

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council

June 23, 2020 Minutes

JPNC Attendance: Kevin Rainsford, Michael Reiskind, David Baron, Robin Cheung, Will Cohen, Valerie Coimbra, Marvin Mathelier, Samantha Montano, Peg Preble, Carolyn Royce, Kyle Smith, Gert Thorn, and Priscilla Yang.

Other attendees: Sarah Freeman, Charles Rosenberg, Aidan Foley, James McCann, S. Hale, Grecia _____ (Northeastern University student), McCann Perkins, Rickie Harvey, Barbara Watkins, Ginger Brown (JP Centre/South Main Streets), Denise Delgado (Egleston Square Main Street), Carlos Espinosa-Toro (JP Neighborhood Development Corporation), Justin McClarey (Office of City Councillor Matt O'Malley), Isabel Torres (Office of Rep. Nika Elugardo), Ethan Smith (Office of State Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz), Liana Poston (Office of Rep. Liz Malia), Lindsey Santana (Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services), Lauren Bennett (Jamaica Plain Gazette), and Richard Heath (Boston Bulletin).

Meeting called to order at 7:03pm by Kevin Rainsford via Zoom.

1. Introductions: Council members introduced themselves.

2. Approval of May minutes: Because the minutes from the last meeting were distributed so late, the Chair asked if approval should wait until the next meeting. Motion by Gert Thorn to table approval of the minutes from the May meeting until the next meeting. Seconded by Peg Preble. Passed 11-0-0 (2 came late).

3. Announcements:

- The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is having a Public Meeting on the Arborway Parkway Improvements Project on Wednesday, June 24 at 6:30pm as a GoToMeeting webinar. Community folks can join the webinar at this link: bit.ly/Arborway6-24.

- DCR has announced that it is reopening Parkman Drive to car traffic tonight at 9:00pm.

4. Jamaica Plain's Main Streets: Because businesses are starting to reopen, the directors of Jamaica Plain's three Main Streets were invited to speak about what they are doing with the businesses so far and what they are hoping to do to help them reopen. Also attending is Carlos Espinosa-Toro from the JP Neighborhood Development Corporation (JP NDC). Denise Delgado, Executive Director of Egleston Square Main Street (ESMS), started by saying that over the last few months they have been in an intensive COVID-19 response mode. They have shared public health and economic resource information to all businesses, but especially those that would be most affected by the crisis. The information is in Spanish, English, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Volunteers were used to conduct bilingual one-on-one surveys and technical assistance, such as applying for Small Business Administration (SBA) loans and unemployment. ESMS has worked with Carlos Espinosa-Toro and Ginger Brown from JP Centre/South Main Streets (JP CSMS) on fundraising and giving out relief to small businesses and workers. Ginger Brown, Executive Director of JP Centre/South Main Streets, spoke about the three-step process they developed to respond to the crisis: Immediate Assistance, Long-Term Sustainability and Advocacy, Reopening and Recovery. JP CSMS helped the Boston Main Streets Foundation donate \$1,000 grants by identifying eleven businesses in need in the district. Research was done and shared with local businesses on available Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and other SBA loans. JP Centre/South Main Streets helped businesses change their business model to rely more on gift card sales and take-out/delivery during these last few months. A JP Main Streets Relief Fund was developed with the other two JP Main Streets in order to give out \$500 grants for relief. Recipients were encouraged to attend JP NDC prosperity coaching workshops. JP CSMS has just launched a fundraising campaign for Reopening, to enable businesses to have what they need to reopen such as outdoor tables and chairs and Jersey barriers. They have also developed (with the help of Samuel Maddox and Braxton Tanner - MakeDo Studio) free templates for businesses to use for their new outdoor spaces. The link is patronicity.com/jpcsms2020.

"Orange Means Open" is a campaign to communicate to the community which businesses have reopened; it is a distinctive orange lantern that each reopened business can hang outside their establishment. It is easy to spot and helps revive the district. The "Orange Means Open" website (jpcentsouth.com/2020/06/11/orange-means-open-campaign) also has an interactive map displaying each open business and their individual information. JP Centre/South Main Streets is working with JP Movie Night to do a drive-in movie night on Saturday, June 27 (subsequently moved to July 18) at the St. Theresa of Avila parking lot in West Roxbury at 8:30pm. It is \$40 per car and all proceeds go to the JP Main Streets Relief Fund. Ms. Brown said that this crisis is going to be a long-term problem for businesses and there is still a lot more work to do. Carlos Espinosa-Toro, from the JP NDC, said that he has developed templates for reopening for different types of businesses (construction, restaurants, beauty salons/barbershops, family childcare, and office). These templates synthesize all the new regulations and available resources. The JP NDC is also working to increase the number of available alcohol licenses for restaurants. Mr. Espinosa-Toro has helped businesses get Boston Main Streets Foundation grants, PPP loans and Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL). About \$1.8Million has been disbursed. Questions were about landlords willingness to defer rent; in general landlords have been deferring rent, but there is a fear that when the State moratorium ends, there will be evictions. City Life/Vida Urbana has a campaign to resist mass evictions. There was a request that JPNC help reach out to the community and encourage people to support the businesses that are open. David Baron volunteered to help think of creative ways to reach the community.

He also emphasized the importance of the reuse of parking spaces for new outdoor business uses. Since the use of public transportation is declining, Denise Delgado asked the JPNC to inventory and explore using underutilized parking spaces in Jamaica Plain. Ginger Brown asked that the licensing and permitting process be streamlined to help businesses and perhaps the Resident Parking Program (RPP) rules could be relaxed. Dave Baron said that usually a robust community process helps businesses open faster.

Aides to elected officials introduced themselves.

5. Committee Reports/Recommendations:

5.1. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind said that the Public Service Committee met on June 2 via Zoom and started a discussion with the City on ways of widening sidewalks to allow for social distancing and outdoor dining and retail commerce. Matthew Warfield attended from the Boston Transportation Department to share some of the City's ideas. It will be an expedited process with fewer community meetings. The City has already received a good number of applications for outdoor uses, both on private land and public property. The City was asked to balance the uses of public property with the needs of adjacent businesses, pedestrians, bicyclists and public transit users. Sidewalk seating is usually easier in Jamaica Plain using parking spaces rather than sidewalk space. The City has stated that restaurants can be allowed to serve alcohol across the public sidewalk to the former parking spaces. The City also plans to move some bus stops away from restaurants to accommodate more curbside dining. Gert Thorn hoped that these changes will be the first step in reimagining the Centre/South business district and planning for its future needs.

The next Public Service Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, July 7 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be a request for a new beer & wine license for Simpli Bar and Bites at 3840 Washington Street in Forest Hills. Also on the agenda will be a discussion on reforming the Boston Police Department.

5.2. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron reported that the Zoning Committee met on May 27 and June 10 as virtual meetings. Two matters were heard, but neither needs a vote tonight. In addition, two matters from April 29 were forgotten and do need votes tonight. 1) 373 South Huntington Avenue, a petition by Jose Ruano to change the occupancy from office to office and one residential unit. The residential unit is above the dentist office and has been used like this for some time. There was no opposition and the recommendation of the ZC is to approve. 2) 54 Danforth Street, a petition by Luiza Santos to create one off-street parking space with a new curb cut. This is immediately adjacent to Stony Brook Wine and Spirits' cinderblock wall. Stony Brook Wine and Spirits did not oppose. The street narrows at this point and the City thought this will improve safety. There was general support and the recommendation of the ZC is to approve. 3) 12 Everett Street, a petition by Alterac Valley LLC to construct a three-story multifamily residence with seven (7) residential units and basement-level parking on a 13,231 square foot vacant parcel. This is adjacent to the large development that has been built at 16 Everett Street, and is proposed for the rear of the renovated Victorian house at 8 Everett Street. The parcel at 12 Everett Street is large, but there is practically no frontage except for the driveway. It was a very well-attended meeting. The neighbors were well-organized and generally opposed. The issues were too many units, too much density, and being right next door to the recently-built 16 Everett Street. An alternative is a large three-family structure could be built here. The developer was asked to come back, as it seemed that they were not quite ready. No vote is needed tonight. 4) 49 Robinwood Avenue, a petition by Arbour Hospital to increase capacity from 118 to 122 beds within existing space. This request is for a very modest increase in the number of beds, without any exterior construction. There is a long-standing contentious relationship between Arbour Hospital and the neighbors which was evident at the meeting. Issues were parking and exterior lighting. This request also needed some more time. It seems possible that the sides can work out the issues and write up a Memorandum of Understanding. Gert Thorn said that past written agreements with Arbour Hospital turned out to be unenforceable, or not enforced by the City. No vote is needed tonight. Motion by Carolyn Royce to support the recommendations of the Zoning Committee on 373 South Huntington Avenue and 54 Danforth Street. Seconded by Marvin Mathelier. There was a good amount of discussion about illegal parking in the driveway in front of 373 South Huntington Avenue and at 377 South Huntington Avenue. Passed 11-1-1.

The next Zoning Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, June 24 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be 120 Minden Street to change occupancy from a three-family to a four-family with no work to be done, and 7A Eliot Street for accessibility upgrades.

5.3. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): Carolyn Royce reported that the H&DC met on June 16 via Zoom. The questions are how do goals for sustainable housing affect the community as a whole, as well as Article 80 projects needing zoning relief. What guidelines would benefit homeowners when they want to renovate? Information from Boston Clean Energy Coalition (BCEC) and Mothers Out Front has been very helpful. The difficulty is how to take all the information and distill it into some simple guidelines for all the Committees of the Neighborhood Council. H&DC member Aidan Foley will lead a subcommittee to draft some recommendations to "support the move to clean energy and to ensure permanent affordability and healthy housing". Carolyn Royce invited any interested Council members and community folks to join the subcommittee or nominate people who would be interested. Please contact the JPNC at info.jpnc@gmail.com, Carolyn Royce at carolynroyce@gmail.com, or Aidan Foley at foleyja@gmail.com. It will be a short-term subcommittee. There was a question on how much the present Healthy Housing Guidelines might be broadened, since they were developed mainly from the perspective of reducing childhood asthma. Mr. Foley said that the

goal is to “future-proof” housing so it will not become chronically out-of-date. The use of gas for cooking is one item that will be targeted. There was also a question about whether the H&DC will be discussing inclusive, equity-based Article 80 practices. That will be a future topic of the Committee.

The next H&DC meeting will be on Tuesday, July 21 at 7:00pm via Zoom.

6. Discussion on Making Video Recordings of Meetings Available to the Public: There was continued discussion about recording the virtual JPNC meetings and committee meetings. Charles Rosenberg, from Seaverns Avenue, brought up the facts that these virtual recordings would show a portion of peoples’ homes and personal information could be accidentally exposed. Identity theft is a real risk, as well as showing participants’ young children. The privacy of the home is violated by these recordings. Also, poor folks who don’t have a private space in their home are put at a greater disadvantage. Some folks thought that recordings might be made public, but only after JPNC meetings return to public spaces. Video portions could be released if necessary by specific motion. Samantha Montano reminded members that the JPNC is a neighborhood body that believes in openness and transparency, and community folks want to see how our decisions are made. The City Council and City agencies post videos of their meetings for all to see. Perhaps virtual backgrounds could be used to hide personal spaces, or the Zoom transcript function could be used to post only a transcript. Is there a way to mask community participants’ backgrounds or identities? Most people thought that a participant’s video might be blocked, but one’s true identity should be known. It was decided to continue the discussion.

7. Old Business/New Business:

- Should the JP Neighborhood Council make a public statement on Black Lives Matter? Kevin Rainsford said that this is something the JPNC should be addressing. David Baron said that he would be interested in standing behind a statement, perhaps coming out of the Public Service Committee’s meetings on reforming the Boston Police if the Committee would broaden their discussion; either issuing a Statement of Principles or endorsing some other Statements of Principles. Robin Cheung suggested looking again and reworking at the JPNC’s mission statement. She wants it to be inclusive of Black Lives Matter and the Pride Community. Marvin Mathelier said that a statement by the JPNC is important, but it should be substantial, not pro forma. Actionable steps should be laid out. Folks in Egleston Square are developing a series of panel discussions on matters such as systemic racism or police brutality. The first one might happen on Saturday, July 11. Folks can contact Marvin Mathelier. Kyle Smith said that we should work closely with the City, examine their actions, and offer to help with outreach in Jamaica Plain. Samantha Montano stated that we should be directly addressing the history of active oppression of black people in this country. What should the JP Neighborhood Council do to change its own shortcomings? Kevin Rainsford offered to restart the ad hoc Outreach Committee, chaired by Max Glikman, to actively change the JPNC. Carolyn Royce urged all Committees to take up the issue from the perspective of their Committee. Kevin Rainsford offered to develop a draft and share it with the Council.

8. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:03pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

Next scheduled JPNC meeting: Tuesday, July 28 at 7:00PM via Zoom.

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: Thursday, July 23 at 7:00PM via Zoom.