

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council
March 28, 2023 Minutes

JPNC Attendance: Will Cohen, Bernard Doherty, Michael Reiskind, David Baron, Lorenzo Bartoloni, Peter DeCotis, Sarah Freeman, Omer Hecht, Peg Preble, Danielle Sommer Kieta, Paige Sparks, Gert Thorn, Renée Stacey Welch, and Trevor Wissink-Adams.

Elected at the meeting: Ben Weber.

Other attendees: Dana Gonsalves, Louise Johnson, Louise Robbins, Allan Ihrer, Janet Galloway, Carolyn Royce, Eric Ouyang, Frances Rivera, Hannah Reale, John Harding, Mia-Jean Sicard, Scotty Yates, Natan, Luke, John I., 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 introduced himself.

2. Approval of February 2023 minutes: Motion by Peg Preble to approve the minutes from the February 28, 2023 meeting. Seconded by Gert Thorn. Passed 11-0-1 (2 came late).

3. Announcements:

3.1. Community announcements:

- City Councillor Kendra Lara will be having a Jamaica Plain Budget Town Hall on Thursday, March 30 starting at 6:00pm at Curtis Hall, 20 South Street.

- Bernie Doherty said that the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority is starting a community process for their new project in this area: building redundant connectors for the Metropolitan Water Tunnel System. It will involve a tunnel under Jamaica Plain and there will be geotechnical borings in the area near the American Legion Post on South Street next to the Arnold Arboretum.

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

4. Committee Reports/Recommendations:

4.1. Parks+ Committee (Environment, Parks & Energy Committee): Alexis Rickmers said that the Parks+ Committee met on March 13 at 7:30pm via Zoom. The Committee will take part in One Boston Day with a cleanup on Saturday, April 15. There will also be a Muddy River Cleanup on April 22. Wake Up the Earth is on Saturday, May 6 and the JP Neighborhood Council will have a table during the event. Please volunteer for the event to tell the community about the Council's work.

4.2. Outreach Committee: Paige Sparks said that the Committee met on Tuesday, March 14 at 7:00pm via Zoom. Acting as the JPNC Ad Hoc Elections Committee, the Outreach Committee is planning the biennial JPNC Election and Saturday, June 24 is set as the date of the JPNC Election. There is a separate webpage for the Election. The Election packets will be available on-line and at four locations: the three branch public libraries and Curtis Hall. The Election needs volunteers. There is a Google form for volunteers to sign up. Remember that each Council member is asked to supply at least two volunteers.

The JP Neighborhood Council table at Wake Up the Earth on May 6 will be an excellent way to talk to people about the Election; please volunteer for the table. There will be a kids' activity at the table.

Polling locations on Election Day will be at JP Licks, Stop & Shop, and Forest Hills T Station.

The next Outreach Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, April 11 at 7:00pm via Zoom.

4.3. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): Renée Stacey Welch said that the Housing & Development Committee met on March 21 via Zoom. The Committee is submitting a draft letter about the Arborway Yard requesting the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) provide in-depth information on the Arborway Yard project and build an ongoing relationship throughout the development of the location. Motion by Michael Reiskind to send the letter to MassDOT and the MBTA. Seconded by Will Cohen. There were comments that the neighborhood is being kept in the dark, needs more information, and wants to be part of the discussion. Will Cohen thought that the lines of communication with the MBTA are good and the letter is premature. Omer Hecht agreed with Will Cohen and said the community should not be designing a bus yard. Gert Thorn said that there are two styles of meetings: on-going substantive meetings with community members and canned presentations to the community. Will Cohen thought that the JPNC appears to be rehashing old issues. Sarah Freeman said the MBTA is changing their design silently and not communicating well on design changes. The long-promised 8 acres for community use is being reduced in size. Community input matters and the MBTA is not abiding by the spirit of good community process. Peter DeCotis liked the letter and thought that the JPNC is responsible for important projects like a bus yard. Passed 10-0-3 (1 left early).

The Committee is also submitting a draft letter to Mayor Wu from the Arborway Yard Committee requesting information on the Pole Yard. Motion by David Baron to send the letter to Mayor Wu, the chief of planning at the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA), and the City of Boston Chief of Streets. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. Carolyn Royce said that the removal of the Pole Yard from the Arborway Yard project affects the whole bus yard and community land. It limits the site availability and design. Gert Thorn also mentioned that the present storage of road salt on the site affects the integrity of the buses in the bus yard. Passed 11-0-2 (1 left early).

The Committee is also submitting a draft letter with comments about 18-22 Arboretum Road. Bernie Doherty thought that the project is not really “affordable” and its massing is too large, especially given its proximity to the Arnold Arboretum. Dave Baron also felt that the proposal has problems with affordability; the City’s present requirement is 13%, soon to rise to 17%. But with only 38 affordable units in a 230-unit project, that is only 16 1/2%. There are questions about the Area Median Income (AMI) levels for the tenants. Danielle Sommer Kieta said that the affordability is woefully inadequate for such a large project; it needs more affordable units. There were questions about the location of the project: Omer Hecht asked why Plan:JP/Rox is mentioned in the letter when this location is not in the Plan:JP/Rox area. Carolyn Royce said that was because it is so close to the Plan area. Also, the parcel has a Roslindale zip code, but the BPDA puts it under Jamaica Plain zoning regulations.

In the developer’s own submission, this project creates a “moderate displacement risk”. Carolyn Royce and Bernie Doherty both felt that there should be more larger units, so as to be available for families. Even though it is now an industrial and vacant parcel, the proposed rents will create the displacement risk. Motion by Gert Thorn to send the letter to the BPDA project manager for 18-22 Arboretum Road. Seconded by Will Cohen. Passed 9-0-3 (1 not voting, 1 left early).

The Committee is also submitting three people to be added to the roster of the H&DC: Motion by Will Cohen to add Ben Weber as a Council member to the H&DC, to add Willie Michell as a community member to the H&DC, and to add Ester Belliard as a community member to the H&DC. Seconded by Bernie Doherty. Passed 12-0-1 (1 left early). The full roster of the Committee will be submitted next month. Members of subcommittees do not need ratification by the JPNC.

4.4. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron said that the Zoning Committee met twice, on March 1 and March 22, and heard three proposals which need votes tonight: 1) 201 Forest Hills Street, a petition by Forest Hills Housing Cooperative to construct a free-standing one-story community services building within Forest Hills Housing Cooperative; building to be accessible where existing community space is not accessible. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Cooperative realized that their heavily-used community space was not accessible and want to build a new accessible community space. The recommendation of the ZC is to approve. 2) 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). This project was started during the roll out of ADU 2.0 and took a long time at City Hall, and then a very quick community process. There are changes proposed for an existing garage in the rear; it will stay the same size with new windows and doors. The project was mentioned at the last JPNC meeting in February. Most of the discussion was about how the City is presenting ADU 2.0. The recommendation of the ZC is to approve. 3) 34 McBride Street, a petition by Ben and Catherine Keating to construct a second-story addition to an existing single-family dwelling, adding a new primary bedroom, expanding a second bedroom, and adding a full bath, a total addition of 409 SF. This proposal is for a modest change for family use only. The recommendation of the ZC is to approve. JPNC discussion was about 294 and 294R South Street: Gert Thorn spoke about the garage and what happens when the property changes owners - does this become three rental units? This project is very different from ADU 1.0. Bernie Doherty emphasized that ADU 2.0 is not yet approved at City Hall. Omer Hecht thought that this proposal did not need a second community meeting at the Zoning Committee. Motion by David Baron to approve the recommendations of the Zoning Committee on 201 Forest Hills Street, 294 & 294R South Street, and 34 McBride Street. Seconded by Renée Stacey Welch. Passed 12-0-1 (1 left early).

The next Zoning Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, April 12 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be a request from 87 and 91 Parkton Road about a shared driveway, and 11 Plainfield Street for a shed dormer.

4.5. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind reported that the Committee met on Tuesday, March 7 at 7:00pm via Zoom. The Committee continued its work on getting more trash barrels in the business districts. There was also a request to add Pond Street (from Centre Street to Jamaica Way) to the City Public Works Department’s list of streets to be posted for street sweeping. Along South Street, Centre Street, and So. Huntington Avenue, the old catenary poles - used for suspending the electric wire for streetcars - have recently been numbered and are to be removed by the MBTA.

The next Public Service Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, April 4 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be a request by the Green Basket Market at 186 Green Street for a package store license.

5. Old Business/New Business:

- The Chair raised the issue of the two vacancies on the Council. Nominations will be accepted for any of the one vacancy in Area B or one vacancy in Area C.

Ben Weber from 19 Spring Park Avenue nominated himself. He is an attorney who works in workers rights. A fourteen-year resident of Jamaica Plain, his children go to Boston Public Schools. He is interested in joining the Zoning Committee and the Housing & Development Committee. Motion by Paige Sparks to nominate Ben Weber for the JP Neighborhood Council in Area B. Seconded by Sarah Freeman. Passed 11-0-2 (1 left early).

6. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:39pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

Next scheduled JPNC meeting: Tuesday, April 25 at 7:00PM via Zoom.

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: April 20 at 7:00PM via Zoom.