Answering concerns about truck loading zones, City Councilor Norton noted that Highland Avenue will be designated for unloading trucks and the cross walks will be replaced. In addition, trees will be planted in the Fall.

Peter suggested the addition of a kiosk and LED lights for Bram Way or Walnut Street and announced a competition to create a mural on the brick wall across from 28 Austin Street. There was some discussion about a possible drive-in concert.

Carolyn asked about the \$700,000 the Planning Department will be expending on Newtonville Square improvements, wondering if the money had already been allocated. (See note below.)

Members of the Waban and Newton Highland Area Councils joined the NAC at 7:30. Carolyn discussed the impact of removing overnight parking bans in terms of more traffic and parking congestion. Robert Jampol emphasized that improved public transportation is the way to reduce the need for cars. Chris Pitts noted that telecommunicating reduced car *and* public transportation usage. Jessica emphasized the need for all forms of transportation and that the Newtonville rail platform needs improvement. Peter suggested that development should occur along the Green line. Carolyn added that if we improved public transportation, people would use it.

Peter mentioned that the City Council received a letter from *Engine 6* attempting to rebut the NAC's request for a pause in the zoning process, which was forwarded to him by a City Councilor. He said he would forward it to the NAC, and that he was working on a rebuttal.

Bob Burke, from the Newton Highlands Area Council, expressed concern about the destruction of the villages centers in the name of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and lamented that we are meant to feel guilty about wishing to save villages. He described a project for the Rhode Island Planning Council under the Clean Air Act which he worked on as a civil servant circa 1980. He claimed that all the measures employed in Rhode Island to improve

and add mass transit (commuter rail, park n'ride, more bus routes) had almost no impact on reducing ("auto criteria") emissions, though catalytic converters were effective. Today, he stressed the importance of re-introducing former President Obama's proposed fuel economy standards for 2050 for vehicles, and incentivizing more use of electric vehicles to reduce GHGs.

Kathy Pillsbury (*Engine 6*) reported that the City Council is looking for a way to produce more small-scale multi-family housing, especially through the addition of ADUs (accessory dwelling units). Martina noted that Newtonville has many Victorians that could be used for multi-family units and are less expensive than newly-constructed apartments.

Marcia Johnson said that she was responsible for Newtonville's Historic District status preserving its older workers' neighborhood. She said that new development must include adequate transportation and said that Emily Norton, the City Council, Chris Pitts, and the NAC should be aiding Kay Khan in working to improve the commuter rail. Ms. Norton and others responded that they had already done so, but that Newton's representation is small in the context of the whole state legislature.

Sallee wanted to know how many accessory units have been built since recent legislation eased regulations on them, and would like to see the City do more to encourage them as a less obtrusive way of introducing more density. She also wanted to see what demand for rapid transit would look like after the pandemic, before pushing for more of it. Carole Todreas suggested that if village centers offered more shopping options, people would need to drive less, and our villages would be more attractive to young people.

Carolyn noted the expense of the new apartments, which drives up the cost of smaller multi-family units. She commented that the City Council plan includes eliminating single-family houses because they are "racist." On the other hand, building large, expensive apartments and condos, gentrifies less expensive neighborhoods defeating the purpose of providing affordable housing. Peter reinforced that point, noting California's unsuccessful experience with major legislation attempting to combine affordable housing with public transportation, which has consistently failed, largely due to public fears of gentrification. He earlier asserted that projections of our region's housing needs have also been exaggerated, since population growth in the Greater Boston Area has been flat for the last two years, even before the pandemic. Jessica responded that Newton's population is not declining, and that there needs to be more housing options because single-family housing is economically out of the reach of many. Emily said the market determines housing costs and Newton's educational system makes Newton more attractive. She says we need to look at exclusionary zoning ordinances.

Srdjan asserted that the expansion of the Green Line into the Needham Street Corridor to the Northland project and Upper Falls, which he had advocated, would have realized the goal of transit-oriented development. But the City Council wasn't interested. He also asserted that the \$40+ million improvement to Newtonville Station was unlikely.

Karen Payne, former Boston NAACP chapter president, explained that affordable housing is part of the fight for social justice, and that economic justice and education are all NAACP goals. But, regarding housing, the question is what is affordable. She said we need to define our goals, or we will be in the same place years from now. Karen described the challenges in bringing the Purple line to Mattapan, to expand work and education opportunities. At the same time, it was necessary to subsidize fares so that people could afford to use the trains. Karen noted that Jamaica Plain and Roslindale only recently have become more diverse. She described the communities' efforts to define goals and put them into action.

Emily observed that in the wake of concerns about racism in Newton (following an incident in which the Newton police confronted at gun point a Black Newton homeowner whom they mistakenly believed was a Mattapan murder suspect), that she was discovering how racist Newton is. She also noted that the mayor has formed a commission to make recommendations to enhance racial justice here. Emily reported that she received 600 emails demanding defunding of the police. Jessica reported that the Human Rights Commission is working with the Mayor's commission. Karen explained that Newton might want to form a chapter of the NAACP which can include white people. Tom Elkind said that while the focus has been on police racism, it was only a symptom of social separations, and that Newton really needed to work on integrating society. Karen noted that people of color deal with racism every day. Karen spoke of the Black Wall Street podcast, which Jessica mentioned at a recent Ward 2 Democratic Committee meeting. (<https://www.blackwallstreet-1921.com/>) Chris Pitts asked what Newton can do. Karen responded that groups of people really need to reach out to one another. Kartikey noted that Asians and Indians also experience racism and that "we cannot let history drive the future."

Peter offered the May minutes; Kartikey moved to accept; Martina seconded it. Jess abstained. Carolyn, Pam, Peter, Dana, Martina, Kartikey, and Susan voted to accept. Carolyn formally nominated Martina to be the secretary; Peter seconded the motion, and all voted in the affirmative.

Peter suggested that NAC not meet in August. Carolyn and Dana moved the question. The motion was unanimously accepted. The NAC will meet on September 10

Meeting adjourned at 9:34

* Councilor Norton reported that the \$700,000 has not been allocated, because one of the Planning Department's projects is to develop a sound barrier or fence along Washington Street pending determination of the existing fences's land ownership (city or state).

*Dear Martina,

As you may know, the \$700,000 in funds you mention were a provision of the Special Permit for Washington Place (now *Trio*), dedicated to "off-site improvements" in the immediate neighborhood.

Of these funds, nothing has been spent to date, as the city council has not authorized spending any of it.

The City is looking into using some of the funds to replace and improve the fencing on Washington Street along the turnpike from Lowell Avenue to Walnut Street. The Engineering division has completed the land survey of the existing fence in relation to the City's right of way. Once the survey plan is completed, Engineering staff will schedule a site visit with the City Councilors so that they can see the existing fence and sidewalk. Follow a site visit, staff intends to docket an item with the Public Facilities Committee to request to spend some of the \$700,000 on removing and replacing the fence, and removing and replacing sidewalks and curb as necessary. The type of new fence is still up for discussion.

The spending of the remaining funds on other improvements has not been determined.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Regards,
Gabriel Holbrow

Community Planner - Engagement Specialist
Department of Planning & Development
City of Newton

Respectfully submitted,
Martina Jackson, Secretary