

2020 Annual Report Waban Area Council

Members of WAC in 2020: Chris Pitts, President, Rena Getz, Vice President, Dinah Bodkin, Secretary, Isabelle Albeck, Treasurer, Bob Jampol, Sallee Lipshutz, Megan Meirav, Ronald Marcus, Tom Elkind.

WAC in the Era of Covid-19. March meeting cancelled due to Covid-19. All subsequent meetings held via Zoom. How to help elderly neighbors, Chinese who may have felt negatively targeted and all affected discussed repeatedly. Sachiko Isihara proposes children at Suzuki School create videos of their music making and distribute that to elderly people. Suzuki hosted many outdoor activities in summer and lessons via Zoom but were at 65% of capacity. Sachiko requested (Sept mtg) that Waban residents let it be known SSN accepting new students. Councilor Humphrey announced launch of rental assistance program. Food relief: distribution of grab and go bags (May mtg). Repeated appeals to Waban residents to patronize businesses, esp Barry's Deli which was experiencing significant financial distress during pandemic.

Real Estate Matters:

20 Kinmonth Rd. Announced at May meeting that Nursing Home at that site demolished.

Wellesley Office Park. Presentation made at January meeting by David Hall and Attorney Peter Tam of Hanover Wellesley. Project unanimously approved by Wellesley ZBA on Jan 6 2020. Environmental Impact Form was submitted to the state on Nov 15 2019. Hall and Tam assured attendees that increases in traffic would be minimal. However, meeting attendees were skeptical and presented much data to the contrary. Councilor Humphrey stated we have little leverage over the WOP residential project. All information re WOP posted to WAC website. At December WAC meeting community members complained of noise from construction at WOP. SL: we were not included in the discussions re WOP. How to correct this in future.

Northland: Sallee Lipshutz and Rena Getz worked with NHAC and Newtonville Area Council to organize informational meetings. Northland Project passed in a March 3 referendum.

At June meeting WAC endorsed Newtonville Area Council letter authored by Peter Bruce demanding a slowdown of large development projects. Covid-19 makes this an acute issue.

Traffic and Public Safety Meeting schedule and legislative agenda communicated at various WAC meetings. Schedule of repairs on Chestnut St announced and community concerns re street aired repeatedly at WAC meetings. At April meeting discussion of closing Quinobequin to traffic in order to facilitate community use of outdoor space. Mayor opposed idea.

Newton Wellesley Hospital Cogeneration Plant. At February meeting, WAC learned that John Looney of NWHHVAC will do a neighborhood impact study of their new heating and electricity generating system. Tim deChant heading task force which will look at risk posed to local neighborhood by natural gas. Pediatrician Phil Landrigan spoke of the risk to children that increased air borne particulates presents and circulated his recent publication in the New England Journal of Medicine, "The False Promise of Natural Gas." Stated by Councilor Downs that natural gas will be more secure and dependable than current system. Noise from NWH serious problem (May mtg). Tim deChant and Cristina Alexander discussed this with Justin Ferbert Community impact studies by Woodard and Curran announced in July. Also announced that most Cogen developments will be on hold due to Covid. September mtg: deChant was told noise mitigation was in effect, but he and his neighbors saw little benefit. Hoping to appeal to NWH community group.

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Zoning Reform Major presentation made by Rena Getz at August meeting. Presentation available on WAC website. Also informal agreement to create subcommittee which will create questionnaire that will allow Waban residents to state which Zoning Reforms they favor most. RG presented ZAP fall calendar at September WAC meeting. Deb Crossley, chair of Zoning and Planning Committee attended WAC meeting in October to discuss timeline of public presentations and what the principal goals of Zoning Redesign are. Presentation by Lisle Baker, Ward Councilor for Ward 7 at November meeting. Explained principles of zoning and goals of current zoning redesign. Also presented principle components of new zoning ordinance, including maps showing redesigned areas. Discussion ensued, including possibility of a survey to determine what types of changes people favor most. Conversations on Zoning continued at the December meeting with Ken Lyons, President of Chestnut Hill Association and Peter Sachs, Architect. Both have extensive experience in zoning laws and design issues. The main objection in Lyons and Sachs discussions was changing from a FAR (floor to area ratio) based zoning system to a Form Based Zoning system. Also controversial was a proposal to allow “by right” multi-family dwellings in all residential districts. Also controversial was a proposal to allow “by right” some 1 and R2 homes to be converted to as many as six residential units. Both proposals were eliminated.

Historical Waban Announced at May meeting that landmarking ordinance was suspended. At September meeting Laura Foote announced the effort “Vision-a series of engaging interpretative sign in Newton Village Centers.” Grassroots effort. Historic plaque installed in West Newton in small park at intersection of Washington and Watertown streets. Idea for similar plaque received positively by WAC members. Decided at October meeting that plaque will be in Waban Sq where historic buildings are easily sited.

Community Issues

Friends of Quinobequin and Friends of Hemlock Gorge (FOQ and FOHG) Footbridges in Quinobequin repaired by local son and father team (photos shown at January meeting). Most parks closed off due to Covid. Multi use path along Quinobequin discussed at June meeting. June 25th Zoom session with DCR reported by Maureen Reilly Meagher and Councilor Humphrey, main message being that improvements are put on hold due to lack of funds. Also discussed at July meeting was Solomon Foundation’s proposal that Quinobequin be one way, northbound. September meeting John Mordes requested that WAC/FOTQ approve FOHG’s proposal for direct access from Quinobequin Trail to Hemlock Gorge. Motion passed unanimously. Councilor Humphrey reiterated that Quinobequin is a state road and all matters relating to it are handled through Ruth Balsler’s office. DCR presented three proposals for Quinobequin at “listening session” on 10/08/20. All material was posted at FOTQ section of WAC website. Chris reminded WAC meeting attendees that comment period was open until Oct 23.

Newton Open Space Plan (May mtg). Several “friends” organizations objected to proposal that they be moved from Park and Rec to Conservation Commission. Bob Jampol kept WAC in the loop on this.

Black Lives Matter Banner placed on Beacon St bridge over green line found shredded one day later. Possible vandalism discussed at June mtg. Municipal sites and groups in Newton are constrained by ordinances requiring activities be nonpolitical (July mtg). WAC therefore joined with Newtonville Area Council about possible NAACP chapter in Newton and other

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actions area councils can take. Karen Payne, former Boston NAACP chapter president was invited speaker at June NAC meeting to which WAC was also invited. November mtg discussion re showing solidarity with BLM. Tariq Lukas suggested supporting black owned businesses.

Candidates Debate Debate held via Zoom Newton Special Election March 16 for the contested City Council seats Councilor-at-Large, Wards 1 & 2. Video of debate posted at WAC website. Debates hosted by WAC, NHAC, Newtonville Area Council and Newton Upper Falls.

Bike Newton Beacon St bike lane discussed at July meeting. Progress in creating bike lane discussed at September meeting: most Beacon St residents did not mind losing parking along Beacon St in order to allow for a painted bike lane. Repeated complaints that the new Angier School does not have a bike lane and what can be done about it.

Ban on Fossil Fuel Infrastructure: It was moved at the February meeting WAC send a letter to City Council endorsing "home rule", ie Newton being allowed to issue its own ruling re fossil fuel infrastructure within the city.

Treasurer's Report issued and approved each month. Minutes of monthly meetings posted and approved each month.

**Respectfully submitted by Dinah Bodkin
April 19 2021**