

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, August 4, 2022

Area Council members:

Barbara Darnell, Robert Fizek, Jeremy Freudberg, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, and Larry Rosenberg; Amy Wayne not present

Ex Officio:

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

Guests:

John Rice, Bob Burke, Kathy Pillsbury, Pam Wright, Rena Getz

Meeting called to order at 7:04 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. Area Councilor Nathaniel Lichtin presiding. The meeting was held in person at the Brigham House as well as via Zoom videoconferencing technology.

Substantive Topics:

Local and City Updates - presented by Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin and John Rice.

Area Council Opening: Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that no candidates have asked to be considered for the open position. Area Councilor Robert Fizek put forward a suggestion about a potential new member.

Summer in the Highlands 2022: John Rice reported that the summer concert series events started in June. So far, there have been no rained-out events. Newton Theater Company presented a play for 3 days in June. There have been movie nights and/or concerts every Friday night. The Newton Library has held events in Newton Highlands every Wednesday for children. The Senior Center has been offering Tai Chi in the playground when the weather is not too hot. Shakespeare in the Park will be performing "Pericles" this Saturday night. The final concert will be on September 9th. John noted that the Area Council typically supports the concert series for \$1000 and the Hyde Center will support it with a donation of \$3000.

Festival of the Arts: John Rice reported that the weather was very hot during the weekend of July 23-24 when the Festival of the Arts held music performances in the Highlands. To escape the hot sun, it was decided to set up a portable stage under the oak tree. The set-up included tents and sprinklers were put out. There may have been 400 people in attendance. There were 40-50 people performing per program. Although it was difficult to manage due to the hot weather, the event was a great success. Surveys were sent out afterwards, and there was consensus to not do this in July due to heat and vacations. The Hyde was the anchor of the event this year and had the largest crowds. The

symphony performance was amazing, and all of the other performances were super. Even with the heat, there were no apparent health issues with the attendees.

Library children's room: The new library space for children opened this morning. City Councilor Pam Wright noted that a portion of the old atrium of the library was taken to make the children's area somewhat bigger.

New Cal Update: John Rice reported that over the recent few weeks, the City Council Public Facilities Committee approved the site plan. Last week, the Finance Committee approved a budget of \$19.5 million for the project. City Council will be considering this item at their meeting next week. John noted that the City intends to purchase a private property adjacent to the proposed facility in Newtonville and demolish the house that is on that site once the current owner leaves the site. This new property addition may one day be used for parkland or open space. The adjacent property site will be purchased for \$1.5 million. The next city meeting to discuss the New Cal senior center project will be next week, on August 8.

John Rice informed the Area Council that Senior Services is considering expanding senior services in Newton Highlands while the new Senior Center is being constructed. Once summer camps move out of the Brigham House, the building will be available for Senior Services programs. The Women's Club may be available for Senior Services as well.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic inquired about the status of the lawsuit that had been put forward in opposition to siting the project at the currently proposed site. John reported that the City Council had an executive session regarding this issue, but no further information was available.

Fire Department open house: This will be happening ton August 14 at the headquarters on Willow Street in Newton Centre. Applications are being accepted for anyone who would like to be a firefighter.

Textile recycling: Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin reported on the mayor's announcement that textiles will not be allowed to be disposed in the blue trash bins, but there will be special bins placed at the Rumford Avenue recycling center or at the schools. Also, various charitable organizations will pick up discarded or donated clothing if they are called. The City of Newton will benefit financially from the proper disposal of textiles. City Councilor Pam Wright noted that some dissatisfaction was expressed at the location of these bins at the schools.

Other Updates:

Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg noted that the property at 1158 Beacon Street which was going to be Union Twist is now for sale. Nathaniel Lichtin contacted Mike Ross, the attorney for Union Twist, who confirmed that Union Twist could not close on the property. No certain reason is known for this turn of events. It is unclear if the existence of new home delivery services for marijuana may have had an impact on this situation.

Area Councilor Jeremy Freudberg noted that a settlement agreement had been reached regarding the development project planned for 1149-1151 Walnut Street, but no further information is known at this time.

Area Councilor Robert Fizek commented that a parcel that contains one of the duplex homes near the corner of Walnut and Forest Street may be redeveloped. The duplex may be redeveloped into a single-family building.

Newton Highlands Memorial:

John Rice provided some background information regarding a proposal to update the Newton Highlands World War II memorial. There is a World War II memorial at the Hyde Playground near the corner of Bowdoin and Lincoln Streets which was repaired several years ago due to a motor vehicle collision. When the monument was repaired, the memorial was updated to add a missing name to commemorate that there were 22 men who lost their lives during this war. A discussion subsequently took place how to honor other veterans who had lost their lives during more recent conflicts. It has been brought to attention that a Newton Highlands resident, David Connolly, lost his life in Afghanistan.

A decision was made to update the memorial by adding other names to it. There will be additional names added from veterans who lost their lives during World War I, the Korean war, the Vietnam war, and other wars. John met with the Newton Memorial Art company in Newton Center to develop a new monument that would complement the memorial that is currently in place. The existing monument will remain, and new stone plaques will be added on either side. Research is ongoing to identify which names to place. The new monument will be rededicated once the project has been completed, and a fundraising drive will ensue once the cost is known.

Bob Burke noted that he may have some photographs from the initial dedication of the World War II memorial from 1950. John Rice noted that he has discovered information on where the World War II veterans died. A discussion ensued about the existence of archival photos of Newton Highlands. John Rice noted that he has a collection of photos, and Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic also has a box of photos that he inherited from Keith Tornheim some years ago. Suggestions were made to digitize these photos and make them more readily available to the public.

Zoning Redesign:

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that he met with representatives of the Waban, Upper Falls, and Newtonville Area Councils and that the Area Councils have agreed to hold a community meeting to discuss the zoning redesign process on Saturday, September 10 at the Waban Library Center from 2 pm to 4 pm. The city's Planning Department intends to restart the process of receiving feedback from the public starting September 1. The four area councils will inform the community about this process at the planned September 10th all-area council meeting. This will likely be held as a hybrid in-person and zoom meeting.

At the September 10th meeting, there will be a presentation of zoning issues, followed by a question and answer session. Kathy Pillsbury wondered why this meeting was coordinated between all 4 area councils. Nathaniel Lichtin responded that organizing the meeting will take a lot of effort and that it

makes sense to combine efforts of all the area councils since this issue affects each of their constituents.

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that the response period regarding zoning redesign for the public is propose to be from Sept 1 to Oct 16. Nathaniel proposed that the public comment period stay open for longer. The Upper Falls Area Council is requesting that the public comment period is extended to 3 months. Nathaniel noted that the public will initially have access to zoning redesign materials on September 1. The Area Councils will review these documents and present them to the community on September 10. At the Newton Highlands Area Council meeting in October, the Area Council will use that meeting to draft a response. Area Councilor Robert Fizek noted concerns from the community about the zoning redesign process, including concerns on how to make the zoning materials more accessible and understandable to community members. People also have concerns on how this effort will relate to each individual village. City Councilor Pam Wright noted that the Planning Department may be basing their village maps from information in the Pattern Book project from a few years ago.

City Councilor Pam Wright noted that a big difference in the new zoning regulations will be what is allowed for by-right development, rather than by special permit. For example, there have been proposals to allow 5 stories by right, with the fifth story being recessed, in certain village centers.

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin proposed that the Area Council should submit an official response to the zoning proposals, and that individuals may also submit their own feedback. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic expressed a concern that the zoning reform process will still be a reactive process, in which community members react to an existing, favored proposal, rather than a proactive process in which community input guides the planning process. Area Councilor Robert Fizek wondered how the proposal for Design Guidelines will be developed and detailed, and whether they will be tailored to individual villages. City Councilor Pam Wright asked how the guidelines will be enforced. What if a developer doesn't abide by the guidelines?

City Councilor Pam Wright noted that it is important to understand the definition of terms such as "footprint" and whether parking and overhangs will be considered as part of a footprint of a project. Area Councilor Robert Fizek pointed out that the community would benefit from models in order to better understand how the new proposed zoning will actually look.

Rena Getz pointed out information from the Planning Department showing an example of a recent building that was approved by special permit and how it compares with the new zoning proposal. Rena showed a table from a slide deck that defines proposed setbacks and other parameters that would apply to the zoning code. In these slides, proposed standards have been defined for the various newly revised zoning districts. A discussion ensued about how accessible this information is to the public so that feedback could be offered as part of the various zoning meetings. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic pointed out that the buildings noted as being a precedent for the new zoning are among the most high-density projects approved recently in Newton. It may be more appropriate to identify more typical buildings that exist in village centers, rather than these new outliers, and to use the historically contextual buildings as a better precedent.

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin suggested that the Area Council requests that the public comment period for zoning redesign is extended to 4 months, rather than the current 6 weeks

proposed to allow public comments. Area Councilor Groot Gregory stated that it is important that the Area Council defines the criteria for extending the review period to justify this request for more time. Area Council President Lichtin pointed out that there will be a number of Area Council meetings needed to solicit public feedback and to understand and draft a response from the Area Council, and therefore more time is needed. The Area Council members took a vote, that the vote was 7:0 with one absent member in favor of making this request for additional time.

The other zoning matter brought up by Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin relates to the rules for accessory dwelling units. There is a new proposal to remove the 4-year period after obtaining approval to construct an accessory dwelling project. There is a further proposal to allow the building of certain accessory dwelling units by right. The new proposal recommends that certain accessory dwelling may be allowed to be built to the accessory building setback requirements rather than the main dwelling unit setback requirements. Accessory buildings need to be setback 5 ft from the property line, rather than a setback of 7.5 ft to 25 ft that is required for primary dwellings. The proposal would in effect allow a two-dwelling housing situation on many lots throughout the city. The proposal limits by-right development to a floor area of up to 900 SF. City Councilor Pam Wright noted that an accessory building height may be up to 22 ft tall. Councilor Wright suggested that the new zoning may provide greater latitude if an accessory dwelling is proposed for an existing building structure such as an existing garage. Perhaps there should be further limitations on setbacks if an accessory dwelling is an entirely new construction project. Even though most plans for accessory dwellings are approved by City Council, when a special permit is required, there is more opportunity to modify and improve the project.

Administrative Items:

Approval of June and July Minutes: The draft minutes were reviewed including revisions made to the initial draft minutes from June and July. No comments ensued, and the meeting minutes were approved 7:0 with one absence.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory reported that there will be a net positive balance of about \$200 for Village Day activities once a check for \$3000 is received from the Hyde Center.

Village Day T-Shirts: The effort to give them away has not yet started. John Rice agreed to give them out for free at the Hyde concert series and during the Winter Social event.

Hybrid Meeting feedback: There was consensus that the format was going well. The Area Council will continue this format again next month. The state has approved virtual meetings until the end of March 2023. Robert Fizek expressed support for live meetings over virtual meetings

New Business:

A discussion was held at the start of this month's Area Council meeting regarding a tree that was removed on Lincoln Street. Further information will be obtained from Marc Welch once he returns.

Meeting Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 pm.