

# Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council

## Meeting Minutes, May 7, 2020

### **Area Council members:**

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

### **Ex Officio:**

City Councilor Brenda Noel, City Councilor Bill Humphrey

### **Guests:**

John Rice, Larry Rosenberg, Diane Prunte, Carol Carroll, Carol Stapleton

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.

### Area Council Update on Covid-19

The topic of compliance with social distancing rules and other infection control measures was discussed. Carol Stapleton from Parks and Recreation joined the Area Council for this part of the meeting. Area Councilor Barbara Darnell noted that on Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, which was the first warm day of the spring, there were many people congregating at the coves and beach area of Crystal Lake. Ms. Stapleton came to the Lake with our new Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture, Nicole Banks, to assess the situation. Quite a number of people did not seem to be practicing social distancing or wearing masks.

Ms. Stapleton noted that the City is developing a plan to address the likelihood that there will be people gathering at the Lake over the summer. The plans for events and swimming at the Bathhouse have not yet been finalized. Everyone realizes that the coves of the lake are a strong attraction to people when there is good weather. There will likely be new signage and patrols to inform people about the recommendations to maintain distance from one another and to wear masks. Currently, there are no plans to close the parking lot at the Bathhouse, as it will just encourage more parking on residential streets.

A discussion ensued amongst Area Councilors about the importance of promoting social distancing during the Covic pandemic. There is support for increasing educational efforts and adding signage to inform people to wear masks when congregating and to do social distancing. Area Council president Nathaniel Lichtin noted that this type of information could be added to our website.

Ms. Stapleton updated the Area Council on the redesign of Levingston Cove. The city has hired Weston & Sampson and a contract amendment is being developed to move the project forward. The

plan is to have the project go before the Community Preservation Committee in the fall for approval and funding and to begin construction next spring, 2021.

Ms. Stapleton also updated the Area Council on the plan to treat Crystal Lake with aluminum sulfate, a nontoxic material, to reduce algae blooms. This compound is insoluble in water under most conditions and binds to phosphorus so that it can no longer be used as food by algae organisms. The aluminum sulfate will go into the lake this Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>. The material will bind to the phosphorus and cause it to sink to the bottom of the lake. The lake may need to be treated again in 3-4 years. The water will be safe to swim in, but the City is asking people to stay out of the lake on the day of treatment. Initially, the water may appear cloudy but by the next day, the water will be clear again after treatment.

Ms. Stapleton provided an update about walking paths in Cold Spring Park. The initial plans have been completed for the trail from the Beacon Street parking lot to Duncklee Street. The trail has been restored to its original stone dust surface, eliminating some of the worst mud, rock, and root hazards. Over the next few weeks, the Department of Public Works will be working to address flooding that occurs between the end of Winslow Road and the Zervas School. It was noted that there has been some crowding at Cold Spring Park, especially at the dog park. Ms. Stapleton noted that any concerns regarding Cold Spring Park can be brought forward by calling 617 796-1500 or by contacting the City's 311 telephone system.

Area Councilor Amy Wayne brought up the topic of lack of wearing of masks and social distancing that she has noticed on city sidewalks and public places. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic pointed out that more education is needed so that people know that there is a greater risk of transmission of the Covid virus when masks are not worn. Some studies suggest that a plume of air with possibly transmissible virus may follow a runner or bicyclist, as noted in a recent study:

<https://medium.com/@jurgenthoelen/belgian-dutch-study-why-in-times-of-covid-19-you-cannot-walk-run-bike-close-to-each-other-a5df19c77d08>

Area Councilors agreed that there needs to be a greater understanding about mechanisms of potential spread of the virus and further efforts to increase knowledge on how to reduce disease transmission. Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin will reach out to the mayor to ask her to help disseminate information that would encourage people to wear masks whenever they could be transmitting disease to others, including in outdoors spaces. Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic will reach out to Bike Newton to ask the organization to encourage its members to wear masks when bicycling, especially when near other bicyclists and pedestrians. We will also disseminate the Area Council minutes that include our discussion about this topic to the mayor and community.

### Virtual Community Event:

A discussion ensued about whether the Area Council would like to host a virtual community event, considering that many in-person community interactive activities have been cancelled or postponed. Several Area Councilors supported the idea that we could host a Newton Highlands trivia contest, with questions about local history, architecture, and events. Srdjan Nedeljkovic has a collection of historical images that could be used. Area Councilors were supportive of providing a small reward

to the winners of the trivia contest. Area Council President Lichtin asked for volunteers who would help develop the trivia contest, and Councilors Barbara Darnell, Amy Wayne, Bob Burke, and Srdjan Nedeljkovic will help put together a defined set of ideas and questions. It is hoped that this contest will help build community spirit while we are all socially distancing.

Area Councilor Bob Burke and others suggested that the Area Council could provide gift certificates to local restaurants for takeout to the winner of the contest. In addition, Bob suggested that he will contact the Newton Tab to highlight support of the local Highlands restaurants by showing people visiting the businesses and taking orders.

### Appointment of New Area Councilor

Mr. Larry Rosenberg, a 25-year resident of Newton Highlands, has expressed interest in joining the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council and filling our one vacant position. Mr. Rosenberg stated that he has seen many changes in the Highlands over the years and that he would like to help make more positive changes in our community. Mr. Rosenberg has been involved with the Red Cross for many years. He has served as the Red Cross representative to the City for the Disaster Group. He has conducted intake of new volunteers who sign up for the Red Cross and has served on the Emergency Management Committee of the City. Mr. Rosenberg looks forward to bringing some new ideas to the Area Council. He noted that the Red Cross now does most of its activities virtually because of the current pandemic, and that no volunteers can have contact with a potential client. Mr. Rosenberg has also managed the first aid station for the Boston Marathon at Coolidge Corner, and also helped manage events such as the Walk for Hunger and the Jimmy Fund.

Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic made a motion to appoint Mr. Larry Rosenberg as a member of the Newton Highlands Area Council. Barbara Darnell seconded the motion. The motion was approved 7 to 0. Mr. Rosenberg will contact City Clerk David Olsen about getting sworn in.

### Postcard Outreach Effort to Neighborhood

Area Councilor Amanda Theunissen has reached out to designer Ingrid Buuck about designing a postcard to send out to the Newton Highlands community. The goal of the postcard is to inform the community about the Area Council, to provide a web-link for neighborhood information, and to encourage community engagement by signing up to be part of the Newton Highlands Google group.

Ms. Buuck, an accomplished designer, will help develop the postcard for a flat fee of \$400. A discussion ensued about the contents of the postcard. Area Councilors agreed that we may want to have council logo on it. On the front, we would like to have an eye-catching image to create interest. On the back of the postcard, we might describe what the Area Council is, what we do, and provide information on how to participate in our meetings and join our discussion group. There was discussion about the size of the postcard and agreement that the information needs to be presented concisely. An overall theme of “bringing the neighborhood together” was discussed. The artwork on the postcard may range from a historical concept to other locally inspired images. Rather than a url web-link we might consider adding a QR code.

Area Councilor Thieunissen will work with Ms. Buuck to begin the design process. Another idea for a theme may be “how do we reconnect safely and when to we do it?” Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory confirmed that the Area Council had previously allocated money to distribute the postcard. Srdjan Nedeljkovic mentioned that we could use EDDM, Every Door Direct Mail, as a low cost mechanism to distribute these cards. Amanda volunteered to present a draft version of a postcard for the next meeting.

Area Councilor Amy Wayne made a motion for the Area Council to hire Ingrid Buuck to design the outreach postcard for \$400. This was approved unanimously 8 to 0.

### Local and City Updates:

#### Village Day Cancellation

Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory reported that any money that had been collected from Village Day vendors has been refunded. The website to reserve booth space has been disabled. Steven Feinstein and Maureen Oates were supportive of the decision to cancel Village Day due to the Covid 19 virus. It was noted that Village Bank had provided a generous donation of \$2000 in support of Village Day this year, and that they have approved using this donation to fund another Area Council activity at a later date.

#### Zoning Redesign:

Area Council President Nathaniel Lichtin noted that the zoning redesign process is moving forward and that Planning Department staffers are making outreach to community groups about the proposal. The Zoning and Planning committee is now reviewing the proposal for residential districts. Members of the Planning department met with the Newtonville Area Council recently and will be meeting with other community groups. Nathaniel proposed to invite the Planning Department staff to attend our June meeting to discuss the zoning redesign proposal and the process. Mr. Lichtin will be reaching out to City Community Planner Gabriel Holbrow to set up this meeting.

#### Other City Updates

Land Use: Area Council President Lichtin stated that there were no major updates related to Land Use issues. The focus of the City Council’s Land Use Committee is oriented towards the Riverside project these days.

Shuttle buses: Area Councilor Amy Wayne noted that she had heard that another shuttle bus may be coming to Newton Highlands. Nathaniel replied that this may be the new Wells Avenue shuttle bus. Area Council members expressed concern about there being many vans and buses parking and idling in the village center. Nathaniel stated that he will coordinate a meeting with city representatives about the shuttle buses. In order for a route to be established, the Public Safety and Transportation committee needs to approve the route. Area Council President Lichtin

will contact Nicole Freedman in the Planning Department and invite city staff to discuss the shuttle bus situation. This meeting may be scheduled for our July Area Council meeting.

**Village Center Beautification:** Area Council President Lichtin expressed the intent to reach out to Barbara Darnell, Sonya McKnight, and the planning department to discuss improvements that could make the village center more physically welcoming. The improvements could include better street lighting, holiday theme lighting, and other ideas to focus on ways to improve the village center and make it more vibrant.

The Area Council took the opportunity to applauded Area Councilors Barbara Darnell and Groot Gregory for all their excellent work to manage and maintain the Hyde Center garden, which is as beautiful as it ever was, and thanked John Rice for supporting the work.

**John O'Hara dedication ceremony.** Hyde Center director John Rice updated the Area Council on plans for the John O'Hara Square dedication ceremony. A sign is being developed to note the corner of Lincoln and Walnut Streets as John O'Hara Square. A granite sign will mark the area. The sign will be lit. The dedication ceremony has been postponed so that it can take place at a time that people can get together again. The event may happen later in the summer or in September.

John Rice also noted that the planters that are usually placed on the Walnut Street MBTA bridge are not going to be placed this year.

#### Administrative Items:

Approval of the April Minutes: A motion was made to approve the April minutes as there were no edits offered. The minutes were approved 8:0.

Treasurer's Report: Area Council Treasurer Groot Gregory noted that payment has been made for the new Hope Fountain pump. The annual budget has been revised to reflect changes due to the cancellation of Village Day. The \$2000 donation by Village Bank was noted.

#### New Business:

John Rice reported that the summer schedule for the Hyde Concert series has been cancelled for June, and that there is a good chance that the entire summer concert series may be cancelled due to the viral pandemic. However, the Shakespeare performance scheduled for a Wednesday in August may still take place.

#### Meeting Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 PM.