

NEWTONVILLE AREA COUNCIL MINUTES

NOVEMBER 14, 2019

NAC Members Present: Peter Bruce, Martina Jackson, Susan Reisler, Tarik Lucas, Dana D'Agostino, Marc Kaufman, Colleen Minaker, and Helene Sroat. Ward 2 Councilor Emily Norton was also present.

Public Attendees: A list of people attending of the public can be obtained from the NAC separately.

Review and Approval of Minutes: With one minor change, the minutes from October's meeting were approved with a full majority vote.

Burning Issue: John Oliver from Preserve Newton Parks spoke about the proposed Newton Center for Active Living (NewCAL). He said he is concerned that the parks are not safe from development and that they need to be preserved. There was significant discussion about the center, which the Mayor wants to place in Albemarle Park, near the swimming pool. Marc Kaufman stated his opposition to the Mayor's plan, citing that there is not significant transportation to the area from around the city. Tarik noted the issue is serious and the group must remain vigilant in following ongoing activities. Martina expressed concern that the city will not give up the proposed location without a fight. Someone stated that the cost of the building is far too high for the size and that due to this fact, the city cannot afford to pay for private land on which to build it. Susan agreed with Marianne Knapp that a senior center should be for seniors only, rather than the entire community. Someone also mentioned that Albemarle is a Flood-prone area and that is reason enough not to build the NewCAL there.

A proposal to the group was put on the table: Does the NAC think there should be a new Senior Center built in Albemarle Park? The group voted against 9-0.

Burning Issue: Peter and Mary Lewitt from Brooks Avenue spoke about development at 70 Walker Street. The developers who own this building are proposing a 4-unit home and they are asking for relief on size and set backs and they are concerned about this. Their concern is that if the city agrees to the relief, it will set a precedence that will cause others to over build on their lots and that will ruin the neighborhood look and feel. Emily Norton said she set up a meeting on Land Use to revisit the developer's request (Dec 3). Mr. and Mrs. Lewitt stated they aren't against development overall, just abuse of the rules and establishing this sort of precedent.

Riverside and Northland Update: Randy Block gave an excellent overview and update about what's going on with the Riverside Development Project and announced that the Zoning and Planning Department approved a negotiated plan with neighborhood groups and the developers that shrinks the project down from 1.5 million sq. Ft. to 1.05 million sq. ft. They also accumulated enough leverage and support from the Right Size Newton campaign to reduce the housing to 60% of the overall project, which will generate less traffic overall. Other issues will be debated in the Land Use process, he said. He also spoke about zoning parameters and how they are approved.

Marc asked Randy about the process of the negotiation and he answered him in detail, providing an overview of the whole process and ending with a suggestion that the NAC develop

a zoning plan for the Washington Street Corridor. He said by filing our own zoning plan we will have more of a chance of controlling the development that occurs in the future.

Washington Street Update: ZAP approved changes- the maximum allowable number of stories is six with a special permit, extending the “common” limit, defined as a “medium height area”, Peter Bruce reported. The Road Diet issue is on hold for now, and Peter suggested that the city test it before investing in it and Tarik added the test should be for at least one year, to test it in all seasons. Peter said there will be a vote in November and there is no more comments allowed from the public. There was a financial analysis conducted and it was rejected. Martina Jackson suggested the group write a letter to City Councilors asking them to weigh in more publicly about the Washington Street zoning proposals and that she would draft one for review by the group.

Debates De-Brief: Peter expressed overall satisfaction with the debates that the NAC sponsored for the elections and everyone agreed they went well. There was some discussion about the voting process for area council members city-wide and people provided feedback that the City did not handle the election process for area councils equally in all voting stations. Some voting stations did not advertise the area council ballots well enough and others made it difficult to vote. People agreed there should be more adequate signage for Area Council elections and people should be told they need to pick up a separate ballot because it is their right to vote.

New Member Introduction: The NAC Applauded the new members and they each had an opportunity to introduce themselves. New NAC members are: Jessica Archer, Kirill Alshewski, Carolyn Jacoby Gabbay, Martina Jackson, and Kartikey Trivedi, and Pam Shuffro. There motivation for joining the NAC are as follows:

Jessica- she is interested in ensuring the voice of the working class in Newton is heard and she is concerned with the affordable housing issues in Newton.

Kirill- He is interested in helping communicate what’s going on in Newton to residents to strengthen the community and gain a stronger voice. He wants to help build the NAC infrastructure to better get out the voice of the NAC to the public.

Carolyn- She is interested in giving back to the community now that she has more time as a semi-retired Lawyer. She is interested in engaging at the city level on the development issues ongoing.

Kartikey Trivedi- He is interested in helping explain how local government works to the average Newtonite and thinks this can be easily done using social media. He believes this will help get people more engaged because they will better understand how local politics effects them personally.

Pam- was not present.

Respectfully submitted by Maura Harrington, Treasurer