

## **Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council Annual Report for 2022**

Area Council Members in 2022: Bob Burke (until June), Barbara Darnell, Robert Fizek (starting in June), Jeremy Freudberg (starting in May), Groot Gregory, Nathaniel Lichtin, Srdjan Nedeljkovic, Larry Rosenberg, Amy Wayne (starting in August)

Ex-officio City Councilors: Bill Humphrey, Brenda Noel, Holly Ryan

During 2022, the NHNAC met on the first Thursday of each month, except as noted below. Meeting agendas were posted on the City of Newton's electronic posting board. Area Council meetings beginning in July were held at the Brigham House, 20 Hartford Street in Newton Highlands. All of the meetings were also held virtually using the Zoom platform.

Minutes of each meeting are available on the City of Newton website under the link for the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council.

Financial Report: The NHNAC has an account at Village Bank in Newton. The balance at the beginning of the year was \$16,129.35 and the balance at the end of the year was \$15,465.44.

January:

The NHNAC meeting for January 6, 2022, was cancelled due to illness. The next meeting of the NHNAC was scheduled for February 3, 2022.

February:

Area Council vice president Barbara Darnell chaired the meeting. It was decided that election of officers will be taking place at the March meeting. Newton resident Jeremy Freudberg and Area Councilor Srdjan Nedeljkovic reported on a proposal to include a section of Clark Street into the Newton Highlands Area Council service area. The Area Council voted to approve this proposal and it was scheduled for a public hearing of the Program and Services committee meeting at City Council on February 23. A discussion ensued about the planned Newton Highlands Enhancement project. Information was presented by Public Works Commission Jim McGonagle. Conceptual design will be done by Environmental Partners and Stoss, a landscape architect firm. A presentation was made by Newton resident Marc Hershman about the architecture and design of village centers. Ms. Hershman presented slides of streetscapes of various communities and then discussed "human scale design." A discussion ensued about what kinds of streetscapes people feel most comfortable in. Waban Area Councilor Rena Getz provided an update about Zoning Redesign, with a specific focus on increasing density near transit stations as part of the MBTA community law. There was a brief discussion of planning for Village Day in June and for the upcoming Winter Soup Social on February 12, which was being planned as an outdoor event at the Hyde Playground.

March:

It was reported that the petition to add parts of Clark Street to the NHNAC was approved by the Program & Services Committee on February 23 and that the matter will be up before the full City Council on March 7<sup>th</sup>. A discussion about Area Council officers took place, and it was proposed to continue with the same slate of officers as in the prior year: Nathaniel Lichtin (President), Barbara Darnell (Vice President), Groot Gregory (Treasurer), and Srdjan Nedeljkovic (Secretary), with a vote to be held at the March meeting. Several interested individuals were noted to be interested in the 3 openings for Area Council positions. A presentation was made by Luis Demorizi, Director of Parks & Open Space, about a proposal for new landscaping at the Officer English Garden to include a monument to John O'Hara. The monument is being donated by the O'Hara family. A discussion ensued regarding Zoning Redesign and implications of the MBTA Communities Act. Under this new law, Newton will need to create zoning capacity for 8,330 new housing units, with a minimum density of a multifamily zone being 15 units per acre. The Area Council discussed plans for the upcoming year. Traffic safety, and specifically safety zones on Lincoln Street, were discussed. John Rice announced a commemoration of Area Councilor and longtime Newton resident Bob Burke.

#### April:

Election of the Area Council officers took place, as proposed at the prior month's meeting. It was reported that three new members expressed interest in joining the Area Council: Robert Fizek, Jeremy Freudberg, and Amy Wayne. Both Ms. Wayne and Mr. Freudberg were nominated, and the Area Councilors voted to approve their appointment. John Rice reported that he had reserved the Women's Club for April 24 for a party for longtime residents Bob and Joanne Burke. Mr. Rice and Area Councilor Darnell provided information about an upcoming Festival of the Arts to take place in July at the Hyde Playground. An update about planning for Village Day was reported, including a projected budget. It was announced that the dedication of John O'Hara Square would take place during Village Day in June. Discussion ensued about the upcoming village roadway redesign project, to be presented at a future meeting by staff from the Department of Public Works. Area Council president Lichtin reported that a Zoning Redesign Community Engagement Plan is being proposed. Waban Area Councilor Rena Getz presented an update about zoning redesign. Newton residents Lisa Monahan and Kathy Pillsbury presented information about village center development and the need to support additional development.

#### May:

It was confirmed that Jeremy Freudberg had been sworn in as a member of the Area Council. A discussion took place regarding Crystal Lake algae treatment with aluminum sulfate. An update was provided about the Northland project on Needham Street, with a plan to complete all buildings by 2026. Traffic Council items related to Lincoln Street were discussed: a proposal to remove parking spaces near crosswalks on Lincoln Street, and the implementation of a 20 miles per hour safety zone in the village center. It was reported that a state grant for \$200,000 had been approved to study transportation options in the Needham Street corridor. The Area Council voted to send a letter to the city's transportation planner, as well as to the Mayor and City Council, that the Needham Street corridor study should include all transportation options,

including a light rail option. An update was provided about the Lincoln Street redesign project, with project kick-off scheduled for June 7. Area Councilor Bob Burke announced he would be moving out of Newton Highlands in June and resigning from the Area Council. A vote was held to appoint Robert Fizek to the Area Council. There was a discussion about Village Day planning. It was noted that in-person meetings of the Area Council would resume with the next monthly meeting in June, along with a continuation of virtual meetings via Zoom.

#### June:

The meeting on June 2 was held in person at the Brigham House as well as virtually by Zoom technology. The Area Council thanked Bob Burke for his many years of service. A brief discussion took place to discuss a draft zoning ordinance for village centers. An update was provided about the Northland project, specifically about the proposed daylighting of the South Meadow Brook. It was announced that a meeting to discuss Lincoln Street redesign would be held at the Women's Club on June 7<sup>th</sup>. A summary of the recent Traffic Council meeting was provided, in which it was decided to remove 2 parking spaces near crosswalks on Lincoln Street in the village center. Amy Wayne reported that she will be sworn in to join the Area Council in a few weeks. An update about Village Day planning was presented, including an overview of the budget. John Rice announced the events planned for the Hyde Playground over the summer, with gatherings resuming this year. New business included a discussion about removal of parking spaces to accommodate restaurant seating on the street and future plans for the Officer English garden.

#### July:

Updates were provided about gas line replacement along Lake Avenue, the Farmers Market at Cold Spring Park, and plans for the New Cal senior center. A discussion took place regarding the MBTA's bus network redesign project, which proposes to eliminate Route 59 service on Lincoln Street and Eliot Street in Newton Highlands. It was reported that 20 mph safety zone signs have been posted along Lincoln Street. A review of the recent Village Day took place. Overall, the budget for Village Day did a bit better with revenue over costs. Further discussion took place regarding the Upper Falls Greenway and multimodal transportation options in the corridor. A discussion took place about the Village Center improvement project, and a proposal was made that the project should include undergrounding of utilities in the village center. An update was provided regarding Zoning Redesign, followed by a discussion about community feedback regarding the proposal. A suggestion was made to donate any old Village Day T-shirts that may still exist.

#### August:

Amy Wayne had been sworn in as a member of the Area Council. John Rice reported on activities at the Hyde Playground, including the Summer Concert Series and the Festival of the Arts that took place in July. An update was provided about the New Cal senior center project in Newtonville. It was reported that a plan for recycling of textiles in the city had been implemented. John Rice announced plans for an update to the Newton Highlands war memorial

at the corner of Bowdoin and Lincoln Streets to add new names to the memorial. A discussion took place about zoning redesign, and that public comment will be accepted between September 1 and October 16. The Area Council decided to draft a response to the proposal during the October meeting. Area Council president Lichtin reported an update regarding the city's rules for accessory dwelling units. The August meeting was a short meeting that adjourned after only about one hour.

#### September:

A discussion took place about the beach at the Crystal Lake Bathhouse, and how fencing should be removed. The proposed residential project to build 34 units at 1114 Beacon Street was discussed. A discussion ensued about a large tree that had been removed from at the old Hyde School. John Rice announced that Newton Highlands will be hosting the Senior Center during the time of construction of the new center in Newtonville. Area Councilor Robert Fizek noted that a long-time employee at the Post Office, Mr. Joseph Miele, had passed away. A discussion ensued about the MBTA Green line trains skipping stations and dumping passengers. Traffic concerns in the Highlands were brought up, including discussion about the 20 mph safety zone on Lincoln Street and issues with narrow roadway space due to outdoor restaurant seating. The Area Council approved a donation to the Hyde Center for the summer concert series. Two letters from the Area Council were discussed: one regarding extending the public comment period for zoning redesign and the other requesting that undergrounding of utilities be within the scope of the Lincoln Street village enhancement project. A discussion ensued about the zoning redesign process and community involvement. The Area Council approved both letters regarding zoning redesign and undergrounding of utilities.

#### September and October: Special Meetings

A subsequent meeting of the Area Council took place on September 10. This meeting was held in order to discuss and approve a letter from the Area Council to the City requesting additional time for the Area Council to conduct community engagement and provide feedback regarding the Zoning Redesign process. Additional meetings of the Area Council took place on September 24 and October 3. These were an informational presentation on zoning redesign, followed by a discussion.

#### October:

It was noted that a speed board had been placed on Lincoln Street with a posted speed limit of 20 mph. A discussion took place regarding a community meeting that had occurred to discuss plans to update Crystal Lake Park. The proposed alternatives all involve building a new boardwalk at the current beach. This was followed by a discussion about the MBTA Communities Act zoning law. Further discussion occurred about zoning redesign and the city's exhibit in the library. The Area Council decided to send a letter to the city stating that the new zoning redesign proposal does not match the community intentions regarding zoning. An announcement was made about upcoming MBTA Green line closures. A discussion ensued about slow and unsafe buses that were being run as substitutes. It was decided that the Area Council should submit a letter of complaint to the MBTA. In addition, the Area Council

supported sending a letter requesting that the MBTA does not dump passengers in Newton. There was also a discussion about Newton's Tree Ordinance.

November:

Robert Solomon presented an update about Newton Highlands curb cut accessibility improvements. A discussion ensued regarding the Mayor's proposal for a tax increase, to include funding primarily for schools and transportation. MBTA bus route changes were announced, as was Chestnut Street road work. An announcement was made that the city is implementing a mattress recycling program. Area Council president Lichtin presented information about changes to the accessory dwelling unit ordinance. John Rice gave an update about the Senior Center's temporary move to Newton Highlands. A discussion ensued about development projects proposed for 163-167 Winchester Street and a proposal for a Dunkin Donuts drive through at 940 Boylston Street. A review was presented of the Newton Highlands village enhancement meeting that took place on November 2, in which proposals were presented for the redesign of Lincoln Street and Walnut Street. A discussion ensued about undergrounding utilities in the village center. An update and discussion took place regarding zoning redesign and the proposals recommendations for higher density buildings in the village center. Safety and service issues related to MBTA Green line closures were discussed. A proposal was made to waive or eliminate the city's winter parking ban.

December:

It was noted that construction has begun at Levingston Cove on Crystal Lake, where a new fishing area is being built and new landscaping will be implemented. Discussions took place regarding the Newton Highlands MBTA station proposal and the 1149-1151 development project, which is now undergoing a change in ownership. An update was provided about the proposal to build a new pedestrian bridge across the Charles River at Christina Street. A discussion took place regarding the Newton Highlands Village Enhancement Project, with further discussion about undergrounding utilities. A review of parking in Newton Highlands took place, with discussion about the Highlands parking district. A proposal was made to expand the number of permits allowed for the Highlands parking district. An extensive discussion took place regarding zoning redesign, with a focus on the new VC zones proposed for the village center. Modifications to the tree ordinance were presented and discussed. Further discussion took place regarding the winter parking ban.

The meeting concluded with a discussion about how the city should avoid the webinar format for holding public meetings since this format inhibits community participation.

Submitted by:

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March 1, 2023