

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council
December 20, 2022 Minutes

JPNC Attendance: Will Cohen, Bernard Doherty, Michael Reiskind, David Baron, Nicholas Chaves, Sarah Freeman, Omer Hecht, Peg Preble, Paige Sparks, Gert Thorn, and Renée Stacey Welch.

Other attendees: Celeste Walker, Dana Gonsalves, Kane Dimasso-Scott, Gordon Weissman, Christine O'Toole, Matt Del Sesto, Susan Strelec, David Nollman, Michael Kane, Laura Mistretta, (617)522-0254, Dot Joyce (Forbes Building), Jeffrey Sacks (Forbes Building), Lena Shapiro (Office of Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz), and Richard Heath (Boston Bulletin).

The meeting was called to order at 7:04pm by Will Cohen.

1. Introductions: Council members introduced themselves.

2. Approval of October and November 2022 minutes: Motion by Omer Hecht to approve the minutes from the October 25, 2022 meeting. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. Passed 10-0-1. Because there was no quorum at the November JPNC meeting, the November 22 meeting was held as a JPNC Executive Committee meeting and it was thought that consideration of the November minutes was best left to the Executive Committee.

3. Announcements:

3.1 Community announcements:

- Bernie Doherty brought up the Forbes Building. He thought that the JPNC should advocate strongly for these at-risk elderly tenants. Mr. Doherty was kindly reminded that substantive issues should wait for the Committee Reports part of the agenda.

- The Franklin Park Action Plan was released on December 13. You can see the plan at boston.gov/franklin-park-plan.

- Improvements to Flaherty Playground on Cornwall Street are in the planning stage. There will be a community meeting held soon (subsequently scheduled for Tuesday, February 7 at 6:00pm) via Zoom. The newest plans include a dog park.

- There was a DCR Arborway Parkways Improvement Project meeting held last week on December 14 to discuss the preferred alternative with the nineteen stakeholder groups. A recording will be available shortly and a full community meeting will be scheduled. The stakeholder groups can be seen here:

www.mass.gov/service-details/arborway-parkways-improvement-project

3.2 Council Vacancies: With the resignation of Micah Sachs, the Chair announced that there are now five vacancies on the Council. There are two vacancies in Area A, two vacancies in Area B, and one vacancy in Area C. There were no further nominations made at the meeting.

4. Committee Reports/Recommendations:

4.1. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron said that the Zoning Committee met only once, on December 7. The Committee heard two proposals that need votes tonight. 1) 225 Lamartine Street, a petition by 225-227 Lamartine Street Condominium Trust (Jeff Goodman, trustee), to convert a two-family residence to a three-family residence, extend living space into basement, and add third unit to first floor and basement; add first-floor deck and basement bulkhead; install fire alarm & fire suppression systems. This parcel has two buildings on one lot and the front building owner wants to add basement space. There'll be no changes to the footprints of the houses. One rear adjoining neighbor asked about parking. The ZC recommends approval. 2) 34 Sedgwick Street, a petition by 34 Sedgwick Realty Trust (Virginia Baran Rude and Monica Katherine Rude), to add a dormer to the attic to create additional living space including new bathroom; construct two-story addition in rear of house per plans; demolish existing detached garage; renovate two existing kitchens and baths. This proposal will take down an existing rear garage and add a two-story addition. The residence will remain a two-family house, but larger. The ZC recommends approval. Motion by David Baron to support the recommendations of the Zoning Committee on 225 Lamartine Street and 34 Sedgwick Street. Seconded by Paige Sparks. Passed 10-0-1.

The next Zoning Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, December 21 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be a proposal at 26 Greenview Avenue and the return of 81 Woodlawn Street.

4.2. Outreach Committee: Paige Sparks said that the Committee met on Tuesday, November 8 and December 13 at 7:00pm via Zoom. Up for approval today is the addition of a community member, Doug Rand, an architect who lives at 67 Orchardhill Road. Motion by Paige Sparks to approve Doug Rand as a community member of the Outreach Committee. Seconded by Omer Hecht. Passed 11-0-0. The current roster of the the Committee has one JPNC member vacancy and nine community member vacancies.

The Committee continued their three initiatives: to add information about the Council at The Brewery on a public bulletin board, schools are being contacted to attract more youth to participate in the Council, and the Committee is developing written material to use at tables set up with volunteers at Jamaica Plain events.

Regarding the three proposed bylaw changes previously submitted in writing by the Committee in September and October 2022, the Committee is withdrawing the proposal on Article 14 ("A person may not serve as chair of a working committee for more than one consecutive term. A new chair will be elected at the beginning of every term, as the council and committees are seated following the election."). Motion by Paige Sparks to amend Article 4, paragraph 2 to read (the additional proposed language is in italics): "Elected membership is open to all residents of the JPNC Area who are 16 years of age or older. Persons owning businesses, directors of nonprofit organizations within Jamaica Plain *and full time students 16 years of age or older who attend a school in Jamaica Plain* are also eligible for membership." Seconded by Omer Hecht. A two-thirds vote of the JPNC members present is required for a bylaw change. Dave Baron felt uncomfortable with the

proposal. Ms. Sparks said that these students spend a lot of time in Jamaica Plain and deserve representation. Gert Thorn asked whether this means that some folks could be on two neighborhood councils - where they live and where they go to school. The idea is to increase youth participation on the Council. Motion Failed 6-4-1. Motion by Paige Sparks to add the following language to Article 7, Committees: sub section - Working Committees: "Community members who serve on a working committee may only serve for no more than 2 full terms of the Council. If community members wish to serve on a committee again on the same committee, they must run for a Council seat and participate in the JPNC as any other member." Dave Baron spoke about the value of keeping community members on committees. Gert Thorn said that he cherishes volunteers and said it is very hard to recruit new volunteers. Nick Chaves spoke in favor of the amendment because of the number of vacancies on the JP Neighborhood Council and this change would reward dedication for long-term volunteers. Omer Hecht said that the committees have developed a group of "community members-for-life" which is stagnating the committees. Paige Sparks spoke about the need of a mechanism for turnover of community members on committees. Peg Preble felt that that the proposal is well-meaning, but not at this time. She said that trying to create better turnout at JPNC Elections should be the priority. Sarah Freeman thought that there could be a better way than a bylaw change to generate turnover on the committees. Motion Failed 2-7-2. Paige Sparks requested that committees ask for a clean slate every two years; that every community member has to run again for a community seat.

The next Outreach Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, January 10 at 7:00pm via Zoom.

4.3. Parks Committee (Environment, Parks & Energy Committee): There was no Parks Committee meeting in December.

4.4. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind reported that the Committee had a neighborhood hearing November 1 on the request of the Brendan Behan Pub at 378A Centre Street for a change in the closing hour of their rear patio from 10:00pm to 12midnight. The rear patio had been approved for year-round use in January 2022. The existing patio will retain the same heating, same layout and same menu. There are no TVs on the patio and no music outdoors. All attendees at the very well-attended hearing spoke strongly in favor of the application. The question of noise was raised; tenants living directly upstairs in the same building expressed their approval of the longer hours. There were very kind words saying that the owner Mr. Soltani is hard-working and a true steward to the community. A petition/form letter with 76 signatures was submitted. There was unanimous support for this proposal at the Public Service Committee. The Licensing Board voting session was before the JPNC November meeting, so an Executive Committee vote was necessary and obtained.

There was no December Public Service Committee held.

The next Public Service Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, January 3 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be work on getting more trash barrels in the business districts and discussion of the City's Sidewalk Snow Clearance Program.

4.5. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): There being no Chair, there was no November Housing & Development Committee meeting held. The December H&DC meeting is usually held on the third Tuesday and today's JP Neighborhood Council meeting has created a conflict for that meeting.

Arborway Yard: There was a brief report on the Arborway Yard. Gert Thorn said that the Arborway Yard/CPCAY subcommittee (Community Planning Committee for the Arborway Yard) needs to reorganize itself as an ad hoc committee.

Forbes Building: There was a report on the Forbes Building at 545 Centre Street. The landlord recommitted to make the building 100% affordable - it is about 25% affordable now. He also recommitted that all tenants living there now can remain. The landlord is still in negotiations on rent stabilization, but cannot announce that yet. This building is the last expiring-use building in the City (40 years old) and needs to be renewed, but the landlord said it will not go market-rate or be sold. Jeffrey Sacks (attorney at NixonPeabody, representing the owner) and Dot Joyce (consultant to the owner) said that rents will not be raised in January or February 2023. Attendees representing the tenants were Michael Kane (Mass. Alliance of HUD Tenants (MAHT)) and Laura Mistretta (MAHT), as well as tenants Susan Strelec, David Nollman, and Gordon Weissman. Bernie Doherty emphasized that these tenants are at risk and the JPNC must act to reduce their fear. Michael Kane said that the tenants have been under stress for two years without a clear plan for the building's future. The owner promised that a plan would be shared with the JPNC in May 2022. The City finally saw a plan in October 2022, but the owners did not submit a plan for rent subsidy by the deadline that fall, so the tenants are in limbo for another year. Mr. Kane said that the owners are asking for too much subsidy and another worthwhile proposal was not accepted by the owner. There has been no substantive movement for years. David Nollman appreciated the promise by the owners to be all-affordable, but it is not in writing. Gert Thorn felt troubled by the lengthy negotiations and said the JPNC should broker a deal among the owners, the City, and the State. Motion by Gert Thorn for the JPNC to send a letter to the owners, the City, and the State offering a meeting to resolve the Forbes Building issue. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. Sarah Freeman offered a friendly amendment to add the tenants association to the motion. The amendment was accepted. David Baron asked to see a draft of the letter before a vote is taken. The Chair asked that the motion be withdrawn until a letter is drafted. The motion was withdrawn. Michael Kane asked Jeffrey Sacks what are the owners asking from the State. He has not seen the numbers. Dot Joyce said that there is a lot in writing with numbers available. The owners will resubmit a revised application in January, but they cannot negotiate in public. There was a promise in early 2022 to freeze all rents for 2023. Susan Strelec asked what will happen to rents if the State rejects all requests from the owners? Mr. Kane reported that 20-30 units are now being rented at market rates and the 40-year mortgage has been completely paid off. He said that State Rep. Nika Elugardo brokered a good meeting in 2022 at which the right things were said, but no action has occurred. Mr. Sacks said that the rent freeze applies to 75 units in the building (down from 82 units because 7 tenants have moved out).

5. Old Business/New Business:

- **Election of Housing and Development Committee Chair:** Interest in becoming Chair was expressed by Renée Stacey Welch and Omer Hecht. Both candidates gave short speeches asking for support for the position. A secret vote was taken using the private chat feature of Zoom. Renée Stacey Welch was selected. It was mentioned that previous Chair Micah Sachs has the passwords for Housing and Development Committee access.

- This being the last meeting for Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz' aide Lena Shapiro, the Council thanked her for her work and support over the years.

- Dana Gonsalves asked if anyone had attended the community meeting on December 7 about a proposal for 341-343 Centre Street. Michael Reiskind said he had attended and will report to Mr. Gonsalves by phone.

6. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:02pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

Next scheduled JPNC meeting: Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at 7:00PM via Zoom.

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: January 19, 2023 at 7:00PM via Zoom.