

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council
February 28, 2023 Minutes

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

Elected at the meeting: Lorenzo Bartoloni, Peter DeCotis, and Danielle Sommer Kieta.

Other attendees: Dana Gonsalves, Kane Dimasso-Scott, Michael Epp, Louise Johnson, Doug Rand, Julianna Bruce, Janet Galloway, Jay Flynn, Kathy Brown, Laura Mistretta, Pat Keeley, John Harding, Mary Ostberg, Mia-Jean Sicard, State Rep. Sam Montaña, and Richard Heath (Boston Bulletin).

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

1. Introductions: Council members introduced themselves. The reporter from The Bulletin and Rep. Sam Montaña introduced themselves.

2. Approval of January 2023 minutes: There were two suggested changes to the January 2023 minutes: Sarah Freeman recommended correcting the last two words in the Council Vacancies section: “Nicholas Chaves said that he lives in Area C, but has been seated as a member in Area B. Should he switch areas? It was suggested that he remain in place and run for re-election this year from Area C.” Sarah Freeman also recommended clarifying the Parks+ Committee section by adding the following after the second sentence: “PMAC recently changed its name to “Southwest Corridor Park Alliance” (SWCPA).” Motion by Michael Reiskind to approve the minutes from the January 24, 2023 meeting, as amended. Seconded by Paige Sparks. Passed 11-0-2.

3. Announcements:

3.1 Community announcements:

- The Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS) will have a coffee hour Friday for folks to ask a question or share a concern. Called “ONS Field Fridays”, it will be on March 3 starting at 10:00am at the Egleston Square Branch Library.

3.2 Council Vacancies: The Chair announced again that there are five vacancies on the Council. Two vacancies in Area A, two vacancies in Area B, and one vacancy in Area C. Nominations from the community are encouraged and will be taken today at the end of the meeting.

4. Committee Reports/Recommendations:

4.1. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): Renée Stacey Welch said that the Housing & Development Committee met on February 21 via Zoom. The Committee is submitting a draft comment letter on proposed changes to the City's Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP). The letter supports proposals to strengthen IDP, and additionally requests increased affordability requirements, education for landlords in the use of voucher/subsidies, and protection of Plan:JP/ROX affordability requirements. Mayor Wu has already proposed a new Policy which has 20% affordability (17% affordable units and 3% reserved for vouchers) with a lower Area Median Income (AMI). David Baron said he thinks the H&DC letter is going too far. Will Cohen was surprised that the draft letter from January has come back relatively unchanged and is uncomfortable with the letter. He is worried that the H&DC letter may actually reduce housing production and is a misstep. The requests rely too much on old data and ignore some very well-thought-out opposition. Trevor Wissink-Adams agreed. Bernie Doherty agreed with Renée Stacey Welch’s call for more education, but agreed with Will Cohen that the letter should be revised. Ms. Welch said that she could revise the letter within the timeline. Should it go to the Executive Committee for rewriting? Motion by Gert Thorn to send the letter to the Executive Committee for rewriting. Seconded by Michael Reiskind. Will Cohen also said that there are ethical issues touched on in the letter. Failed 4-5-3 (1 not voting). Motion by Omer Hecht to send the letter as submitted. Seconded by Will Cohen. Failed 0-9-4.

Arborway Yard: There was a discussion on the organization of the working group on the Arborway Yard. There is no Chair or schedule yet. It was agreed that the committee needs more clarity on its mandate for it to become effective. Gert Thorn thought the mission of the committee is clear: to guide the project through its community process. Motion by Gert Thorn to create an Arborway Yard Committee separate from the Housing & Development Committee. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. An amendment was offered by Renée Stacey Welch to have the Committee as a subcommittee of the Housing & Development Committee.

4.2. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron said that the Zoning Committee met only once, on February 15 and heard a single proposal: 294 & 294R South Street, a petition by Rosalba Solis to convert an existing accessory garage behind a single-family residence to an additional accessory dwelling unit (ADU). There were questions of not enough time for the community to see the plans, so this proposal was deferred until the March 22 ZC meeting. No vote is needed tonight. Omer Hecht brought up an issue of process that was raised at the Zoning Committee: can a Committee member speak as an abutter and advocate on one side of an issue and then vote as a member of the Committee? There was little discussion on this issue, but a lot of comments on the type of language used at the ZC and the confusion about ADUs and ADU 2.0. Dave Baron explained a bit about ADU 2.0. Comments about inappropriate language and perceived insults led to questions of whether the language was said at the meeting or written in the Zoom Chat. It was agreed that many comments were conveyed in a poor manner.

The next Zoning Committee meetings will be on Wednesday, March 1 and Wednesday, March 22 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the March 1 agenda will be a request from the Forest Hills Cooperative Apartments for a new community services building.

4.3. Parks+ Committee (Environment, Parks & Energy Committee): Alexis Rickmers said that the Parks+ Committee met on February 13 at 7:30pm via Zoom. The Committee is communicating with folks about the upcoming Muddy River Cleanup on April 22. Gert Thorn brought up an issue of bicyclists using the pedestrian path around Jamaica Pond, which is not allowed. As signs indicate, there is a separate bike path. Nick Chaves offered to reach out to the Jamaica Pond Association (JPA) as community outreach. It was agreed that enforcement should be increased by the Parks Department or the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. Gert Thorn thought that talking to the Parks Department is most important. Rep. Sam Montaña offered to help.

Sarah Freeman reminded folks that the deadline for public comments on the Franklin Park Action Plan is Friday, March 3.

4.4. Outreach Committee: Paige Sparks said that the Committee met on Wednesday, February 8 at 7:00pm via Zoom. The Outreach Committee, acting as the JPNC Ad Hoc Elections Committee, planned for the biennial JPNC Election. There are two preferred dates for the Election: Saturday, June 24 or Saturday, May 20. Many preliminary steps are needed for any Election date: three weeks to collect nomination signatures, then time to validate the signatures, train volunteers, and time to campaign for votes. Motion by Paige Sparks to choose June 24 as the date of the JPNC Election. Seconded by David Baron. The Election packets need to be available about two months before the Election. Dana Gonsalves said that May 20 conflicts with a JP NDC event. Nick Chaves asked whether candidates have to be present on the day of the Election. No, but if they are not present, then they cannot vote. Digital signatures will be allowed again, as in 2021. Passed 10-0-2 (1 left early). The Election needs volunteers for Election Day to be successful and Council members are encouraged to reach out for volunteers. Candidates cannot be volunteers at the polls.

The next Outreach Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, March 14 at 7:00pm via Zoom.

4.5. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind reported that the Committee met on Tuesday, February 7 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda was further planning on getting more trash barrels in the business districts. The Public Works Department (PWD) is very open to locations suggested by the JPNC. There was a request to add some trash barrels along Perkins Street next to the parking lane at Jamaica Pond, but indications are that Parks Department policy is against putting trash barrels catering only to automobile users. There was also a brief discussion of the City's Sidewalk Snow Clearance Program. The PWD is open to adding more sidewalks to the program. The Committee heard a bit more about new bicycle lanes on cross streets in Jamaica Plain. Boylston Street and Paul Gore Street are being proposed by the City.

The next Public Service Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, March 7 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.

5. Old Business/New Business:

- Forbes Building update: The landlord of the Forbes Building at 545 Centre Street has put in place a rent freeze for tenants for one year - 2023. But there is still no long-term solution for the tenants at risk.

- Bernie Doherty updated the Council on the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) project for a redundant water-line connector from Weston to Mattapan via a deep-rock (400'-500') tunnel. Geotechnical borings are now being done (going down 300' to 500'). The affected area in Jamaica Plain is near the State Laboratories. The MWRA gave a good presentation to the community.

- The Chair raised the issue of the five vacancies on the Council. Also, Jonathan Watkins has not been in attendance for many meetings, Paige Sparks said she will reach out to him. Nominations will be accepted for any of the two vacancies in Area A, two vacancies in Area B, or one vacancy in Area C.

Lorenzo Bartoloni from 40 Union Avenue nominated himself. He is a Northeastern University student in Human Services and Urban Studies who has worked at the Fenway Community Development Corporation on IDP issues, displacement, and redlining. He is also involved with the Coalition for a Truly Affordable Boston.

John Harding is interested in joining the JPNC. He said he is still learning and will attend meetings of the Housing & Development Committee to learn more. Paige Sparks offered to mentor him.

Danielle Sommer Kieta from 18 Copley Street in Egleston Square nominated herself as a candidate for Area A. She said she is interested in affordable housing.

Peter DeCotis from 29 School Street near Egleston Square nominated himself as a candidate for Area A. He works at Boston University as a career coach. He is interested in Franklin Park issues.

Motion by Paige Sparks to nominate Lorenzo Bartoloni for the JP Neighborhood Council in Area B. Seconded by Michael Reiskind. Passed 10-0-2 (1 left early). Motion by Paige Sparks to nominate Peter DeCotis for the JP Neighborhood Council in Area A. Seconded by Bernard Doherty. Passed 9-0-3 (1 left early). Motion by Bernard Doherty to nominate Danielle Sommer Kieta for the JP Neighborhood Council in Area A. Seconded by Sarah Freeman. Passed 9-0-3 (1 left early).

- State Representative Sam Montaña introduce themselves, offered help on State issues, and left their email in the Chat.

6. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:33pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

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

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: March 16 at 7:00PM via Zoom.