

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council
August 24, 2021 Minutes

JPNC Attendance: Michael Reiskind, David Baron, Will Cohen, Bernard Doherty, Marvin Mathelier, Samantha Montaño, Peg Preble, Micah Sachs, and Trevor Wissink-Adams.

Other attendees: Kevin Rainsford, Sarah Freeman, Paige Sparks, Michael Kane, Pam Bender, Grace Holley, Lydia Rivera, LJ Jacobs, Marvin Watkins, Maureen, Beatrice Gen, Joyce Smith, Chuck Anastas, Alexis Rickmers, David Nollman, Susan Strolch, Lena Shapiro (Office of State Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz), Michael Giordano (Office of City Councillor Matt O'Malley), Lauren Bennett (Jamaica Plain Gazette), and Richard Heath (Boston Bulletin).

This meeting is the first meeting of the new JP Neighborhood Council elected at the neighborhood election held on August 21. The meeting was called to order at 7:08pm via Zoom by Michael Reiskind, as the only officer from the previous JP Neighborhood Council to be elected onto the present Council. He explained that he was only temporarily chairing the meeting until Council members feel comfortable electing new officers - either at this meeting or the next.

1. Introductions: Council members introduced themselves. Aides to elected officials introduced themselves.

2. Election Results: Kevin Rainsford reported that the JP Neighborhood Council Election was held on Saturday, August 21, 2021 from 10am to 4pm. The turnout was particularly low; there were 131 ballots cast, 19 at Stop & Shop, 29 at Forest Hills MBTA Station, and 83 at JP Licks. 25 ballots were cast from Area A, 50 ballots from Area B, and 56 ballots from Area C. Elected from Area A were Marvin Mathelier, Brandon Iizuka Russell, and Trevor Wissink-Adams. There are two vacancies in Area A. There are five vacancies in Area B. Elected from Area C were Gert Thorn, Peg Preble, Bernard Doherty, and Micah Sachs. There is one vacancy in Area C. Elected At-Large were Michael Reiskind, David Baron, Will Cohen, and Samantha Montaño. There is one vacancy At-Large. There was discussion about the reasons for the low turnout; probably a combination of the August date, moving of the election date, low outreach, and the lack of contested seats - especially in Area B. There was a suggestion that the Forest Hills table/poll be set up at a different location, not the area where people catch busses for Roslindale and points south. There were about six write-in votes, but none for more than one person and none had an address attached. While the turnout was low, there were no complaints about it not being a fair and open election. The Election Committee was asked to meet once more for a debriefing and write up recommendations for future JPNC elections. David Baron reminded folks that this is required by our by-laws. Motion by Michael Reiskind to accept the report of the Election Committee and to authorize the Ombuds Board to hold all ballots and envelopes for thirty days to allow for complaints or requests for recounts. Seconded by Micah Sachs. Passed 9-0-0.

3. Announcement of Council Vacancies: The Chair made the official announcement of Council vacancies. There are presently two vacancies in Area A, five vacancies in Area B, one vacancy in Area C, and one vacancy At-Large. Nominations will be accepted at this meeting and the JPNC meetings in September and October. At least 60 days is needed after the announcement of a vacancy before it is filled. There are nine vacancies that may be filled in October.

4. Approval of July minutes: Motion by David Baron to approve the minutes from the July 27, 2021 meeting. Seconded by Will Cohen. Passed 8-0-1.

5. Community Announcements:

- There will be a community reading of Frederick Douglass's 4th of July speech this Saturday, August 28 from 3:00pm to 5:30pm at the Ula Café Terrace, 284 Amory Street.
- The Department of Conservation and Recreation Special Commission have two more meetings left in September and October.
- Mayor Janey's Coffee Hour for Jamaica Plain will take place on Thursday, August 26 starting at 10:30am at Mozart Street Playground.
- The MBTA will be holding a virtual Open House on their Better Bus Project on Thursday, August 26 at 6:00pm.

6. Election of New Officers: Dave Baron and Bernie Doherty started a discussion on when to elect new JPNC officers. It was decided to elect interim officers until most of the nine Council vacancies are filled to allow the officers to be selected by a larger Council. Dave Baron nominated Samantha Montaño to be interim Chair of the JPNC until October 2021. Bernie Doherty nominated himself as interim Vice-Chair of the JPNC. Bernie Doherty nominated Michael Reiskind as interim Secretary-Treasurer of the JPNC. Kevin Rainsford, as past Chair, was asked to actively assist in the transition during this interim period. Motion by Dave Baron to elect the slate of the three nominated as interim officers. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. Passed 9-0-0. Samantha Montaño took over as chair of the meeting.

7. Nominations for Council Vacancies: Alexis Rickmers nominated herself for the vacancy in Area C. Marvin Watkins, 1953 Columbus Avenue, nominated himself for a vacancy in Area A.

8. Committee Reports/Recommendations:

8.1. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron reported that the Zoning Committee met on August 4 as a virtual meeting. Two matters were heard and one needs a vote tonight: 1) 104-104B Jamaica Street, a petition by Rosa Auterio to construct

a three-unit townhouse-style dwelling with off-street parking in rear yard. The building is to be fully sprinklered. This meeting on August 4 was the second community meeting. There is a side-yard violation and the neighbor on that side was in opposition. There were also other issues brought up by neighbors. This proposal is for three townhouses side-by-side, and the long-time owner plans to live in one of the townhouses once they are built. After the first meeting, the proposal was changed and the abutting neighbors are not opposing the modified design. There was no one who came to oppose at the August 4 meeting and the ZC recommends approval. Bernie Doherty thinks that this request has way too many variances, twelve or thirteen. It should not pass. Dave Baron said that this is a corner lot which tends to have a lot of variances. The neighbors and ZC were comfortable with their recommendation of approval. Motion by Micah Sachs to support the recommendation of the Zoning Committee on 104-104B Jamaica Street. Seconded by Michael Reiskind. Passed 8-1-0.

The other matter was 212 Chestnut Avenue, a request to change a two-family dwelling to a seven unit residential building (since modified to a 6-unit building). There was a lot of opposition to this request. More time is needed to work on the issues. There was good feedback received by the home-owner.

The next Zoning Committee meetings will be on Wednesday, September 1 and September 15 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the September 1 agenda will be 12-14 Porter Street, construction of a new two-family dwelling with two parking places.

8.2. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind said that the Public Service Committee met on August 3 via Zoom. On the agenda was a request of Simpli Bar & Bites at 3840 Washington Street for a beer and wine license. This is a restaurant that used to have an alcohol license under a different ownership, and has been operating currently with a simple common victualler with no alcohol. The operation, menu and hours will remain the same, including an attractive rear patio. The Committee also considered the possible need for permission for take-out and for two TVs. There was no opposition at the neighborhood hearing. The Public Service Committee voted to support the requests. However with all the changes at the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, there had been no abutters meeting and the Committee added another proviso that the support is contingent on there being no opposition at the abutters meeting, which would occur sometime in September. That abutters meeting was held on August 17 and I was informed that the one attendee was in support. Motion by Michael Reiskind to support the request of FS Bar & Lounge LLC, doing business as "Simpli Bar & Bites," at 3840 Washington Street for a 7-day common victualler wines and malt beverages license, with take-out, and an entertainment license for 2 TVs, with the hours of 6:00 am to 11:00 pm, with Florian Struga as manager, and with a seasonal outdoor patio with 20 seats. Seconded by David Baron. Passed 9-0-0.

The next Public Service Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, September 7 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be four license requests: a request of BMS Paper for new two-story restaurant with 357 seats at 3380 Washington Street, the addition of a deli counter to the existing BMS Paper establishment at the same address, a new beer wine & liqueurs license for Mike & Patty's at 388 Centre Street (former Sorella's location), and an all-alcohol license for the Ethiopian Café at 377A Centre Street. It was pointed out that that date is the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah.

8.3. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): Marvin Mathelier reported that the H&DC met on August 17 via Zoom. The Committee considered and supported a proposal from the Membership Outreach Subcommittee on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The proposal was shared before this meeting with Council members. Goal #1 is to have the H&DC membership match what the JP community looks like today in terms of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), renters/owners, and others categories. The goals are that 45% of Committee members be Black, Indigenous & People Of Color (BIPOC), 50% of Committee members be renters, 20% of Committee members be renters in income-restricted housing, and 33% of Committee members be from each of JPNC Areas A, B & C. Goal #2 is that the H&DC allocate designated seats for under-represented groups, in the percentages of the goals laid out above. In addition, the Committee decided to hold vacant seats open for under-represented groups for six months. In six months time (February 2022), they would check back in and see if goals were met. Motion by Marvin Mathelier to accept the proposal of Goals #1 and #2 from the H&DC. Dave Baron said that this effort will encourage people to do the real important work of outreach and recruiting. He asked about the reason for diversity among Areas A, B, and C. It was confirmed that the freeze would affect potential Council members as well. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. Passed 8-0-1.

The tenants at the Forbes Building at 545 Centre Street are going through issues with the owners about their continued tenancy. The biggest concern is that the owner may displace 147 renters when the government subsidy expires in March 2022. The H&DC heard from Beverly Estes-Smargiassi, Assistant Director for Housing Development in the City's Department of Neighborhood Development, as well as Michael Kane, executive director of the Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants. It was an informational meeting at which no vote was taken and Mr. Mathelier understands that no vote is to be taken tonight. David Nollman, from the steering committee of the Forbes Building Tenants Association and on the Board of the Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants, said that it is a complicated situation. When the landlord paid off the mortgage in 2019, the forty-year agreement with the government ended, creating a 40T agreement allowing all tenants to remain for three additional years (March 2022) under almost the same terms. He was able to raise rents up to 55 and he did raise them up 4.98% which is a heavy burden. Most of the tenants are elderly or disabled. Mr. Nollman said that the landlord has said that he wants all of the present tenants to stay, but has been unable to work out terms with the City of Boston. Of the 147 units, 37 tenants are lowest-income tenants under MRVP (Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program). All of the tenants are being offered only one-year leases. The tenants feel they are at-risk and are asking the JPNC to support them in their continued tenancy. Mr. Nollman said there was a plan by the landlord to convert the whole building for artists

housing. There is a petition of support for the tenants that has almost 700 signatures, including 120 from Forbes Building tenants. Michael Kane then added that up to December 2020, the landlord had said that he wanted to preserve all affordable housing presently at the Forbes Building, but just before Christmas, the City became concerned because the landlord wanted to waive fair housing rules and wanted to waive the City's artists rules so that only he could select tenants. He wanted to waive the homeless set-aside requirement for City and State money. He also has a 19-page plan for the surrounding area of Centre Street. He is refusing to sign long-term contracts unless the City agrees with his vision. The landlord has agreed to 88 mobile MRVP vouchers for one year that are renewable. The City is firm on having long-term contracts and the State is leaning that way, too. He urged the JPNC to sign the petition that had been circulating that supports the Forbes Building tenants: Firstly, urging the landlord, Mr. Clayton, to sign the contracts now to save the Forbes Building as affordable housing and prevent displacement, including a 20-year extension for the 37 MRVP tenants, and a 20-year contract for 76 more tenants. with either the BHA or the State as supported by the City; Secondly, to preserve the Forbes Building as affordable, mixed-income housing for predominantly senior and disabled tenants; Thirdly, to support the City's home-rule petition to restore governmentally-involved housing protections. Motion by Samantha Montaño to sign on to the Forbes Building petition. Seconded by Bernard Doherty. Discussion about whether the Council should vote after hearing only one side of the issue. Amendment by Marvin Mathelier to not vote tonight and wait until after Thursday to allow the H&DC to gather more information on this issue. Seconded by Samantha Montaño. Amendment Failed 3-5-0 (1 left early). A vote was then held on the original motion. Motion Passed 7-0-1 (1 left early). The next H&DC meeting will be on Tuesday, September 21 at 7:00pm via Zoom.

9. Old Business/New Business:

- Kevin Rainsford reminded folks that the JPNC Committees have to elect their new chairs and submit them to the Council.

10. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:14pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

Next scheduled JPNC meeting: Tuesday, September 28, 2021 at 7:00PM via Zoom.

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: September 23, 2021 at 7:00PM via Zoom (did not occur).