

Waban Area Council Meeting Minutes
March 11 7:30pm
Held via Zoom

Waban Area Council: Christopher Pitts, Rena Getz, Isabelle Albeck, Dinah Bodkin, Tom Elkind, Sallee Lipshutz, Bob Jampol, Ronald Marcus.

Community: Lisa Monahan, Debra Berenbaum, John Mordes, Laura Foote, Nathaniel Lichtin, Robert Kelly, Sean Roche, Carol Todreas.

City Council: Bill Humphrey

Burning Issues from the Community: TE wishes to bring Safe Streets petition, sponsored by Bike Newton, to people's attention. Petition is addressed to the mayor and the city council and it asks for some specific actions to be taken to comply with obligations that the city has for various climate change issues and also to get Newton up to speed on bicycle and pedestrian safety, which it lags behind greatly compared to its neighbors. (https://www.change.org/p/mayor-and-city-council-of-newton-improve-bicycle-and-pedestrian-safety-in-newton-ma-47776ba3-e0b0-423b-841e-798a66778b49?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=0c962ac0-7afb-11eb-a740-cf08249fe520). Not a Waban specific issue. Also safety concerns apply to pedestrians as well as bike riders. Bill Humphrey refers people to Councillor Downs who is now head of the Public Safety and Transportation Committee. Chestnut St one of least safe streets. Bike enthusiasts state that when they speak to City Councillors, councillors declare themselves in favor of upgrading bike lanes. But when it comes to acting on their promises, councillors appear to be impeded by budgetary constraints and other priorities. General agreement among participants that if biking were safer more people would bike.

NewTV and the Future of Public Access. Bob Kelly introduced by Chris Pitts. Bob Kelly is Executive Produce of NewTV. The purpose of his having been invited by Chris Pitts is to explain the financial pressures facing NewTV and to generate support for House bill 1440 which is a mechanism for generating new funding streams for community television. Bob Kelly explained that under the Cable Act of 1984 cable companies have been paying five percent of gross revenues to support public education or government programming. The justification is that they are using the airwaves on the right of way in cities and towns across the country. In Massachusetts each city and town actually negotiates with the cable operators for the five percent of the capital funding, senior discounts or whatever else they can do with free cable. Now, however, streaming providers such as Netflix, Hulu, and many others provide TV programming through the Internet with the result that many viewers are "cutting the cord" (ending Cable service). The result is significant decrease in cable revenues which affects the funding of NewTV. A bill before the state legislature, HD 1440 addresses that problem by proposing that streaming services return a certain amount of their revenue to the cities and towns whose airwaves they use by right of way. General discussion ensued as to whether NewTV is watched by Newton residents and what the awareness of NewTV is. One mission is to teach people in the community how to use NewTV's equipment so that much of the content could be citizen generated. NewTV has covered all the debates sponsored by the four area councils. Some discussion ensued as to what is appropriate to put on a government channel. Bob Kelley shared letter written by Newton Ward 6 Democratic Committee to City Council and state delegation supporting legislation that would provide NewTV with funding from streaming video providers. General discussion on whether writing a letter of support is appropriate given that that specific action was not mentioned in the Agenda. Also discussion of whether those on the board of NewTV should recuse themselves from participating in writing said letter.

Nathaniel Lichtin proposed directing a WAC letter to our state representatives, since they are the ones actually voting on the bill. That also gives WAC the opportunity to include said vote in the Meeting Agenda for April. Rena Getz nominates Bob Jampol and Sallee Lipshutz to draft letter to the legislature in support of new funding sources for NewTV. Resolution passed.

Update on proposed revisions to the Demolition delay Ordinance Current ordinance requires that demolition of any house older than 50 years be reviewed by Newton Historic Commission (NHC). A demolition delay of 12 to 18 months can then be imposed by NHC. Various criteria are considered by NHC (<https://www.newtonma.gov/government/planning/historic-preservation/project-review-applications/demolition-review>). Over one hundred and fifty cities and towns in Massachusetts have established demolition delay bylaws or ordinances. Currently under discussion are revisions to the demolition delay ordinance which reduces the number of homes that come up for review when a demolition is proposed. Revisions also make it much more difficult for NHC to impose said delay (to be posted at <http://www.wabanareacouncil.com/>). Discussion ensued as to how other towns are treating this issue and most are revising their ordinances so that the demo delay is triggered more easily. Newton is moving in the opposite direction from other towns. A public hearing on the proposed revisions is set for April 12th.

Treasurer's Report: \$800. Bills for gift certificates and some reimbursement from joint council debates still outstanding.

February Minutes Approved.

Bill Humphrey: Chestnut St repairs and MBTA repairs upcoming.

Meeting adjourned 9:36 pm

Respectfully submitted by
Dinah Bodkin
March 21 2021