

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council

April 28, 2020 Minutes

JPNC Attendance: Kevin Rainsford, Max Glikman, Michael Reiskind, Vicky Arroyo, David Baron, Robin Cheung, Will Cohen, Valerie Coimbra, Bernard Doherty, Marvin Mathelier, Samantha Montano, Peg Preble, Carolyn Royce, Kyle Smith, Gert Thorn, Esther Tutella-Chen, Trevor Wissink-Adams, and Priscilla Yang.

Other attendees: Sarah Freeman, Dorothy Farrell, Celeste Walker, Marie Turley, Alex Grey, Peter Elmut, Jasmine Olivier, Meg Crowley, Mayor Marty Walsh, State Rep. Liz Malia, City Councillor Michael Flaherty, City Councillor Annissa Essaibi-George, City Councillor Matt O'Malley, Natalie Kaufman (Office of Rep. Liz Malia), Liana Poston (Office of Rep. Liz Malia), Justin McClarey (Office of City Councillor Matt O'Malley), Rachel Nagin (Office of City Councillor Annissa Essaibi-George), Alicia Payne (Office of City Councillor Michael Flaherty), Lindsey Santana (Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services), Lauren Bennett (Jamaica Plain Gazette), and Richard Heath (Boston Bulletin). [Two attendees did not sign in by name.]

Meeting called to order at 7:15pm by Kevin Rainsford via Zoom.

1. Introductions: Council members introduced themselves.

2. Mayor Marty Walsh: City of Boston Mayor Marty Walsh started by saying that he is uplifted by all the good work and support being done in these tough times, especially by the City workers such as first responders and food service workers. The City has supported their public school students by delivering over 30,000 Chromebook laptops. They have supplied over 500,000 meals to residents. To date, Boston has 8,300 positive COVID-19 cases and 330 deaths. The Convention Center special hospital was built in only five days, and has seen 472 patients. They have raised \$27M for the Boston Resiliency Fund, and the money is going to homeless programs, food programs, technology, and health. There are ten testing sites open now, and the City has to go out and buy all the tests - there are no Federal handouts of tests. The City has also started antibody testing as a pilot program. The City is participating in the State's re-opening plan. It will be a phased re-opening, being very cognizant of the different health risk to different populations (age and underlying conditions). Mayor Walsh said that he believes in going slower for more safety. At least ten banks have worked with the City to defer mortgages for three months to the back end of the loan without interest or penalties. Homeowners have to call their bank. Credit card companies should also be called to ask for special programs. The City has put a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures for three months - before the State passed similar legislation. The Federal government's plan to help small businesses was oversubscribed. It had \$450B in funds, received 30 million applications and funded 2 million of them. So, the City is trying to be real helpful to small businesses: the rules have been changed to allow restaurants to sell groceries and paper goods. He emphasized that physical social distancing and the use of masks are the best ways to deal with COVID-19. It will be about eighteen months before a vaccine is available, and about four-to-five months before a cure. He also urged folks with addictions who are isolated to reach out to 311 to be put in touch with counselors. Domestic abuse calls should go to 911.

Questions: Can anything be done to improve mask-wearing compliance among runners? At least half seem to not wear masks and pass close to walkers in the Arnold Arboretum and Jamaica Pond. Mayor Walsh has called the Mayor of Somerville to ask about their \$300 fine for not wearing masks. Walsh does not like using fines, but he will specifically urge runners to comply at his press conference tomorrow. Can a streamed waiver process be set up for construction projects building affordable housing? Mayor Walsh said that construction will probably be the first inductees allowed to restart, but they will have to sign affidavits adhering to safety protocols, including warm running water. He is also setting up a process whereby banks will extend the construction deadlines for their loans. What will the phases look like for restaurants reopening? Probably reduce indoor seating by 50%, and permit lots more outdoor seating to prevent the indoor air conditioning spreading droplets. Is the City supporting and adding resources for undocumented residents during this crisis? There is help with language, food assistance and rental assistance for undocumented residents through the Office of Immigrant Advancement. Mayor Walsh said the City is "wide open for everybody". There were also questions about what the City budget will be affected, whether masks are compulsory or recommended, what is the City doing for the homeless during the crisis, will the Rental Assistance Fund be replenished, how can the City stabilize businesses after the crisis is over, and a request to think about the mental health of first responders and others on the front lines after the crisis. Folks were urged to use the City text resource by testing EOSCOVID to 888-777.

The Mayor was thanked for his evening readings of Bedtimes Stories for Little Kids.

Elected officials, and aides introduced themselves and spoke briefly. Councillor Annissa Essaibi-George said that the City budget process is continuing; also her knit business is making masks and they are available for folks. Councillor Matt O'Malley urged folks to attend Friday session on very high third party restaurant delivery fees.

3. Committee Reports/Recommendations:

3.1. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron reported that the Zoning Committee met on April 15 as a virtual meeting for the first time. The Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) is not meeting and there are no abutters meetings being held. The ZC is meeting virtually just to clear backlog. It being the first meeting, some time was spent on April 15 on technical problems.

Three issues were heard and votes are needed tonight on all three: 1) 135 Carolina Avenue, a petition by Stephen Williamson and Patrick Byrne to erect a rear addition to an existing two-family house. The owners are looking to expand to stay in their house. There was no opposition and the recommendation of the ZC is to approve. 2) 24 Spalding Street, a petition by David and Tracy Steeves to construct a three-family residence with one affordable housing unit, one owner-occupied accessible unit, and one three-bedroom unit. This petition was a little more controversial. This parcel was picked up in the MassDOT auction of surplus properties. The developers described the three-family project as being their dream home, because their owner-occupied unit would be handicapped-accessible to accommodate their son. There is one market unit and also an affordable unit which was required by MassDOT and the City's Department of Neighborhood Development (DND). The proposal is for a fairly large three-family building. It triggers lot of variances because it is zoned open space, not three-family residential as is most of Spalding Street. They need a side yard variance and the side neighbor was somewhat opposed, because they thought their own ability to build in their backyard would be limited. There was a lot of support in person and by letter for the 24 Spalding proposal. The recommendation of the ZC is to approve. 3) 6-8 Wise Street, a petition by Armando Hernandez (dba 68 Wise Street LLC) to combine two lots and construct new building with six (6) residential dwelling units. This was the biggest matter on the agenda; it also went through a DND process, so an affordable unit is required even though it is only a six unit development. There was a lot of community process and neighbors seemed to like the modern design of the proposal. The recommendation of the ZC is to approve with the proviso that the project include one affordable unit, per agreement with DND. Bernie Doherty asked what is the square footage of the 24 Spalding Street lot. It is listed as 5,000 square feet - larger than most on Spalding Street (around 3,200 sq. ft.). Mr. Doherty asked what is the level of affordability of the units at 24 Spalding and 6-8 Wise? They are both at 80% Area Median Income (AMI). Mr. Doherty repeated his concern about the actual affordability of legally "affordable" units. Carolyn Royce asked what was the process that required the one affordable unit on 6-8 Wise Street. DND had a hook, because one of the two lots had a City-imposed deed restriction and DND used the restriction to negotiate for the affordable unit. The affordable unit here is on the first floor, which also makes it less desirable than the other units. Ms. Royce also had two questions about Spalding Street; she remembered that this MassDOT parcel was supposed to be all affordable units, and the developer was allowed to lower his purchase price significantly to create all affordability. She feels very unsettled about the disappearance of the affordable units. Gert Thorn followed up with a request to split the three votes and do more research on the disappearance of affordability at 24 Spalding Street. Marie Turley concurred with finding out how the proposal changed over time. Ms. Royce also asked if the affordable unit at Spalding Street is the equivalent size as the other two units. It is smaller than the other two (a 900 sq. ft. two-bedroom unit); DND does not require the units to be comparable. Motion by David Baron to support the recommendation of the Zoning Committee to approve on 135 Carolina Avenue. Seconded by Max Glikman. Passed 17-0-1 (then changed to 18-0-0). Motion by David Baron to support the recommendation of the Zoning Committee to approve on 24 Spalding Street. Seconded by Max Glikman. Passed 10-4-2 (2 votes missing). Motion by David Baron to support the recommendation of the Zoning Committee as presented with the proviso on 6-8 Wise Street. Seconded by Max Glikman. Passed 17-0-1.

The next Zoning Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, April 29 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be 373 South Huntington Avenue (change occupancy from office to office and one residential unit, to correct error in 2017), and 54 Danforth Street (create off-street parking space with new curb cut. After that the next Zoning Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, May 13 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be a request to renovate the former gas station at 561-579 Centre Street for use as retail/wholesale butcher, grocery, and other uses.

3.2. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): Carolyn Royce reported that the H&DC met on April 21 via Zoom at which there was a discussion on building electrification as an alternative to natural gas. The Town of Brookline has passed a resolution forbidding gas and oil lines in new construction/renovation under 15,000 sq. ft. Discussion on whether adding these type of sustainable goals affects the ability to build affordable housing. There was a question on whether the electric grid capacity can meet the new demand. The H&DC is also looking to update its Healthy Housing Guidelines and looking at sustainability in future Article 80 projects. It was reported that the State House passed a bill preventing foreclosures and evictions during the COVID-19 crisis.

The next H&DC meeting will be on Tuesday, May 19 at 7:00pm via Zoom. The discussion on sustainability will continue.

3.3. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind said that the Public Service Committee has not been meeting and the City of Boston Licensing Board has also been on hiatus. Just last week, the Licensing Board started virtual meetings and two Jamaica Plain items were on their agenda. Both had previously come before the JPNC: The first was a request of Third Cliff Bakery & Café for a new 7-Day Common Victualler License in the just-built Vita building at 3531 Washington Street. The second was a request of the Brendan Behan Pub at 378 Centre Street for a rear patio. Both were approved. There was a request to start Public Service Committee meetings as a communications tool to help neighbors during this COVID-19 crisis.

3.4. Ad Hoc Parks + Committee: Esther Tutella-Chen said the Parks + Committee will be start meetings in the future. There are no City Clean Ups scheduled.

3.5. Ad Hoc Education Committee: Trevor Wissink-Adams said the Education Committee has no meeting planned, but he will be Zoom calling the members of the Committee to discuss the impact on school funding that the loss of future

state funding will have on the Student Opportunity Act, which looks like it will be substantial. They will also discuss what the loss of the spring semester might have on future Boston Public Schools plans.

4. Announcements: None

5. Approval of February minutes: Approval of the minutes from the February 25, 2020 meeting was tabled.

6. New Business:

- Discussion about recording these virtual JPNC meetings and whether the recordings or just the written minutes should be the official minutes shared with the community. There was agreement to not use the cloud for cost and storage purposes. It was agreed to not share the recording of this meeting, and in the future to be clear at the beginning of meetings that a recording is being made. The JPNC will continue this conversation.

- Natalie Kaufman from Rep. Liz Malia's office summarized some the work that their office is doing: they are looking at gaps in Federal funding and policy that Commonwealth of Massachusetts might fill. They are also doing a lot of work helping constituents apply for and collect unemployment. They are advocating for specific folks and it looks like it does speed up some claims. There are competing unemployment agencies at the State and Federal level. To be eligible for the new Federal (gig worker) claim, you must first be denied at the regular State level. The State is speeding up their denials. They have hired 850 new workers. Also, please request a telephone call back and then answer calls from the state unemployment office (617-626-8600). The House Democratic Caucus is meeting tomorrow to enable a vote to pass a bond bill to fill the gap in funding caused by the delaying the income tax filing date for three months.

- Lindsey Santana was thanked for her good work. She asked that folks use her email rather than her work phone, because she is working on the 311 phones.

- Dave Baron thanked Rep. Liz Malia and Rep. Nika Elugardo for helping pass the remote notary law for Massachusetts enabling vital legal work to continue with virtual meetings. Witnessing signatures is not included, but is not a problem.

7. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:57pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

Next scheduled JPNC meeting: Tuesday, May 26 at 7:00PM via Zoom.

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: Thursday, May 21 at 7:00PM via Zoom.