

Waban Area Council
Meeting Minutes Aug 11 2022
Held via Zoom

WAC Members Present: Rena Getz, Sallee Lipshutz, Isabelle Albeck, Dinah Bodkin, Christopher Pitts, Drake McCabe

Community: Robert Burke, MaryLee Belleville, Bernice Bradin, Carolyn Gabbay, Lydia Kenin, John Mordes

City Councillors: Tarik Lucas, Pam Wright, Julia Malakie

Community Update *Friends of Hemlock Gorge* A picnic was held Tuesday August 2 to thank Ruth Balsler for her efforts on behalf of Hemlock Gorge. Balsler raised the money to repair the roof and foundation of the Stone Building. Also sidewalks from the parking area to the Stone Building. Discussion included photo of memorial to Brian Yates. *Newton Festival of the Arts* CP discussed Festival of the Arts and its importance to the city of Newton. A multi-faceted arts festival with free admission that brings enormous value to the city. <https://newtoncommunitypride.org/newton-festival-of-the-arts/>. July 23 and 24 approximately 1500 people attended in Newton Highlands. The shade of a large oak tree helped the group cope with the heat. Feedback from surveys was very positive.

Zoning Update: Three “BU” (business use) districts tiered according to allowed intensity of use. All based on Gov Baker’s Economic Development Bill signed in 2021. MBTA communities must have at least one zoning district which permits multi-family housing. Housing in question can be no more than 1/2 mile from MBTA stop. Final version of the bill included requirement that communities with more developable land near MBTA actually has to be more concentrated than 15 units per acre. Showed a diagram with 0.25 and 0.5 mile radiuses. Affects 3600 lots in Waban. With more detailed map Chris and Rena went over characteristics of buildings (particularly near Village Center) that are affected. Includes Windsor Rd district and Pine Ridge districts which include many houses on Natl Historic Register. Being on Natl Historic Register entitles a home to an 18 month demolition delay imposed by Newton Historic Commission. The Strong Block is individually listed, which is the highest level of protection short of landmarking. Showed chart (as seen in WAC July meeting) comparing revised BU3 to former BU3 which was allowed by special permit. One change in the revised BU3 is that the amount of parking required for Retail, Office and Multi-family is significantly reduced. In addition there is no minimum lot area requirement per unit. RG also showed slides explaining terminology, the schedule of zoning changes and where Waban streets and neighborhoods are found in the Newton Lookbook. In terms of community engagement, Planning Dept is meeting with a very small group of people. One city councillor did a deep dive on the data generated from the Visioning Kits and concluded that too few residents were surveyed and that there were other serious problems with the Polis data. Rena surmises that there actually is not a valid premise to put all of this zoning in place. Window of opportunity

for public comment is Sept 1-Oct 16. There will be an explanatory exhibit at the public library and feedback tools will be available to the public. Much discussion among meeting attendees that in the age of Covid, increasing density poses a public health risk. RG proposes a letter to be sent from the four area councils asking for more time for each organization to absorb the zoning changes and disseminate them to the public. Julia Malakie suggested that whatever time extension is requested, that the “clock” not start until maps are available and included in the library exhibit. Agreed that a special zoom meeting will be held approximately one week from now to agree on contents of letter and make sure those contents accord well with what is in letters from other area councils. Some discussion then ensued of changes to accessory apartment ordinance. City Councillor Pam Wright emphasized that public comment period is coming up and changes are not set in stone. Restrictions on use of ADU discussed. Owner must be on premise but is free to rent out accessory unit. Accessory unit must be certified yearly.

Community Issues (2) Braeburn Country Club IA concerned that Braeburn Country Club, which gets a large tax break on the “undeveloped” land it owns, is blocking off access for people (particularly children) who wish to use it in winter for snowshoeing and sledding. There may be liability issues for the club. Agreed that IA will speak to Charles River Country Club and find out what their policy is and also who is the best person at City Hall to help deal with this issue. Then WAC will write a letter to the appropriate parties.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Respectfully submitted by Dinah Bodkin August 24, 2022