

# Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

## Meeting Minutes, May 5, 2022

### **Area Council members:**

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

### **Ex Officio:**

City Councilors Brenda Noel, Bill Humphrey, and Holly Ryan were not present

### **Guests:**

Lisa Gordon, Robert Solomon, Jenn Martin, Amy Wayne, Robert Fizek, Rena Getz, Chris Pitts, Steven Feinstein, Jay Flynn, John Orrison, Carol Carroll

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. It was confirmed that since the NHNAC's prior meeting, Jeremy Freudberg has officially been sworn in as a member of the Area Council but that Amy Wayne has not yet been sworn in.

### Substantive Topics:

#### Crystal Lake Algae Treatment

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin provided an update about the recent water treatment at Crystal Lake to improve water quality and reduce the risk of algae blooms. The first treatment of aluminum sulfate to inactivate phosphorus in the sediments of the lake was done in 2020, and now in 2022 the second planned treatment was applied. After the lake treatment in 2020, monitoring showed increased water clarity (from 9.5 to 16.4 feet), increased dissolved oxygen at the lake bottom (from 37% to 59%) and normalized pH levels (from 7.9 to 6.8).

It is hoped that this year's treatment should be adequate to manage the lake for the next 20 years. The lake is safe to swim in. It is hoped that water quality will be excellent during the summer. Crystal Lake opens on June 13<sup>th</sup>. The treatment will mitigate phosphorus from coming up from the sediment at the base of the lake. With these treatments, in addition to mitigating street run-off, it is hoped that there will be no further algae blooms.

#### Northland Update

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin reported that he sits on the Northlands community liaison committee and that anybody can join the e-mail list by going to the construction site and registering <northlandnewtonconstruction.com>. The next meeting of this committee is on June 22. This May

and June, Northland will be demolishing the old Marshalls and AAA buildings on the site. Additional low-grade demolition will take place from May to August. Construction work will start in July and continue the rest of the year. At the same time, Mass DOT will be doing work on Needham Street, and the two entities are working to manage truck traffic to minimize impact on the community.

Once construction at the Northland site gets going, it will continue until all buildings are completed in 2026. The design for a community Splash Park is with the city planning department for review. Additional meetings of the construction liaison group will take place up until September. The overall plans for the project have not changed from what was approved by City Council. Design guideline review is taking place. A discussion ensued about when to invite Northland to update the Area Council about their project.

#### Traffic Council Agenda Items regarding Lincoln Street

Jenn Martin noted two traffic council items for the upcoming May 19<sup>th</sup> meeting that are regarding Lincoln Street. Item TC17-22 is in reference to daylighting two crosswalks. The city is proposing to remove a parking spot in front of the Bank of America ATM. There is a concern that drivers may not see pedestrians. The Department of Public Works has the administrative authority to remove the parking spot as it is within 25 feet of a crosswalk. The other parking spot to be removed is on the eastbound side of Lincoln Street adjacent to the crosswalk near the arched entry of the building that houses the Davis Hairdressing salon. It was noted that a third parking spot has recently been removed on Lincoln Street at Chester Street across from the Hyde Center. Each of these parking spaces will be removed administratively and no vote is needed by Traffic Council.

Bob Burke noted that he is glad that the parking spaces will be removed due to safety concerns. Groot Gregory asked if alternative uses can be considered for those spaces, like bike racks. Jenn Martin responded that as long as visibility is maintained, this may be possible. It was noted that parking is at a premium for the village center. Nathaniel Lichtin pointed out that administrative decisions like this that are implemented can also be undone administratively.

Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg suggested that perhaps new crosswalk locations could be considered in order to replace the 3 parking spaces that were lost. It was also pointed out that additional parking spaces will be lost on Lincoln Street to accommodate a new driveway for the new house that is being built next to the post office. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked why we don't have a blinking light at the crosswalk in the village. Jenn Martin responded that the city is developing an RRFB priority list. The list is quite long. It was noted that parking and other issues will be discussed as part of the village streetscape redesign that is being planned for Newton Highlands. A kickoff meeting is being scheduled for June 7<sup>th</sup> to solicit community input and feedback.

Jenn Martin noted that another item on the Traffic Council agenda for May is implementation of a 20-mph safety zone in the village center. These types of safety zones are used as a reminder to drivers that they are in a place where there are vulnerable pedestrians. The zone is delineated by signs. At the end of the safety zone, a sign will be posted "end speed zone". The safety zone proposal is to start the zone on Lincoln Street at Walnut Street and extend it to the Hyde Center.

Area Councilor Barbara Darnell noted that traffic often goes fast on Lincoln Street. There is also an issue of double-parked cars on Lincoln Street. Perhaps additional traffic calming may be considered near the Hyde Center.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic asked if village business owners were consulted regarding the administrative decision to remove parking spaces. Jenn Martin stated that she did not know if businesses were notified yet about the proposed removal of parking as a result of TC17-22. Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg, who is an alternate resident member of Traffic Council, pointed out that landlords are typically notified as part of the Traffic Council protocol.

Area Councilor Nedeljkovic stated that although it would seem logical that removing these spaces will increase visibility and improve pedestrian safety, there could be unintended consequences that the perceived increased width of the road could encourage some drivers to drive faster rather than slowing down. In addition, allowing the newly developed property next to the post office to have two double-width driveways and curb cuts may lead to reduced pedestrian safety. Area Councilor Nedeljkovic wondered if parking spaces that had been previously removed on Lincoln Street near the Hyde Center could be restored in order to mitigate any new loss of spaces in the village center.

Rena Getz noted that the budget for the upcoming street improvement project in Newton Highlands is \$5 million. These funds, of which \$250K will be appropriated this year, are to upgrade signal equipment, enhance sidewalks, and improve safety. Amy Wayne pointed out that parking is the most important concern for businesses.

## **Addendum**

An addendum to the minutes and answers to some questions that came up were provided after the meeting by Jenn Martin.

**What is an RRFB?** RRFB stands for “Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon.” These are the pedestrian push-button yellow flashing lights like between the Newton Free Library and City Hall.

**What is the RRFB list?** DPW Transportation is developing an RRFB evaluation and prioritization list similar to the one that they develop each year for Traffic Calming Evaluation and Prioritization. The list will help make data-informed decisions on where to place RRFBs across the City. Some examples of how a location makes it on the evaluation list - locations identified by DPW or Newton Police; locations identified by Councilors; and, at the request of the Newton Safe Routes to School Task Force, locations with a crossing guard at arrival/dismissal.

**Additional follow-up:** Any existing crosswalk crossing free flow traffic (i.e. not stop controlled) that's not already part of a larger project can be added to the list for evaluation. Ms. Martin also clarified with DPW that the opportunity for an addition like this in Newton Highlands may be considered as part of the upcoming village redesign process that has its kick off meeting on June 7.

Learn more about Newton's Traffic Calming Evaluation and Prioritization here:

<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/public-works/transportation-division/traffic-improvement-projects/traffic-calming-projects>.

**Additional follow-up regarding notification of businesses about the upcoming Traffic Council meeting to discuss removal of parking spaces on Lincoln Street:** Ms. Martin checked with David Koses, Transportation Planning Coordinator for the City of Newton, about business notification. Mr. Koses responded:

"All of the addresses which are on or which abut Lincoln Street between 125 Lincoln Street (which is located three parcels to the west of Bowdoin Street) and Walnut Street were notified of the meeting via US mail. The notifications were mailed out earlier this week and should be arriving by today or tomorrow. The agenda that these abutters will receive specifies that the removal of parking spaces will be voted NAN "No Action Needed" by Traffic Council. This is true because Traffic Council does not actually need to vote to remove the parking spaces, but we can remove them administratively since they are both located within 25 feet of a marked crosswalk. They never really even needed to go through the Traffic Council process, in fact."

Mr. Koses also confirmed that the letters were mailed to the parcel addresses to the attention of the owner or resident.

### Needham Street Rail Path

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic announced that a state grant of \$200K had been approved recently to conduct a study of multimodal transportation options in the Needham Street corridor. The Area Council meeting was joined by transportation advocates Jay Flynn from Transit Matters and John Orrison, a consultant who has worked for the MBTA on commuter rail issues. Area Councilor Nedeljkovic composed a letter advocating that the \$200,000 grant include all of the Needham Street corridor and include consideration of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the Charles River and Route 128 and into Needham. The scope of work should include all transportation options, including a light rail extension from Newton Highlands into Needham Heights, as well as options for bus service, and compare the new options to current conditions. The study should also take into account the full width of the 80-ft wide corridor, as well as current and future development in the corridor.

The letter also calls for the study to consider metrics by which to evaluate these options, including impact on transit utilization (ridership), access, cost-effectiveness, mobility, air quality, service quality, neighborhood impact, consistency with various policies, environmental issues, economic and land use impacts, impacts on traffic and congestion, safety considerations, effects on housing, and travel times, and equity and environmental justice, among other things.

The Area Council approved unanimously supporting the letter and suggested that, in addition to Nicole Freedman, it be sent to the Mayor, City Council and State Representatives Ruth Balsler, Kay Kahn and Senator Cynthia Creem. Jeremy Freudberg supported the letter and believes that this rail extension would be one of the most feasible extensions to build. There may be operational challenges to be worked out. Barbara Darnell states she would love to see the businesses and employees more supported with better transportation options. Barbara supports the letter. Nathaniel Lichtin asked if there has been outreach to the Upper Falls community, but was fine with supporting the letter and then making outreach to Upper Falls. Rena Getz supported the letter and asked if this

could be presented to the Waban Area Council. Area Councilor Groot Gregory stated he is inclined to support the letter but would have preferred an advance opportunity to review and consider it.

The letter is time sensitive, so the Newton Highlands Area Council voted to endorse it with the caveat that members have a chance to read it over and make comments by next Wednesday, when Newton's Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) meets and the letter is presented there. Area Council President Lichtin asked that TAG's comments be forwarded to the Highlands Area Council. A vote was held, and the letter was approved unanimously 7:0.

### Lincoln Street Redesign Update

Nathaniel Lichtin and Barbara Darnell reported that representatives from the Department of Public Works, Shawna Sullivan and Jim McGonagle, were not able to join us tonight. However, the following memo was sent from DPW regarding the initiation of the Lincoln Street redesign project:

“DPW will be flyering the Newton Highlands area with information on the project website and the project kickoff meeting in the next few weeks. We will also put up a few message boards in the area advertising the kickoff meeting. Notice of the kickoff meeting will be included in the Mayor's newsletter and on the City's website. We will also ask Councilors to include the meeting in their newsletters. The website will be live when the flyers are distributed. People will be able to offer suggestions at specific locations within the project area. Project kick-off is scheduled on June 7 at 6 pm at the Brigham House. Environmental Partners Group Stoss Landscape Urbanism and city representatives will be at the meeting. We will announce the project email address at the kickoff meeting.”

Area Council Vice President Barbara Darnell noted it will be interesting to see the results of the traffic study that was recently completed in Newton Highlands, and to see traffic speeds. Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg suggested that Jim and Shawna attend our NHNAC June meeting prior to the June 7th community meeting.

### New Members

Area Councilor Bob Burke announced that he will be moving out of Newton Highlands by June 6<sup>th</sup>. Bob has mixed emotions about leaving Newton Highlands but feels that this move is the right choice to move to a new environment. We all hope that Bob will participate virtually even after he leaves the Highlands.

Robert Fizek has expressed an interest in joining the Area Council. He thanked Bob Burke for his service and many years of participation. Robert has lived in Newton Highlands for the past 30 years, and has been involved with Crystal Lake issues and maintaining the Hope Fountain. Robert would be very pleased to join the Area Council. Barbara thanked Robert for keeping the fountain in great shape. Robert thanked all others who contribute to beautification of the fountain, including Barbara Smiley and Cornelia, for all of their effort in maintaining the flowers.

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that Dr. Mark Friedman also expressed an interest in joining the Area Council, but that he couldn't attend tonight's meeting.

Nathaniel reviewed the Areas Council's bylaws, noting that a 2/3 majority is necessary to appoint a new member. A number of current Area Councilors then expressed support for Mr. Fizek. A vote was held to appoint Robert Fizek to the Area Council, with 7 members voting to appoint Robert and none opposed. Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin will notify the City Clerk about the appointment, and Mr. Fizek will go to City Hall to be sworn in.

### Village Day

Steven Feinstein gave an update regarding Village Day planning. Some of the easy steps have been taken care of. There remains concern about having enough person power to handle all of the various tasks. Steven noted that long time Village Day contributor Maureen Oates will not be around and cannot organize the Road Race this year, so Steven is taking on that responsibility. Steven also noted that John Rice has been very helpful with the organization of the event. The 5K race is on track but the registrations went out late. Sponsorship efforts and fundraising have been slow this year. Village Bank has donated \$2000. Salon Capri and Brookline Bank are usual sponsors and are pending. We may also consider approaching Buttonwood Restaurant for sponsorship.

Financially, things are uncertain with regards to Village Day this year. As far as revenues, there is concern about raising adequate revenues from the road race. The vendor website is now up. We have at least 15 sign-ups so far. Steven said that he will be promoting the race. Volunteers are needed this year, especially since Maureen Oates and her network will not be available. We will need a person to handle the cash and the registration table for the road race. People are needed for water stations along the route. We have already secured the police detail. On the marketing side, Steven has talked with Signal Graphics about the Village Day banner, and if we can reuse the old banner. The rest of the signage, lawn signs and some posters will be acquired.

Steven is not sure yet who the headliner will be for the music. The overall cost for music will be lower this year since there will be one stage. We will still go ahead with promotions so that more people sign up and attend. The face painter and caricature artist have been invited back. We will not have a professional magician, and there will be just one stage for music. Any additional activities are welcome, either for kids or for adults. We will ask DPW to come with the trucks. A discussion ensued about inviting the Ligerbots. We will have the bounce houses set up in the parking lot. Steven noted that he needs help with manpower, both in advance and during the day of the event. Promotion and fundraising is needed. Perhaps we can contact Anna's Taqueria for sponsorship. The budget for Village Day is a bit uncertain at this time. There will be lower costs and lower revenues.

Rena Getz gave some suggestions about reaching out to the Ligerbots. Groot Gregory suggested that we could check with police auxiliary about helping with the race. As far as the budget, Groot anticipated that even with the worst case, the event is feasible as a community building event. Groot can help with handling cash for the road race. The vendors will need direction to their spaces. Groot will update the graphics for the event. Bruce Henderson is working on the website which needs to be updated <[highlandsvillageday.org](http://highlandsvillageday.org)>. We also have a Facebook and Twitter account. There is a group of people from Bfitt:60 Training Studio who are interested in running in the road race. Groot noted that Chris Steele may have the ability to be a magician. Barbara Darnell thanked Steve for all of his work on Village Day. Carol Carroll suggested a volleyball demo. Steve mentioned some other local

entertainment options. Nathaniel also mentioned Newton Highlands Conservatory on Winchester Street.

### Administrative Items:

Approval of April Minutes: The draft minutes were submitted for review from the April 7<sup>th</sup> Area Council meeting. A motion was made to approve the minutes as written. The minutes were approved 7:0.

Treasurer's Report: No new transactions last month. Bob Burke noted that there were funds left over from the Local Historic District effort, up to \$2040. There is also a fund for bridge beautification, up to \$1670.

### New Business:

Nathaniel Lichtin brought up the issue of in-person meetings. After July 15, state law states we need to have a quorum for an in-person meeting, and that the Chair needs to be at meetings in person. A hybrid meeting can be established for the public to attend. The internet is stable at the Brigham House. We won't know how it goes until we try it. Groot noted that we had previously discussed enabling hybrid meetings. Jeremy expressed support for hybrid meetings for the public to be able to participate. Robert Fizek suggested that a technical "dry run" could be held at the next meeting at the Brigham House. Barbara suggested that everyone could bring their own laptops, but we may need to use one central microphone.

Jeremy Freudberg asked about the website. Groot and Nathaniel have ability to change it. Jeremy volunteered to keep the website updated. Everyone unanimously congratulated Jeremy as our new webmaster!

Nathaniel noted a number of upcoming meetings. On May 19 at 6 pm and June 28 at 6 pm, the MBTA will host community meetings about bus network redesign. Larry noted that this Saturday is Taiwan Day on Lincoln Street. Bob Burke noted there are events at Hemlock Gorge in Upper Falls, including a guided tour of Upper Falls on Saturday, May 7 from 1 pm to 3 pm. The starting point is the corner of Oak and Chestnut Street for a self-guided tour. Nathaniel noted that on May 11, Walnut Market is applying for a sign permit before the Urban Design Commission.

### Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 pm.