



Newtonville Area Council Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 15, 2021 7:00 PM
Meeting Location: Online via Zoom

- NAC members:
 - Peter Bruce (President), Kartikey Trivedi (Vice President), Dana D’Agostino (Treasurer), Carolyn Gabbay (Secretary), Jessica Aker Archer, Martina Jackson and Susan Reisler,
- Members of the public: Approximately 5 people

Peter Bruce called the meeting to order and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

1. Burning Issues - open for the community to raise issues

a) Garden Remedies: marijuana signs in Brighton and Newton

Carolyn Gabbay asked why terms of Garden Remedies’ Special Permit (SP), which specifically designates the negotiated and agreed signage permitted at the site, have not been enforced and why there has been no reply from the Planning Department to several inquiries by Susan Quigley. She suggested the NAC send a letter. Peter Bruce agreed that a letter should be sent, noting that Planning’s failure to respond was rude. He also commented on Garden Remedies’ Mass Pike billboard, as well as lit signs at Trio and other sites a bad for the City’s aesthetics. Martina Jackson concurred that they diminish Newton’s public image. Jessica Archer said that, while she was not concerned about the word “CANNABIS” appearing on Garden Remedies’ new signs she criticized the failure to comply with the SP and Planning’s lack of response. Kartikey Trivedi expressed concern about both follow through failures.

Carolyn moved, and Marina seconded, and it was unanimously

VOTED: to send a short letter from the NAC to the Planning Department about the non-compliant Garden Remedies sign and the lack of responsiveness to the NAC and residents.

ACTION ITEM:

- ***Carolyn agreed to draft the letter.***

In response to Peter’s question about the Garden Remedies billboard in Brighton that is visible just before the Newton exit on the Mass Pike, Carolyn noted that the Cannabis Control Commission has not been restricting billboards despite complaints in various communities. Jessica said that she had not seen increase people lining up at Garden Remedies since the billboard was erected. Carolyn speculated that the billboard had been erected in anticipation of competition when the Washington Street Ascend marijuana shop opens and that Garden Remedies’ disregard for the terms of the SP might be an argument against its anticipated request to amend the SP to change the sign and remove the “appointments only” condition of operation.

b) Benches on Walnut Street: the decision-making process

Martina expressed concern with aesthetic and comfort/functionality of the new benches and noted the non-uniform styles of the benches installed on Austin and Walnut Streets and other nearby Newtonville locations. She expressed concern about the process and lack of consultation with the NAC or Beautiful Newtonville per their testimony, noting that Barney Heath – who had failed to attend this NAC meeting - had said at the last NAC meeting that the benches were shown, but without clarifying to whom. She also reported that it was her understanding that President Albright had said to Marcia Johnson that there are more important things to deal with than the benches.

Peter suggested sending a letter from the NAC, possibly jointly with Beautiful Newtonville, about the process even if there is no agreement on the comfort and aesthetics of the benches, including the use of consultants to make decisions without public consultation.

Jessica wondered whether the City's choices might have been limited by vendor contracts.

While agreeing on the issue of process and lack of consultation, noted that Barney's absence was likely due to the concurrent ZAP on gun shop zoning.

Martina, Peter and Kartikey commented on the process, the lack of consultation, transparency, courtesy and respect for the NAC.

Peter moved, and Martina seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: to send a short letter from the NAC to the Planning Department about process used in selecting benches for Newtonville public areas.

ACTION ITEM:

- ***Martina agreed to draft the letter.***

c) Other

Susan Reisler raised the issue of responsibility or cleaning the tables near the benches as well as garbage being left in the area, including by students and others having lunch in the area. She suggested that nearby shopkeepers might be willing to help and the possibility of posting flyers or signs reminding people to bin their trash. Other suggestions included contacting the NNHS principal, the PTSO, and/or NNHS student clubs that focus on environmental issues.

ACTION ITEMS:

- ***Susan agreed to follow up with shopkeepers and look into flyers/signs.***
- ***Jessica agreed to contact NNHS student clubs.***
- ***Martina agreed to contact the NNHS PTSO.***

Comments were also made about the whether the white trim and white (and, in some cases blue) chairs would remain clean over time and whether those features might be painted dark green to match the lampposts. There were also comments of decorating the Bram Way jersey barriers.

ACTION ITEM:

- ***Susan agreed to call Councilor Norton about these ideas.***

2. Follow-up discussion on gun stores and zoning

There was a general discussion on the issues relating to the gun shop that was proposed for 709 Washington Street, including of the discussion that took place at the recent meeting of the Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) and the related public hearing session. Some of the comments included:

- Sensitive uses near by the areas proposed for gun shops in the ZAP recommended “Alternative 5”.
- The failure of the Washington Street gun shop applicant to obtain a building permit, raising questions about the likelihood of the applicant to follow other regulations in connection with operating a gun shop.
- Whether the Newton police had or should have considered the suitability of the location and its plate glass window in approving the security plan submitted by the applicant, and what security criteria were used by the Police Department.
- How to make sure the facts surrounding the Washington Street gun shop application are publicly known.

Kartikey moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To submit a request, pursuant to the public records law, to the City of Newton for copies of documents relating to the proposed 709 Washington Street gun shop and to authorize the expenditure of up to \$100.00 for any fees assessed by the City in connection with the fulfilling the request.

ACTION ITEMS:

- *Kartikey agreed to submit the request letter on behalf of the NAC.*
- *Carolyn agreed to assist him in drafting the request letter.*

3. Zoning Redesign: Village center zoning

- a) What we’d like to see
- b) The NAC’s role in community engagement
- c) Response letter to Mayor Fuller

Extended discussion on these topics were deferred to a future meeting when Nevena Pilipovic-Wengler can attend.

It was noted that Ms. Pilipovic-Wengler plans a tour through Newtonville’s village center on May 26, following a May 20 Zoom meeting explaining the vision kit and a survey process. It was also noted that the plan for outreach highlights focus groups of young people, LGBTQ+, older adults, creative communities, and other special groups, but omits a focus on homeowners and people older than youth but younger than seniors. The NAC will encourage resident participation.

Peter Harrington commented that the Polis technique is not scientific and that, since the NAC’s survey has been consistently criticized by those who do not wish to consider its results, he suggested avoiding using the term “survey” for the Polis tool.

Other comments included noting that the Planning Department’s previously convened outreach sessions had not done as well as they should have with sharing via a plenary session at the conclusion of separate

breakout sessions, the Newton's architect community would be valuable contributors to the process if they were engaged by the Planning Department and that, if there was a desire to do so, the City could conduct a "scientific" (statistically valid) study of residents. There was also discussion of the inconsistent listing of "goals" for the zoning redesign project from, among others ZAP and the Mayor and the apparent commitment to Transit Oriented Development. Peter

Harrington took the position that the accessory apartments ordinance already effectively opened the City to multi-family housing in what is generally regarded as the single-family housing zones.

Kartikey posited that there are 2 distinct patterns of housing in Newton, namely (1) the north side of the city with many existing 2-family homes in which apartment complexes owned/operated by a developer are being pushed, and (2) the south side where population is increasing with smaller lots and attached units. He also noted that Newton's biggest "selling point" and the attraction for many apartment dwellers has been the perceived quality of its school system, despite the fact that its rankings have been declining.

Peter Harrington, supported by Martina's comments, also noted that the north side has a history of being the most diverse part of the City culturally, religiously and economically and that the gentrification of Newtonville by developers who are concerned with making large returns on their investments is making it hard to maintain that diversity.

Jessica commented that, aside from affordability issue, the fact that Newton's school system is only "good" but not the "best" was a selling point for her family in selecting Newton so that she would be subject to less competition growing up.

On affordability, discussion points included that having speculative developers build supposedly "moderate" income is driving out real moderate- income housing and that the price of housing at Trio for persons with incomes at 80% AMI is hundreds of dollars more expensive than natural affordable housing stock, while the cost of the market rate housing at Trio is exorbitant.

4. Toward a housing policy for the future

Peter Bruce noted that several constructive ideas concerning future housing policy have been discussed, including Councilor Marc Laredo's suggestion to increase the amount of affordable housing required for approval of large projects to 25%, Peter Harrington's suggestions for village centers, as well as allowing detached accessory dwellings on the south side of Newton (with or without infrastructure impact fees). He suggested that the NAC might pull together an idea exchange forum including Engine 6, Right Size Newton and others to try to find common ground without adversely affecting Newton's community fabric.

Peter Harrington suggested investigating ways to encourage non-profit developers to build affordable housing since taking the profit incentive out lowers sale and rental costs. He noted that Josephine MacNeil says the City taxes low- and moderate-income properties and he suggested the City waive the real estate taxes for non-profit developers to drive cost down and create an incentive to pay a reasonable price for the land and to build low- and moderate-income housing.

Peter Bruce noted that a community land trust might be considered to buy the land and lease to developers who would build 100% affordable housing, a concept that Pam Shufro has previously suggested might be funded via charitable contributions. Martina commented that the Dudley Street reclamation was accomplished in much the same way.

There was a consensus that sponsoring a forum, that was “professionally” managed and well organized (possibly with some keynote presenters and a reactor panel) could have credibility and lead to an open discussion that would be the best way to inform the public and develop realistic solutions to real problems.

ACTION ITEM:

- ***Peter will appoint a working group, including Martina and himself and any other interested people to pursue the concept.***

5. Administrative issues

a) Village Day

Dana D’Agostino and Martina reported that planning and preparations (such as having an event vision and division of labor plan) are proceeding at the “go slow” recommended by the City, holding off on making deposits but assuming that an in-person event will take place. A Save-a-Date is in the finishing stages for the artwork with the intention of distributing it in June with a vendor survey, as well as posting to the NAC Facebook page. The plan calls for one sound stage on Highland Street and another on Austin Street, and the sound engineer used in the past has done a walk-through. Dana and Martina know how to line up performers.

b) Gaining control of our Facebook credentials

Councilor Norton has agreed to administer the Facebook page and has experience with maintaining Facebook pages. Ken Roberts volunteered to continue to administer the site, but also agrees to turn the credentials over to her after the NAC takes a vote for him to do so. Peter moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To appoint Councilor Emily Norton the new Facebook page administrator to serve at the pleasure of the NAC and with limited authority to post only those items authorized by the NAC, and to thank Ken Roberts for his past service and ask him to transfer all relevant credentials to Councilor Norton.

c) Review and approval of the April 2021 meeting minutes

Discussion and action were deferred.

6. Adjournment

At 9:30 Carolyn moved, Martina seconded, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay

Secretary

DRAFT