**Minutes: Newtonville Area Council Meeting July 8, 2021**

NAC attendees: Peter Bruce (President), Susan Reisler, Pam Shufro, Kirill Alshewski, Martina Jackson, Dana D'Agostino (Treasurer) (arrived late).

Several local residents were also in attendance.

**Keeping Newtonville Center Clean** Susan spoke about her efforts to keep the area clean, including having signs made to discourage people from littering. She had spoken to Justin Lau, the Newton Police Department's Outreach Officer, who said signs alone wouldn't do the trick, and that professional signs purchased from a website would be less effective than home-made ones. It was suggested that Susan contact Newton North High School's sign department to have them design and print signs, and perhaps have a contest to see which student can create the best slogan. She made a motion to allow her to spend up to $100 to acquire anti-littering signs to be put up in store windows. Martina seconded and it was:

***Voted*** — unanimously (five votes) to approve the motion.

Susan also noted that Rancatore's, which had previously been a problem area with trash, gum, and ice cream drippings, has been doing a good job of keeping the sidewalk area near its store free of debris, partly due to our asking. It was also mentioned that much more trash is evident in Newton Centre's village center than ours.

**Gun store regulation** It was noted that the City Council had approved "Alternative #5," for which support was voiced and to which no objections were raised. The idea of a total ban was criticized by a member who argued (following the Giffords' Center guidance), that a total ban would not only be rejected by the Supreme Court, but so would any other restrictive zoning.

**Senior Center/NewCAL** Pam and Peter said that some of the furniture in front of the Senior Center is broken and that most of it appears to be covered with a lichen-like fungus. There are also nails dangerously protruding from some of it.

A member opined that the plans for NewCAL do not sufficiently provide for setbacks or for providing a garden area. Pam said Josh Morse agreed with and would advocate for us on these issues. Peter said Josh Morse might attend our next meeting to talk about the next steps in the new building's design process. The City plans to completely demolish the existing building and putatively keep in mind its historic look and that of the surrounding architecture, in order to come up with a design compatible with these historic, neighborhood parameters. Mr. Morse also said that he would send someone to look at the Senior Center's outdoor furniture. Martina added that she objected to most of the new benches on Walnut Street, which were chosen without input or approval from the NAC or Beautiful Newtonville, and she suggested something similar could happen with the Senior Center, which has gone from needing historically appropriate repairs to complete replacement, and that the NAC should "oversee" the planning and development of NewCAL carefully to hold those in charge to their design and other promises.

Peter mentioned that the nearby Church of the Open Word was up for sale, and that it might make a worthy purchase for either the New Arts Center, which needs more room to expand, or for the development of senior and affordable housing. He suggested we speak to the minister in charge.

**Zoning Redesign/Community Engagement** Pam said her experience with the Polis interactive survey had been much like Carolyn's (discussed in the June NAC meeting) and described the survey as having a very large number of seemingly random comments, most of which she thought were either not urgent or well-expressed and which she passed on. Peter said that it had hundreds of comments, was far too long, and took hours to complete (though some time was spent writing his own questions). Pam commented in the survey about housing affordability, pointing to the very high rents of even the "affordable" units at our large new developments, as well as the market rate units, relative to our naturally affordable housing.

As for sampling and bias in the Polis survey, it was noted that it revealed the results, so far, of two questions which seemed to separate people into clusters, one of which showed people who seemed to be boosters of zoning redesign and more accelerated development to outnumber those in favor of less development by two-or-three to one. Thus, people who had self-selected to participate early in the survey (almost 300 had taken it between mid-May and July 8) appeared to front-load the sampling in a way that would likely increase the distrust and deter the participation of the many people, inclined toward more constrained development, who were already skeptical about Zoning Redesign's community engagement process.

It was also stated that the selection of the two clustering questions may have also biased the results because the comment that seemingly attracted those for more constrained development was not factual. It complained about Trio, with three or four stories, being too large. In fact, Trio has a combination of four and five story heights. Some of us did not answer that question because it was not factual, even though we would generally prefer lower heights.

With such biased sampling and the deterrent effects on some potential respondents of releasing early results, it was held that the survey was not representative and scientific enough to allow valid generalizations, and that it would be worthless unless followed up by a quantitative survey. More constructively, however, Pam suggested that the results of the survey could give insights from which to develop questions for a representative, scientific survey. [City Council President Albright, at our June meeting, said that she was not aware of any plans to create such a survey.] Another member asserted that given the seemingly poor quality of the Polis survey, it would look bad for the NAC to promote such a flawed, low-quality instrument. She and another member had similar feelings about the Vision Kit.

Councilor Tarik Lucas said the NAC should engage with the Polis survey and especially the Vision Kit. He suggested that leaders who might guide others in doing Vision Kits should take tours of their village centers first by themselves and do their own Vision Kits, to better understand and be familiar enough with it to help others. He planned to do this, and suggested Susan Albright and Emily Norton also lead groups of residents in Vision Kit tour efforts. He also urged each person to send in their own Vision Kit.

Lucas also said such participation could be useful when the City resumes zoning for the *Washington Street Vision Plan*, as these comments would be taken into consideration. Relatedly, resident Peter Harrington urged the NAC to broadcast the fact that there is a Vision Kit, and that we should foster participation to "let people speak."

When queried individually as to whether to promote the Vision Kit, the reaction of the NAC members present was divided, with three in favor and two opposed, mostly for the reasons noted above. (One member had temporarily left to take a phone call.) The sense of the meeting was that we should be

outspokenly critical of the flaws in the process but proceed to experiment with and encourage our constituents to do the Vision Kit.

Participation could have a real impact, according to Lucas, since only 281 residents had responded to the Polis survey and 116 had taken the Vision Kit over the previous two months. He also mentioned that the city has started a five-week internship program in which four students will conduct on-the-spot "Pop-Up" surveys in village centers.

**Village Day Planning and Outreach** (consists of three parts)
1) Fundraising and sponsorship: 37 local businesses appear to be interested, so far, in sponsoring. Relatedly, the NAC Village Day team has raised $3,000. Both sponsorships and funds will tend to come in in greater numbers as we draw closer to Village Day itself, according to Dana.

2) Vendor booths: The team will send out emails to past vendors; 10-12 booths will be available for electoral candidates for a $75 rental fee.

3) Attendees and eventgoers: outreach to this group includes posters and sandwich boards. Renters at Trio and 28 Austin Street will be invited. Digital marketing will also be used.

The team will meet every other week. We will discuss with the Police Department about possibly extending the celebration's border to Cabot Street, due to recent, narrower widths on Walnut Street.

Four bands are planned. There will also be three performance groups on Austin Street.

**Administrative Issues**

**1)** Regarding a letter the NAC had planned, urging more responsiveness from the Planning Department, it was decided to postpone this to get input from Beautiful Newtonville.
**2)** Regarding the upcoming candidate debates, the area councils were leaning toward using a hybrid model combining both in-person and Zoom audiences for the debates.
**3)** The NAC will be communicating with some of the City's leading organizers of cultural and entertainment events (Chris Pitts, Gloria Gavris, and Paula Gannon) to set up a Fall concert series.
**4)** Minutes from the NAC's May 6 joint meeting with the Waban Area Council on gun control in Newton were:
***Voted*** and approved unanimously (6-0), with Peter moving the question, and Martina seconding.

We agreed, by acclamation, to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Reisler
Secretary Pro Tempore