

# Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

## Meeting Minutes, December 2, 2021

### **Area Council members:**

Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Larry Rosenberg, Amy Wayne

### **Ex Officio:**

City Councilors Bill Humphrey present; Brenda Noel and Holly Ryan not present

### **Guests:**

Lisa Gordon, Carol Carroll

Meeting called to order at 7:12 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin presiding. The meeting was held using Zoom videoconferencing technology.

### Local and City Updates:

#### Area Council Elections:

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin congratulated the winners of the recent Area Council elections on November 2. Congratulations to Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, and Larry Rosenberg. The Area Council has 3 openings and is seeking additional area councilors. Amy Wayne will be spending some time in California and the rest in Newton, and is considering further participation in the Area Council. Regarding swearing in for the new term, there are no definite plans for swearing in at this time. Nathaniel will reach out to the new City Clerk to discuss plans for swearing in.

#### 1021 Boylston Street Starbucks Proposal:

Area Council President Lichtin reported on the proposal for a Starbucks at this location. The proposal was withdrawn by the developer. It is no longer under consideration at this time.

#### Slower Snow Clearing This Winter:

Snow clearing this winter will be slower than usual, due to lack of contractors for plowing. On another winter-related topic, Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that the Area Council should discuss the winter parking ban. City Councilor Humphrey noted that opinions are divided, as there are areas of the city where there is significant opposition to the ban and other areas that are supportive of continuing it. Area Councilor Nedeljkovic noted that he had mostly heard opposition to the winter parking ban.

### Garden Remedies (Newtonville) Appointment Only Requirement:

Area Council President Lichtin reported that Garden Remedies has been approved to remove their appointment-only condition. City Councilor Bill Humphrey note that leaving the appointment system in place could be problematic because some customers are sitting in their cars and waiting for their appointment, rather than just going into the store. It seems that the appointment-only measure may not be necessary for marijuana retail locations going forward as crowding and congestion does not seem to be an issue.

### Other Updates:

There were no additional city updates from President Lichtin. City Councilor Humphrey noted that the condominium project at 1114 Beacon Street was approved. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic expressed disappointment on the proposed design of the new development at 69 Lincoln Street, next to the post office, which is being planned as a snout house design. It is unfortunate that the zoning code or other city statutes do not regulate for the design of this kind of development, especially in a historic area.

### Zoning Redesign Update

The Zoning and Planning Committee held a public meeting on November 18. A discussion took place related to 7 major zoning and planning issues that were identified from the community outreach that took place last summer. A discussion ensued at that meeting on how to accomplish the 7 major goals. There was a lot of talk about height and density bonuses, which are two different concepts. It was noted that increased density can be accomplished by building larger buildings or by making multiple smaller units on a lot. The lead item discussed under sustainability was about encouraging the reuse of existing buildings and incentivizing their reuse. There was discussion about increasing density in the village centers as a method to improve sustainability. There was additional discussion about encouraging smaller retail spaces to encourage local small businesses.

Insuring minimum sidewalk widths was discussed, as sidewalk space is important to many people. There is talk about the process for building, and how the zoning process can be optimized to make development easier for landowners and developers, give them assurances, and remove some burdensome requirements. Setback issues were discussed. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that there needs to be more attention to design during the zoning discussions, as the acceptability of a new development is often determined as much by its design as by whether it meets zoning requirements. He pointed out two current development projects on Lincoln Street. One project at 125 Lincoln Street seems contextually appropriate and respectful of historical design elements. The other project at 69 Lincoln Street next to the Post Office is being built as a bulky snout house without any historical references.

The next meeting for Zoning Redesign will be on December 15<sup>th</sup>. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked if there is a demand for small retail spaces. Apparently, other village centers that have smaller storefronts have done relatively well compared to those with larger storefronts. Nathaniel

Lichtin noted a reference to this issue in the October zoning presentation, and how density of population matters in order for these kinds of businesses to thrive. Mr. Lichtin later noted that the zoning redesign process is also considering new requirements for regulating shadows related to setbacks.

### Plans for Area Council Next Year

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin asked about ideas for the next term for the Area Council. In January, we will have two items up for discussion. John Rice mentioned that Parks & Recreation staff will come to our January Area Council meeting to talk about the Officer English Garden landscaping. Another representative from the city will come to the January meeting to talk with us about improvements in the Highlands village center using federal stimulus money.

A discussion ensued about additional ideas for Area Council topics for next year. Zoning redesign will be a major topic on the Area Council agenda. The Area Council will be involved in the planning for village center improvements. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell believes that the Area Council should take a more active role with regards to planning for village centers improvements. There are safety issues with traffic in the Highlands, and new crosswalks and stop signs should be considered. Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg noted people making an illegal U-turn in the village center is a dangerous situation.

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that John Rice is in the process of being appointed to serve on the Historical Commission. John has also been appointed to serve on the Parks & Recreation Commission. These appointments were made at the request of the Mayor with approval by City Council.

Area Councilor Bob Burke suggested that the Area Council should consider the architecture and planning ideas of Mark Hershman, a local architect. Bob has heard Mr. Hershman talk about how to approach to some of the development issues we are facing in Newton. How can we build projects that discourage loneliness and isolation, and build projects that bring people together? Srdjan Nedeljkovic suggested that we could invite Mr. Hershman to give a presentation related to zoning and architecture to the Area Council.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell noted how window boxes on the Walnut Street bridge in the summer enhance the streetscape. Over the winter, there is a possibility to put up fence art, as it is being done in Waban and at Cold Spring Park. Ellen Fisher organizes these displays, and Area Councilor Darnell suggested that we could ask her to put up a display on the bridge over the winter. Area Councilor Lichtin noted he had received a request to put a sign on the bridge for a community refrigerator, where people can drop off and pick up food.

For a discussion about traffic and safety, a suggestion was made to invite the city traffic engineer, Isaac Prizant, to a future meeting. Lisa Gordon suggested that we should be proactive about advocating for safety improvements. Area Councilor Groot Gregory recommended a survey to gather opinions about priorities. Nathaniel suggested that Area Council members could bring forth ideas, circulate them, and then develop a survey for the community about safety improvements.

### Administrative Items:

Approval of November Minutes: The draft minutes were submitted for review from the November 4<sup>th</sup> Area Council meeting. Minor changes were made to the draft minutes. The minutes were approved with these changes 7:0.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory provided an update. Money was spent on the candidate forums, zoom, and the Area Council purchased new checks.

### New Business:

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin reported that John Rice has asked that the Area Council pull a permit to hold a Winter Festival at the Hyde Playground. The Area Council will be noted as a supporter of this event. The Soup Social will be part of the Newton Community Pride Winter Festival, with the soup being served outside. The following day, in Newton Centre, there will be a light show.

John Rice is considering putting together another Newton Highlands History event. Bob Burke will share stories about history of the Highlands. This is being envisioned as an oral history project. A plaque for the village center is already in the fabrication stage.

Carol Carroll noted a special permit application for 175 Allerton Road. This was a three-family house, and some renovations have already been made. Now there is new proposal that will include lifting the roof, adding decks, and exterior stairs. The proposed property will have 11 bathrooms and three stories with exterior stairs. There is concern about the appearance of the development and how it will fit with the neighborhood. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic once again noted that there needs to be more attention to design of properties like this. With a historic district, there would have been some additional oversight of projects like this.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic reported that there are addresses on Clark Street that appear on the Area Council map but that are not included in the listing of addresses that are in the catchment area. Depending on interest of the residents, these addresses may be added to the Area Council. In the meantime, the map will need to be corrected.

### Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.