

## September 10, 2020, Newtonville Area Council Meeting Minutes

The Newtonville Area Council meeting was held on Thursday, September 10, 2020, at 7:30PM, via Zoom.

### Persons Attending:

- NAC members: Peter Bruce, Susan Reisler, Dana D'Agostino, Kirill Alshewski, Jessica Aker Archer, Carolyn Gabbay, Pam Shufro, and Martina Jackson (arrived late)
  - Absent: Kartikey Trivedi
- City Councilors: Susan Albright, Deborah Crossley, Emily Norton (arrived late), and Pamela Wright
- Community members: Alice Ingerson, Brooke Lipsett, Bryan Barash, Carole Lynne, Debra Frankel, Erin Delaney, Eryn-Ashlei Bailey, George Flesh, Helen Nayar, Holly Gunner, Jerry Greene, John Vasilakis, Caryn Slotsky, Kathy Laufer, Kathy Pillsbury, Linda Landsberg, Marc Kaufman, Marlowe Teijeg, Miriam Porter, Nancy Solari, Norman Cu**rb**ell, Peter Harrington, Randall Block, Richard Rasala, Ruth Greene, Scott Oran, Meryl Kessler, Steve Burnham, Seth Goodman, Terry Lane, Colleen Minaker, and Meg Ward.

Peter Bruce called the meeting to order and confirmed the presence of a quorum. Martina Jackson was ~~not~~ present at the beginning of the meeting, so Peter Bruce appointed himself Secretary Pro Tempore to take the meeting minutes. Following the meeting agenda, the following topics were discussed.

### 1. Burning issues in the community

- Bram Way:** Scott Oran (Principal, Austin Street Partners) talked about closing Bram Way to vehicular traffic for pedestrian safety and to create a bigger plaza. The NAC has previously supported the idea of closing Bram Way. He also reported that a color full mural has been painted following completion of the competition. Councilor Albright stated that Barney Heath (Newton's Director of Planning) told her that Mayor Fuller is working on a plan to place movable planters to shut Bram Way and move them when needed to accommodate access to Walnut Street stores as per their rights. Suggestions were made about adding speed bumps, better signage/painting, and using planters built by Newton North HS students and now in storage, adding wheels to them, perhaps using some of them to decorate Walnut Street, and others for gate-keeping on Bram Way. The costs of such a project would be defrayed with money previously collected by Beautiful Newtonville for memorial decorations and the ~\$5,000 remaining balance of funding for this year pledged by Austin Street Partners. Norman Cu**rb**ell said that he owns one of the Walnut Street properties and has a legal right of way across Bram Way. He objected to closing Bram Way in a way that he asserted would be in derogation of his legal rights. After further discussion, Councilor Albright suggested that the matter be researched by the applicable City departments (such as safety and legal) to determine next steps. She promised to report back on this at a future meeting.
- Racial composition of Newton's public housing residents/ Affordable Housing Policies and fairness to minorities:** Peter Bruce presented data he had collected from the Newton Housing Authority and questioned whether current policies are fair to Blacks and the Latinx communities. He recounted that most of Newton's public housing residents are white, and about a quarter are Asian, with Russian and Mandarin speakers outnumbering Black and Latinx residents. Given the lack of affirmative action policies in housing these days, he asserted that the only way to increase the number of Blacks and Latinos in our public housing would be to actively publicize in their neighborhoods that needy residents who qualify are eligible for Newton's public housing on a first-come, first-served basis. Pam Shufro commented on economic diversity in the City, considerations relating to Average Median Income (AMI) vs. asset ownership on determining eligibility, and what happens when a resident's income increases after moving into a housing unit. Discussion ensued, especially about the ease with which affluent residents can game the system.

- c) **COVID Update:** Peter Bruce summarized information he had collected and made observations on the data about fatality rates in Newton’s long-term care (LTC) facilities and related public policies. He pointed out that since the state had introduced more transparency in reporting and started auditing and inspecting Newton’s LTCs in June, Newton’s once rapidly rising death rates in these places had virtually stopped.

**2. Rezoning (with City Councilors Pam Wright and Deb Crossley)**

The topic began with an overview by Councilor Crossley of: a) the history of zoning in Newton dating back to 1925; b) the work that resulted in the Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2007 and the limited achievement of the goals encouraged by the Comprehensive Plan; c) the renewed focus on zoning and development; d) a summary of the progress to date in the current zoning review process and the role of the Planning Department in bringing ideas forward for consideration; e) an explanation of the current reconsideration of goals in the process; f) the role of the Pattern Book and contextual zoning; and g) the expectations for future work, including an anticipated vote on rezoning by the end of the current term of the City Council in 2021.

She highlighted the objectives of (1) making Newton more accessible and affordable to people at various income levels and from various backgrounds, not just through “affordable housing”, (2) achieving economic and environmental sustainability, and (3) having development take place in a contextual way in relation to neighborhoods and village centers through such means as defining the allowable building envelopes of buildings and other physical forms.

Discussion followed Councilor Crossley’s presentation, including questions and comments about disparities in the maximum desirable growth in the number of additional housing units stipulated in the Comprehensive Plan and the much larger number of housing units Mayor Fuller seems to have committed herself to together with Boston’s Mayor Walsh and about a dozen other area mayors. Discussion moved to related issues such as how much housing has Newton recently built and does it have “in the pipeline,” population trends and growth rates, the concept of doing away with single-family housing zoning, build-out potential and experience, the possible relaxation or removal of street parking limitations, and the current trend of developers replacing single-family homes with \$1.4+M condos. Councilor Wright commented upon on multifamily housing size and FAR coverage, and screen-shared a chart she had prepared showing “Before and After” information about unit size and setback requirement under current zoning and proposals under discussion. She also screen-shared a chart showing the calendar of the zoning redesign process, which included consideration of residential districts running through December 14, and she encouraged public input. Councilor Albright commented on building out smaller houses to accommodate growing families, as well as DPW’s ability to declare snow emergencies to address street parking.

**3. Discussion of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD, continued from the July meeting)**

Discussion included comments on the inability of disabled persons to use public transit conveniently and COVID considerations affecting the public’s interest in using mass transit. Expansion of para-transit systems like The Ride, was discussed as an alternative for the disabled. Referring to data from the book, *Drawdown*, Peter Bruce commented that there are more impactful ways to address climate change than TOD and “walkable cities,” including incentives to transition to hybrid and all-electric vehicles and proliferating charging stations.

Councilor Crossley explained “redlining” and commented that the 1925 zoning reflected its impact in some of Newton’s villages. Upper Falls and Nonantum and parts of Newtonville were especially hard-hit. *Pam Shufro expressed the hope that Pam Shufro said she hoped that the proposed new zoning code would not make Newton even less affordable to the non-affluent than today's code and hence act as a modern-day functional equivalent of red-lining.* ~~redlining would not occur under a redesigned zoning code.~~

4. **Administrative Issues**

**a) Review and approval of minutes.** The minutes of the June and July 2020 meetings were circulated to NAC members for review prior to the meeting. Carolyn Gabbay moved the June 2020 meeting minutes be approved, and Peter Bruce seconded the motion. It was:

**VOTED:** To approve the June 2020 meeting minutes.

In Favor: 7

Abstaining: 1 (Kirill Alshewski, noting that he was abstaining because he had not been able to attend the meeting)

Jessica Aker Archer moved the July 2020 meeting minutes be approved, and Carolyn Gabbay seconded the motion. It was:

**VOTED:** To approve the July 2020 meeting minutes.

In Favor: 7

Abstaining: 1 (Kirill Alshewski, noting that he was abstaining because he had not been able to attend the meeting)

**b) New donation to the Newton Food Pantry.** Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay noted an increased number of people relying on the Newton Food Pantry (NFP) and the NFP's increased costs of operations, and suggested that the NAC make another \$2,500 donation to the NFP. She withdrew the suggestion after discussion about the NAC's cash position and current and anticipated expenses.

**c) Timely preparation of the minutes.** Peter Bruce summarized his understanding of advice he had received from David Olson about Open Meeting Laws' (OML) timeliness requirements for the public availability of notes/minutes of meetings within 10 days of a meeting. Martina Jackson clarified that the requirement Peter was commenting upon applied only if a request was made for the notes/minutes. Peter commented that we should try to do a better job of timeliness with the minutes in the future.

There being no further business of the meeting, at approximately 9:45 PM, Pam Shufro moved and Peter Bruce seconded a motion to adjourn. It was unanimously:

**VOTED:** To adjourn.

Respectfully Submitted,

Peter Bruce, Secretary Pro Tempore