

Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

Meeting Minutes, July 2, 2020

Area Council members:

Bruce Blakely, Bob Burke, Barbara Darnell, Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Larry Rosenberg, Amanda Theunissen, Amy Wayne

Ex Officio:

City Councilor Bill Humphrey

Guests:

John Rice, Mark Shooman

Meeting called to order at 7:35 pm. Srdjan Nedeljkovic taking minutes. Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin presiding. The meeting was held using Zoom videoconferencing technology due to the Covid-19 health crisis.

Union Twist Marijuana Dispensary

There was a public hearing held at City Council on June 16 regarding the proposal for Union Twist, a marijuana retail dispensary, at 1158 Beacon Street. There will be at least one final public hearing to follow. The Area Council had submitted a letter to City Council expressing concerns about the proposal and has been waiting to see if any modifications would be made before deciding on whether to take any further action regarding the Union Twist proposal. Area Council members Larry Rosenberg, Amanda Theunissen, and Amy Wayne attended the meeting.

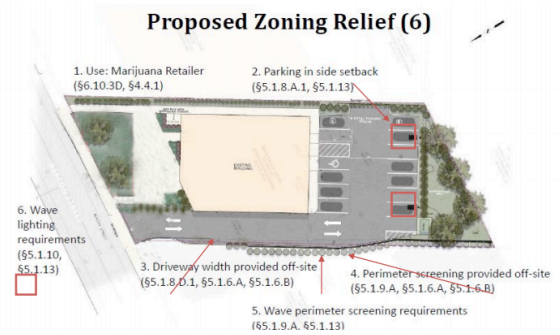
A discussion ensued about one of the major concerns about the proposal, which is traffic flow and its impacts on pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile safety. Union Twist has proposed that two curb cuts be maintained at the site, including a two-way entrance and exit on the western side and a one-way exit on the eastern side. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic presented images of a proposal for a revised access plan that would include one single curb cut entering and exiting the facility. He pointed out that this alternate plan would be safer for cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists. It would be consistent with the Beacon Street bicycle plan and the Safe Routes to School plan for children who walk on this section of Beacon Street to Zervas School. It would also be a better plan to service the restaurant space with an outdoor seating plaza. Furthermore, it would create some new green space.

Nathaniel Lichtin questioned whether the loss of parking in the front setback would have an impact on the take-out business for the current restaurant. Area Councilor Bruce Blakely supported the proposed alternate plan from a parking and traffic point of view, but noted that it

could be detrimental for a take-out business to lose parking at its front door. Area Councilor Amanda Theunissen pointed out that Union Twist will have extremely high turnover of customers. The main access driveway may back up and cause traffic jams on Beacon Street. She noted that many community members expressed similar concerns at the Land Use meeting. There has been a suggestion that Union Twist employees may also be parking in the rear lot, making some of the parking spaces unavailable for customers..



Current Union Twist Proposal



Alternate Parking-Traffic Flow Proposal

Area Councilor Larry Rosenberg commented on the width of the proposed main access driveway at 20 feet, and that many trees on the property line to the adjacent parcel to the west may need to be removed to accommodate the widened driveway. If the trees were to remain, there may not be space for 20 feet of clearance. Area Council Theunissen asked if the traffic analysis peer review has been completed. She expressed concern that some City Councilors seemed to not take into consideration comments from the community in opposition to the Union Twist proposal.

It was noted that there are still many unanswered questions about the proposal. For example, there are questions about plans for delivery of product. Once the public hearing process closes, there may be a time limit for City Council to make a determination about the proposal, but the time limit may be extended. Area Councilor Amy Wayne agreed that there are still unanswered questions about the proposal, and expressed her concern about the volume of cars that will enter and exit the site. She stated that it is unlikely that traffic will flow well at this site. City Councilor Bill Humphrey noted that the restaurant is a tenant of this site, and that the restaurant owners may be limited in their comments regarding the site. Councilor Humphrey noted that traffic and access to this site may be comparable to that of the nearby dental office, which may have similar rates of cars going in and out. Area Councilor Amanda Theunissen didn't agree, and noted that there will likely be many more customers entering and leaving Union Twist than at the dentist. Area Councilor Bruce Blakely pointed out that clients would be more likely to remain at the dentist's office for a longer period of time than people who purchase products at the Union Twist store.

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin asked if the Area Council should take any further action. Many council members felt that their concerns have not been addressed. The Area Council decided by consensus that another letter will go forward expressing ongoing concerns about the proposal. Many of the concerns are related to traffic impacts, pedestrian and bicycle safety, and impacts on Beacon Street. There are concerns about the volume of vehicles coming and going from this

parking lot. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell asked about traffic impacts based on other recent approved marijuana retail businesses. Amanda Theunissen pointed out that Union Twist may be the next marijuana retailer to open in Newton. Ms. Theunissen will proceed to draft a letter regarding ongoing concerns about the Union Twist proposal. The alternate plan for traffic flow as presented by Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic may be put forth as an independent document.

Newton Highlands Trivia Contest:

As a community outreach event, Area Councilor Amy Wayne has developed a trivia contest for Newton Highlands. The questions for the trivia contest will be placed on the Newton Highlands Area Council website. Councilor Wayne suggested that Area Council President Lichtin may provide an introductory write-up to the contest that would include an overview of the Area Council's role and activities. The trivia contest will be opened for 3 weeks, and then the answers to the questions will be posted on the website. To limit entries to one entry per person, Newton residents would be asked to provide an e-mail address. This personal information would also be used to notify winners of the contest. Councilor Wayne said that she has reserved an e-mail address to which contestants may provide their answers to the trivia questions.

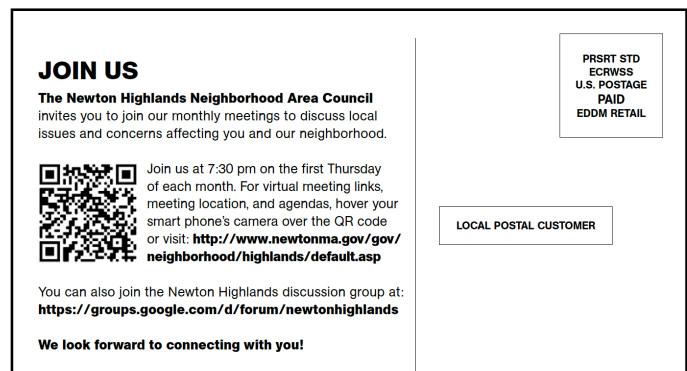
There will be 2 sets of 10 winners, or twenty total winners. Each winner would receive a coupon to one of 10 restaurants in Newton Highlands. Of the 20 winners, a group of 10 winners will be those who answered all of the questions correctly. The other 10 winners will be randomly selected from the remaining contest participants. Anybody who submitted answers to the contest would be eligible to win outside of the initial 10 winners. Area Councilor Bruce Blakely volunteered to put the trivia contest on the Area Council website. The contest will be advertised in various forums: the Newton Highlands google group, Village 14, Newton Patch, and Next Door. The plan is to have the trivia contest begin at the end of July and run into August. Winners will be announced at the September meeting of the Area Council.

John Rice stated that information he will send information about the trivia contest to the Hyde Community Center's e-mail list. Area Councilor Groot Gregory asked if the information the Area Council collects about participants for the trivia contest is subject to public disclosure. There was a discussion if the names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses obtained by the Area Council are protected from disclosure in terms of privacy. Area Council President Lichtin will check with the appropriate state office regarding the privacy issue. It was suggested that business owners and employees should also be invited to participate in the trivia contest. Councilor Wayne was congratulated on the wonderful job she has done bringing this contest forward and putting together the questions. A motion was made to allocate \$400 total for prizes for the virtual trivia contest. Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory suggested a prize of \$25 for participants who get all questions correct and \$20 for the others who are randomly selected winners. An allocation of \$450 of budget was suggested. Area Councilors voted 9:0 to approve this allocation of funds.

Postcard to Neighborhood:

Area Councilor Amanda Theunissen presented a final version of a postcard to be send to the Area Council service area. She has been working with graphic designer Ingrid Buuck to develop

the postcard. A discussion ensued about selecting the print company to print the postcards. The least expensive locally-sited company is Minuteman press at \$1150 for 4000 postcards and \$1099 for 3500 postcards. A company from Montana has quoted a price of \$1274 to print 4000 postcards and mail 3000 of them, including the mailing costs. With mailing fees, the cost for Minuteman Press would be \$1700 total. Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory suggested that we should consider the less expensive option. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic recommended that we print just the amount that will be mailed, which is about 3000 pieces. It was noted that it costs 19 cents a piece to mail each postcard. Nathaniel Lichtin stated that he would support choosing a locally based company even if the cost was higher. Amanda Theunissen stated that she will reach out to a local company, Signal Graphics, to see if they may be able to provide a competitive price. A discussion ensued about how many postcards to order and the consensus was to order 3500. The postcard will be mailed to the community at the end of the summer. The Area Council thanked Area Councilor Theunissen for working on this project.



Old Village Day T-Shirts:

Hyde Community Center director John Rice stated that he has been cleaning the Brigham House and that he located many boxes of old Area Council T-shirts that were typically made for annual Village Day events. John noted that the old T-shirts will be put to good use. The after school programs at the Brigham House will be resuming in September and will use the old T-shirts for art projects. Bonnie Rice will be working to make a quilt using old Village Day T-shirt designs. Afterwards, John will assess how many T-shirts are still remaining. The quilt made from the T-shirts will be placed in the Brigham House by the fall. John noted that the Brigham House attic contained items from over 30 years ago. The Area Council thanked John Rice for working on this project. John will talk with Mildred Hutchinson and George Mansfield about locating some of the older T-shirt designs for the quilt.

Local and City Updates:

Northland Project Update and Construction Liaison Committee:

Area Council President Lichtin informed the Area Council that he has received an update about the Northland project from attorney Alan Schlesinger. Northland intends to begin demolition at the site in the winter or spring and plans to start construction next summer. The Area Council will receive a copy of the construction management plan when it is submitted to the City. There

will be a liaison committee of local community members who will participate in the construction management process.

1149-1151 Walnut Street project update:

The current Skin Innovations site will become a new apartment complex. The project will be putting forth its Special Permit application later this summer. The City is now in a period when they are not accepting new Special Permit applications because public hearings typically are not held for major projects over the summer. No new changes to plans that were presented at a prior Area Council meeting have been announced.

Beacon Street Bike Lanes:

City staff held a virtual community meeting on June 24 for implementing bike lanes on Beacon Street. City Councilor Bill Humphrey reported that he attended the meeting. He noted that the meeting was well attended. There were folks from Waban, Newton Highlands, and Newton Center participating. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain public feedback about the proposal to have dedicated bicycle lanes along most of Beacon Street from Waban to Newton Centre. The Planning Department will return later to the community with a more formal presentation about the proposal.

City Councilor Humphrey noted that this is a “paint-only” project. The project will involve removing parking in certain sections on Beacon Street, mostly where people do not currently park. Sections that have significant on-street parking will maintain on-street parking and have shared bike lanes. The section in Waban Square that currently has angled parking will not be changed at this point. There was discussion of how to implement the bicycle lanes around Cold Spring Park, considering the Farmers’ Market. The Beacon Street bike lanes may have an impact upon parking on those days that the Farmers’ Market is operating.

Zoning Redesign:

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that the Zoning and Planning Committee had a public meeting recently to discuss zoning for multifamily housing and whether to allow for increased density within $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from transit sites. Mr. Lichtin stated that the majority of City Councilors seemed to be supporting this proposal. The scope of multifamily housing is yet to be determined and may include anything from 2-family to 8 unit buildings. The other item discussed at the meeting was the issue of which projects will need to go through a Special Permit process or if more projects may be built by right. Some City Councilors seemed to be leaning towards allowing more projects to go forward by right, but other City Councilors felt that certain projects should be kept under the purview of the Special Permit process.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic presented the maps discussed at this meeting of Newton Highlands that show the bus and light rail stations and the $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius distance from each station. It appears that if the proposal to implement multi-family housing were fully adopted, single family zoning may be completely replaced by multifamily zoning throughout all

of Newton Highlands. Area Council President Lichtin recommended that anyone interested in commenting on the proposal should submit their public comments to City Council.

Letter to the Tab in Support of Local Businesses:

Area Councilor Bob Burke distributed a draft Letter to the Tab newspaper regarding how the community may support local businesses in Newton Highlands. Bob noted that Area Councilors who support the letter are welcome to add their names onto the letter in endorsing it. The Tab will allow a 700-word letter. John Rice noted that typically the Tab allows only a small number of names to sign a letter, but Bob stated that this letter would be given an exception. Many Area Councilors indicated that they would like to join in signing the letter. Area Councilors thanked Area Council Bob Burke for writing the letter.

Administrative Items:

Approval of the June Minutes: A motion was made to approve the June minutes as there were no edits offered. The minutes were approved 9:0.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory noted that there were no transactions during the prior month. An update of budgeted expenses will be provided next month.

New Business:

Hyde Community Center director John Rice informed the Area Council about renovations done to the Hyde Center during its period of inactivity due to the Covid-19 pandemic. John noted that the Area Council has received a \$2000 donation from Village Bank in support of Village Day, which was cancelled this year. John suggested that the Area Council might consider making a donation of all or half of these funds to support the Hyde Community Center renovation project. Renovations include taking down of old pipes, stripping and painting walls, and doing staining. The gym walls will be finished at a cost of \$9000. The floor rehabilitation is expected to cost \$15,000. The Emergency doors to Lincoln Street are leaking, and repairing them will cost \$5000. The renovation project should be completed by September. John noted that the Hyde gym was shut down for 3 months due to the pandemic. The total cost of the renovation project will be approximately \$25K to \$30K.

John Rice noted that in a recent e-mail from Mayor Fuller, it was announced that Crystal Lake has been closed due to high bacteria levels following the recent heavy rains and high runoff into the Lake. The mayor's memo indicates that the Lake will be retested on July 3rd.

John Rice also provided an update about Drive-In Movies sponsored by Newton Pride. The location of the movies has been selected at the former Marshall Plaza lot on Needham Street. Free tickets for both movies have already been sold out. On July 10, the movie "Field of Dreams" will be shown. There is room for 140 cars, and there is already a wait list of 100 more. During the following week, there will be a showing of a children's movie. This event is also sold out. There may be additional movie nights later in August. The tickets to these events are free. However, the price of using the AV equipment and projection screen and the leasing of movies

costs \$7000 per movie. Funding to support these movie nights comes from donations from Village Bank and other donors. In a typical year, Newton Pride would have otherwise funded the Newton City fireworks at a cost of \$15,000. Newton Pride also gets revenue from rides at July 4th holiday events and at the Kidfest event usually held in May. The Northland Corporation has also made a donation of \$2000 to support this activity and is allowing use of the parking lot.

Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.