



**Newtonville Area Council - Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 28, 2023 7:00 PM
Meeting Location: Online via Zoom**

Attendees:

NAC: Jennifer Bentley (President), Martina Jackson (Vice President), Nancy Greenberg (Secretary), Timothy LeBlanc, Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay, Aline Sammut

City Government:

Public: Approximately 10 members of the public

Jennifer called the meeting to order and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

1. Village Center Zoning – Sharing of Utile images

Jennifer reviewed the February 13, 2023 meeting of the Zoning & Planning Committee (ZAP) and shared the PowerPoint presentation used at that meeting entitled “Village Center Rezoning Phase 4: Draft Zoning” and she summarized the following components of that presentation:

- The comparison of VC3 vs MU4
- “Urban Design” by Allan Jacobs (1993), which was used as a reference
- The fact that the presentation only dealt with VC3
- Showed Utile’s renderings of certain villages with 4.5 story buildings
- Carolyn asked questions on the Walnut Street, Newtonville rendering, noting:
 - The Street Sections pages showed a ratio computed for the proposed new buildings on a 45.6 feet height which appears to be is shorter than the allowable 18-foot and 12-foot story heights and may make the ratio more favorable, as well as that it was not measured from the top floor
 - At the ZAP meeting Councilor Baker asked about shadowing.
 - NAC should ask that Utile produce a study on the shadowing on Walnut Street.
- Dan Cohen noted that there is inconsistency on the drawings of the existing buildings to show the ratio more favorable (as it includes the pediment). Carolyn noted that the street width on the Walnut Street drawing produces perspective distortion (i.e., the width of the street appears to be taller than the building, which is not accurate). Also, the building

footprint at under 7,000sf is smaller than what the lot will allow, so building can potentially be much bigger.

- Other comments, included:
 - Aline asked what was wrong with the NAC's rendering and Carolyn explained that the key criticisms were that we assumed parcel assembly (which is a common practice) and the building drawn on the Star Market lot had an error but that there were 3 solutions for that error, none of which would impact the massing. Also, there was a criticism that it was thought to be unlikely that the whole street will be built out.
 - Margaret Wazuka asked what the next steps are. Jennifer explained that there will be more meetings, more refinements, with the latest plans due in April. Carolyn noted that residents can always send emails to the City Councilors. There is no opportunity for the public to speak at the ZAP meetings, but there will be a public hearing on or about April 27.
 - Kathy Pillsbury noted that ZAP is going through about 10 topics, half of which they covered on February 27 and the rest will be in March and ZAP said that version 2.0 would come out in April.
 - There will not be a vote by residents on the proposed zoning.
 - On Walnut Street, President Albright had told the NAC that she thought it should be VC2 instead of a VC3, but at the ZAP meeting she said she did not think that the building height should be limited, although other Councilors do.
 - There has been a suggestion that a bonus extra floor might be allowed to include more Affordable housing.

The suggestion was made that residents reach out to their Councilors to have their opinions heard.

Carolyn moved, Aline second and it was unanimously:

VOTED: The NAC requests the Zoning & Planning Committee and/or the Planning and Development Department have their consultant, Utile, provide a shadow study of a full, or near full, buildout of Walnut Street from Newtonville Avenue to Highland Avenue under the proposed VC3 Village Center zoning.

Jennifer will send the request to ZAP.

2. Discussion of issues in Newtonville

- Aline Sammut reported that she has been in contact with Jack Lovitt at City Hall about the banners on the lamp posts in the middle of Walnut Street, but the matter seems to be stuck in the Law Department and she is not getting answers. Aline will contact City Hall again. This is ongoing for 2 years. Kathy Pillsbury recommended going through one of the Councilors and Carolyn suggested sending a letter to the editor to Fig City News for publication.
- Jennifer noted that Newtonville is also waiting for new trash cans, with the Big Belly units going away.

- Senior Center demolition should start this summer.
- Gath pool is being designed as a 2 pool and splash pad facility and Albemarle fields are to be redone.
- Horace Mann and Franklin schools are to be redesigned, but those projects are tied to the proposed tax override.
- The pavilion at Cabot Park has been completed.

3. Administrative Issues

a. Interviews for Candidates to fill Council Openings

Jennifer noted that Martina resigned from NAC to avoid an appearance of conflict with her work with Fig City News so up to 3 vacancies in the NAC can be filled. There are 7 applicants.

Jennifer explained the process as follows:

1. Tonight, we conduct interviews
2. Each candidate has 10 minutes to answer questions.
3. Our bylaws says that we must wait until next meeting to vote.
4. Must be a majority of the entire NAC (i.e., a majority of the current 6 members, not just a majority of those voting) must vote for a candidate in order for that person to be elected.

Candidate: Dan Cohen

- Has lived in Newton since 1995, and had 2 kids that went through Newton schools. Son participated in soccer, daughter in Girl Scouts. Troop leader. Loves Newtonville. Sees the changes and wants to have more input. Dan is a “techie” who des software / data privacy work.
- Question: How would you handle being objective? Answer: Plans to present both sides of an issue.
- Question: What would you do with a conflict with your job and the NAC? Answer: Does not think there will be a conflict as the company he works for is not in Newton.
- Question: What kind of holes do you see in the NAC and how will you fill it? Answer: Gender and age diversity.
- Question: What are the top issues that the NAC should address? Answer: Empty storefronts, congestions in Newtonville. He loves Newtonville Village Day. Thinks about how Newtonville can be better than what it is, with more activity. Started commuting to Boston. Takes bike to Newton Center and takes T; does not take the commuter rail because schedule is not convenient. Parking – need more.
- Question: Newton has 13 villages with each one distinct. How would be fight to keep the historical village perspective? Answer: Thinks that the gaps between each village makes it distinct. Stores make the villages distinct. No opinion on whether to combine them.

Candidate: Laura De Veau

- Lives on 12 Proctor Street. Works at Mt. Ida since 2007. Lived at Oak hill and moved to Newtonville. Works in higher education. Currently faculty at BU and BC. Runs consulting company.
- Question: How would you handle being objective? Answer: With my background, dealing with students, sometimes there are unpopular opinions. Need to articulate why and listen to the concerns. Has a lot of experience being a conduit of information, making it more palatable and easier to implement new policy.
- Questions: Would there be any conflict of interest with the job and NAC? Answer: No
- Questions: Have you attended NAC meetings? Answer: No, has not attended NAC meetings, but reads Fig City News.
- Question: What kind of holes do you see in the NAC and how will you fill it? Answer: Can mobilize volunteers, objective, and also brings perspective from the north side of Washington Street; Martina was the only person from that side of Newtonville.
- Question: What are the top issues that NAC should address? Answer: Transportation needs improvement. Commuter rail doesn't run enough. Bus schedules changed and has impacted people. Talked with people at the bus stops to let them know that bus schedules have been cut. People are aware and may have to change jobs, such as workers at Whole Foods. Wants to keep the village vibrant. Local business is critical. Need trust in local government – if people don't trust in our governance, then there is a major problem. NAC needs to build trust and if there is a hole in the trust, we need to identify it and hold them accountable.
- Question: Newton has 13 villages with each one distinct. How would be fight to keep the historical village perspective? Answer. Newtonville is very walkable, has a vibrancy, is close to Newton High School. Lots of young people walking around adds to the vibrancy. Our obligation is to have people be able to grow old here and also appreciate the young.

Candidate: Dave Bronstein

- Has lived in Newton all his life. His father was a cab driver. He appreciated the Newton education. His own kids are a product of the Newton Public Schools. He works at Bank of America (noting he is not advocating for more banks), in product management. He was involved in NAC a few years ago. He thinks this village has more going for it than the other villages due to its walkability, high school, etc.
- Question: How would you handle being objective? Answer: He understands that there are many opinions. He would like to create engagement. He asks how can the NAC better job of engaging the residents and give meaningful information.
- Question: Do you have a conflict of interest with your job. Answer: No, but he needs to register at the bank on the position, if he is selected, but he does not see a problem or conflict.
- Question: What kind of holes do you see in the NAC and how will you fill it? Answer: His skill are process and management --how to break down complex projects and explain them. For the NAC, this means how to break down the zoning issues and engage the community.

- Question: What are the top issues that NAC should address? Answer: Noted difference between addressing and impacting. Wants to work on advocacy and communicating to the community so they understand. As to open store fronts – how do we attract businesses? Transportation – how do we improve it? Need to take a long-term view on future of Newtonville.
- Question: What makes Newtonville special? Answer: We have a supermarket. How do we maintain and grow Newtonville with retail mix, day to day services, etc.

Candidate: Chris Perriello

- He moved to Newtonville 8.5 years ago and his kids went to preschool until it closed due to COVID. It was a very diverse preschool. Horace Mann school facilities have issues and we need redevelopment of Horace Mann. He worked on the redevelopment on advocacy to add modular classrooms to improve some of the issues. He expects his children to go through the Newton Public Schools. Hie family uses Gath every day in the summer. He uses the commuter rail for work (3 days/week) and also uses the bus, although they were cut during the pandemic. He likes the NewCal project. As to development he has kept an eye on this and wants to have a stronger hand in negotiating with developers. He works as an attorney and a Massachusetts broker’s license and has worked with developers.
- Question: With your job, will there be issues or conflict of interest? Answer: He doesn’t see an issue but will have to get pre-clearance/approval from work.
- Question: Have you attended NAC meetings? Answer: No, but attended school committee meetings and meetings hosted by developers and has spoken about the need for accessibility for our commuter rail stations.
- Question: What kind of holes do you see in the NAC and how will you fill it? Answer: He brings to the table a degree in psychology, an analytic mind, considers all sides and learns quickly.
- Question: What are the top issues to be addressed? Answer: Empty storefronts. Values local small businesses. Supports local businesses. Wants storefronts filled with non-banks. Wants the override (and sent in his “Yes” vote). Wants to bring the preschool back. As for Gath pool he advocates for a local swim team and wants the pool depth at edges to be deeper for safety.

Candidate: Harvey Young

- He has lived in Newton for 5 years and has an 8 year old and a 13 year old in Newton Public Schools. He wants to invest and be a part of the community. He works at BU as Dean of Fine Arts and is a big believer in arts and culture.
- Question: How would you handle being objective? Answer: Part of my being is to be objective and he works as an arbiter in day-to-day life. He feels we need to acknowledge differences but respect one another.
- Question: Would there be a conflict with your work? Answer: No conflicts with work job.
- Question: Have you attended NAC meetings? Answer: No, has not been to NAC meetings.

- Question: What skills can you provide to NAC to round out the NAC? Answer: Kids, culture, community togetherness, go on walks and interacts with the community. Works at being part of the community.
- Question: What are the top issues to be addressed? Answer: Building heights can decimate the feeling of community. As population increases, how do we maintain a sense of community. Commuting is not convenient, so he has to drive.
- Question: What do you think are the top issues the NAC should address? Answer: He thinks the NAC is tackling the issues that are priorities. Also, what does population growth mean for the community.
- Question: What is special about Newtonville? Answer: Culture and community. Preserve the sense of community and not losing that.

Candidate: Ralph Abele

- He has lived in Newtonville for 49 years on Paige Road. His kids are products of the Newton Public Schools. He is retired now, but he worked on the Clean Water Act for decades. He worked at the federal, state, and local levels. Set up Newton Historical Commission. He worked on revising the demolition ordinance.
- Questions: What is special about Newtonville? Answer: For a long time, it was the only a stop between Boston and Albany. It is an area that relies on the trains. He understands that the commuter rail is public transit, but not mass transit. He has been on the Board of the Charles River Watershed for years. The river is a great resource.
- Question: Why do you want to be on the NAC? Answer: He doesn't like the direction of the planning, particularly the village center. Wants to be active on this.
- Question: How would you handle being objective? Answer: Having a mix of business and residential is a fact. He is not anti-development, but wants scale and negotiation.
- Question: Any conflict of interest (with Watershed, historic district)? Answer: No, he doesn't think so. Commission is more regulatory.
- Question: Have you attended NAC Meetings? Answer: Yes, he has attended NAC meetings.
- Question: What skills will you bring? What holes will you fill? Answer: Knows Newtonville really well. He has experience negotiating on making the environment better.
- Question: What top issues do you see? Answer: Having a mix of stores. Zoning -- Bringing more housing but preserving the character. Transportation --a important issue on which to advocate.
- Question: What makes Newtonville special and how would you fight to keep it special? Answer: Newtonville has its own character, it's walkable, has residential and commercial, trains.

Candidate: Jeff Klapisch

- Not available.

Jennifer thanked everyone for participating. Carolyn also thanked everyone and said she wants to enlist them all in NAC projects. She noted that a resident did a count of store fronts in Newtonville's village center and there 7 vacant and 67 occupied storefronts (~90% occupancy).

Jennifer noted that the NAC will need to have someone take over Martina's role of talking to businesses. Aline worked on the Clean Newtonville campaign with local businesses. Filling these 3 positions will give us more bandwidth to do more.

On logistics, Jennifer foresees in person meetings at City Hall, but with a hybrid option. Meetings are the 4th Thursday of the month, unless there is a conflict with a holiday. We will vote on the candidates at the next meeting, which will be on March 23rd.

Aline noted that she troubled by special permits in the new zoning (meaning even taller buildings) Because developers are always asking for more.

b. Approval of January meeting minutes

Deferred.

Adjournment

At approximately 9:20 PM, Carolyn moved, Aline seconded, and it was unanimously:

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Greenberg

Secretary