

# Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

## Meeting Minutes, March 3, 2022

### **Area Council members:**

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

### **Ex Officio:**

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

### **Guests:**

Karl O'Hara, Carol Stapleton, Luis Demorizi, Gregg Mellett, Barbara O'Hara, Jeremy Freudberg, Patrick O'Hara, Amy Wayne, John Rice, Hattie Kerwin Derrick, Beth Capstick, Brian Oates, Isabelle Albeck, Rena Getz, Patrick Knight, City Councilor Alicia Bowman, Andrew Pearlman, Rick Ropelewski, Carol Hausner

Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell presiding. The meeting was held using Zoom videoconferencing technology.

### Substantive Topics:

#### Expansion of the NHNAC Service Area to include all of Clark Street:

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell reported that the petition to add parts of Clark Street to the NHNAC was approved by the Program & Services Committee of the City Council on February 23. She thanked Jeremy Freudberg, a resident of Clark Street, and Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic for bringing the petition forward. The matter will up before full City Council at the March 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

#### NHNAC Election:

A conversation took place regarding election of officers for the Area Council. A decision was made to continue with the current officers from the prior term, with Nathaniel Lichtin (President), Barbara Darnell (Vice President), Groot Gregory (Treasurer), and Srdjan Nedeljkovic (Secretary) and to discuss the matter further at a subsequent Area Council meeting.

#### Appointment of NHNAC New Members:

Regarding new members, there are currently 3 openings for the Area Council. According to bylaws, a vacancy notice will need to be posted to give any interested parties an opportunity to declare their interest. After a vacancy notice is posted, then an interested member can be appointed by the elected Area Council members at a subsequent meeting. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic stated that he

will make a note of the vacancies in the minutes of tonight's meeting and post the vacancy notice on the google group list serve. John Rice expressed interest in joining the Area Council, as did Jeremy Freudberg. Amy Wayne is also interested in rejoining the Area Council

Presentation of John O'Hara sign for the Office English Garden:

Luis Demorizi, Director of Parks & Open Space from the City of Newton gave a presentation about a proposal for new landscaping for the Officer English Garden at the corner of Lincoln and Walnut Streets. He introduced Gregory Mellett, a landscape architect who has worked on plans for the new garden. Mr. Demorizi also recognized members of the O'Hara family who are looking forward to funding the landscaping and maintenance of the garden. An image of the current garden was shown. The new proposal was described. The space of the current garden will be substantially replanted with native pollinator friendly plants such as dwarf purple coneflower, butterfly weed, Black Eyed Susan, trumpet daffodils, blue fescue, dwarf snowcap, Shasta daisy, and stone crop. Images of these plants were shown. The landscape plan will be simplified to include only hardy, drought tolerant varieties. After the third year, the area should be filled in nicely. A 2'x2' stone monument commemorating John O'Hara will be included in the design. The plants will have a maximum height of 3 feet to maintain visibility into the seating area.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked if there were any plans to include trees in the space. Mr. Demorizi responded that there are currently no plans to include trees. The three cherry trees now in the garden will be removed. It was noted that there are 3 non-viable trees currently in the garden. The soil will need to be refreshed, but some of the native soil will be retained. The landscape plans are staying away from plants that require lots of water. The O'Hara family will be taking care of initially watering the garden via their contractor. Once the plants start naturalizing, the watering requirements may be reduced. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked if the Parks and Recreation watering truck may be used to assist in watering. Mr. Demorizi responded that the watering truck may come by at times to add water and that the Parks and Recreation Department will work with the O'Hara family to ensure that a good watering plan is maintained. Isabelle Albeck asked if one small tree could be included so that some shade could be added to the garden. Mr. Demorizi responded that Parks & Recreation will consider if this is feasible. If so, this would be a small ornamental tree or a larger shrub, like a witch hazel.

John Rice expressed his appreciation to Area Councilor Barbara Darnell for managing much of the landscaping for the Hyde Garden. On behalf of the Area Council, Area Councilor Barbara Darnell then thanked the O'Hara family for their contributions to the garden. City Councilor Brenda Noel also thanked the Area Council and the O'Hara family for pulling the Officer English Garden project together. City Councilor Noel noted that the City of Newton is grateful for the generosity of the O'Hara family.

Area Councilor Nathaniel Lichtin asked about the 2' x 2' stone monument that is being planned for the garden. Mr. Demorizi stated that the monument has been fabricated and is awaiting installation. It is a pillar-style granite monument demarcating the square on three sides. The monument is being donated by the O'Hara family. Amy Wayne asked about the height of the monument. Mr. Demorizi responded that the monument will be 6' high from level of the plantings. The planting bed is about 2' high from street level, so the monument will be 8 feet high from street level. Amy Wayne

wondered if the height is excessively tall and whether an eye level monument would be more appropriate. Mr. Demorizi noted that there will be etched letters on the granite. John Rice commented that he is working on a sign to commemorate Officer English, explaining the history of the garden. Parks & Recreation will replace the sign that was once on the fence next to the garden. Amy Wayne asked who was making decisions regarding the monument, and Luis responded that the Parks & Recreation Department has administrative decision-making authority over the garden. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell thanked the O'Hara family once again for their contributions to the square, as well as to their long-standing contributions to the Newton Highlands community. Luis Demorizi also thanked the O'Hara family for their contribution.

### Zoning Redesign:

Rena Getz provided an update about zoning redesign. She reviewed the timeline regarding the implementation of the MBTA Communities Act for the establishment of multifamily zoning districts. The Planning Department will be making a presentation of the zoning requirements to City Council on March 7<sup>th</sup>. This presentation is a requirement of complying with the guidelines, and the purpose is to inform the City Council about the MBTA Communities Act, section 3A, c 40A. The public is welcome to attend this informational meeting.

A concurrent process zoning initiative is taking place with the Zoning & Planning Committee. Last Monday, there was a presentation at the Zoning and Planning Committee meeting of what current zoning allows to be built out on the lots within village centers and the amount of build that could go on each lot, taking into consideration parking requirements. This analysis intended to show what current zoning could allow for development and is a baseline for what future zoning could accommodate for development. The first meeting by ZAP was focused on large village centers, and the next meeting will consider smaller village centers. There is not much opportunity for public comment at this time.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked the difference between a large and a small village center. Rena responded that this may be based on existing density or allowable density in each village. The Planning Department has not yet classified its village centers, but the classifications may be similar to a previous zoning exercise from about 2 years ago. Rena then reported on later milestones for the MBTA Communities Act. By May 2, 2022, the City is required to submit an MBTA Community Information Form. By December 31, 2022, Newton is required to submit an Action Plan or Request for Compliance Determination.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked for a summary explaining the MBTA Communities Act. The bill requires for Newton to create by-right multifamily housing equivalent to 25% of our existing housing stock, so Newton needs to create zoning capacity for 8,330 new units. There are two stipulations for this in addition to the number of units that are required. The minimum density of a multifamily zone needs to be 15 units per acre, and the new zoning needs to encompass a minimum of 25 acres. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked if compliance with the Act would be accomplished if a single zone of 25 acres can be approved within the city that has a high enough density to accommodate 8330 units. Rena stated that she believed that this would technically be compliant with the requirements of the Act. If a community does not meet this requirement, then a

community will be ineligible for local capital grants and other infrastructure funding. The funds awarded to cities and towns which adopt these provisions may be used throughout the city.

Area Councilor Bob Burke asked about the issue of overlapping areas adjacent to transit stations, such as those within one-half mile of the Waban and the Eliot MBTA stations. It was noted on the transit map that there are a number of overlapping Green line stations that fall within a half mile radius of each other. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked why a community would opt to lose control over local zoning decisions. Isabelle Albeck pointed out that there are a large number of people who are worried about equity. Rena Getz noted that equity can be achieved through a local zoning process, perhaps more so than if a by-right process puts housing decisions outside of local control.

#### Plans for Area Council for the Next Year:

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell stated she would like the Area Council to work to address the safety issues around Lincoln and Walnut streets. She suggested that the Area Council may wish to engage with the traffic manager at City Hall. Jeremy Freudberg also expressed interest in addressing traffic safety, but noted that any roadway design issues will likely be rolled into the upcoming Newton Highlands capital project. Jeremy also brought up that the Area Council meetings will convert back to in person meetings. He suggested that the Area Council may wish to send another postcard to the community to get more people involved. Nathaniel Lichtin noted that a few people became interested in the Area Council from our prior mailing. Barbara Darnell noted that she puts out a sign on the Walnut Street bridge regarding the Area Council, which is a way to engage people.

John Rice mentioned that the city is implementing safety zones in high pedestrian areas of the city, and that a section of Lincoln Street may become a safety zone with a 20-mph zone, instead of 30 mph. This proposal may be going before City Council. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic commented on the ambiguous signage of the safety slow speed zones, which may be perceived as zones where people actually speed. A discussion ensued regarding speeding of trucks. It was noted that slow speeds are safer for bicyclists. Larry Rosenberg noted that putting up signs about traffic regulations is not as important as enforcement of the rules.

Barbara Darnell noted that the police chief has offered to come to the Area Council, and that that the Area Council may consider inviting him to a future meeting. Nathaniel Lichtin suggested that implementing the village capital improvement plan should be a focus of the Area Council. Barbara Darnell offered to collect by e-mail further ideas for action items by the Area Council.

#### Administrative Items:

Approval of February Minutes: The draft minutes were submitted for review from the February 3<sup>rd</sup> Area Council meeting. The initial draft had been revised based on feedback. The revised minutes were approved 6:0.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory provided an update. No transactions to report. Groot has been in touch with Steve Feinstein about ordering items for Village Day, including the Road Race and the Bounce House.

New Business:

John Rice stated that he is planning a commemoration for Bob Burke and suggested that early May would be a reasonable time-period to plan for an event to honor Bob's decades of service. John noted that he plans to document some of Bob's stories over the years. T

It was noted that the John O'Hara dedication at the Officer English Garden may occur at Village Day this year.

Jeremy Freudberg pointed out that the zoom link for the meeting that was listed on the meeting agenda did not link to zoom. An effort will be made to correct this issue.

Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.