

Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council
March 25, 2025 Minutes

JPNC Attendance: Renée Stacey Welch, Bernard Doherty, Michael Reiskind, David Baron, Lorenzo Bartoloni, Esther Belliard, Carla-Lisa Caliga, Nicholas Chaves, Peter DeCotis, Sarah Freeman, Willie Mitchell, Katherine O'Shea, Leah Simmons Dzintars, and Gert Thorn.

Other attendees: Janet Galloway, Celeste Walker, Mark Freudenberger, Alcurtis Clark, Amrita Suresh, Stanley Kramer, Alexandra Rollins, Todd Kerr, Holly DeMelo, Mia Jean-Sicard, Scott Yates, John Williams, Tricia Muse, Pat Skerret, Bradley, MJ, Bro D, Yesmene, Griffin, and Richard Heath (Boston Bulletin).

The meeting was called to order at 7:04pm by Renée Stacey Welch.

1. Introductions: The members of the JP Neighborhood Council introduced themselves. The reporter from The Boston Bulletin introduced himself.

2. Approval of February 2025 minutes: Motion by Carla-Lisa Caliga to approve the minutes from the February 25, 2025 meeting. Seconded by Willie Mitchell. Passed 14-0-0.

3. Community announcements:

- There will be a community conversation, April 10 at the BCYF Hennigan, 200 Heath Street, at 6:00pm to petition for the reopening and activation of the sports center at the Hennigan.
- The Jamaica Pond Association, along with the JPNC Parks+ Committee, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, and the Town of Brookline are working to improve the maintenance at Jamaica Pond and along the Emerald Necklace.
- The annual Lobbying Day at the State House will be on Thursday, April 10 from 10am to 2:00pm. Organized by the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC).
- Love Your Block, the Jamaica Plain community cleanup, will be on Saturday, April 12. JS Loves will be cleaning at the Community Garden at 15 Walden Street from 11:00am to 1:00pm.
- Holy DeMelo, from the Jamaica Plain Recovery Center at 120 South Street, said that the Center is a peer recovery center funded by the state.

4. Committee Reports:

4.1. Public Service Committee: Michael Reiskind reported that the Committee met on Tuesday, March 4. On the agenda was a discussion of traffic issues in the neighborhood. There were complaints about the Forest Hills area, including about the pedestrian lights at crosswalks. The Boston Transportation Department (BTD) is starting a planning effort of redesigning Hyde Park Avenue with a series of public engagement meetings. There was also interest expressed about the newly restarted Centre South Streetscape Project. It was hoped that the BTD would build on the previous guidelines developed for this project in 2011 and not start from scratch. The Committee also started to work on its annual list of streets, sidewalks and striping needing attention.

The next Public Service Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, April 1 at 7:00pm via Zoom. On the agenda will be a request from A & G Liquor Store at 170 South Street for a new package store license and continued discussion of traffic issues in the neighborhood.

4.2. Parks+ Committee: Leah Simmons Dzintars reported that the Parks+ Committee met on March 13. Discussion centered on a review of the Arborway Parkways Improvement Project with the proposed replacement of the Kelley and Murray rotaries with traffic lights. The Committee is urging the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to improve communication with the community and trying to insure that the DCR listens seriously to community comments. There was a lot of discussion at the Council meeting about the longstanding problem of bicycles on the Jamaica Pond pedestrian path. Letters have been written and the signage and markings are still inadequate. The markings wear off and the signs are too small. This has become a safety issue, especially with electric bikes and scooters. The community is frustrated at the inadequate response. There was also talk about the lack of a permanent Parks Commissioner as well as the 439 job vacancies at the Parks Department.

The next Parks+ Committee meeting will be on Thursday, April 10 (the second Thursday) at 7:00pm via Zoom.

4.3. Outreach Committee: Katherine O'Shea reported that the Committee met on Tuesday, March 11 via Zoom. There was a new community member attending who may join a committee or run for the Council.

The Outreach Committee discussed whether to continue to have bi-annual elections. Peter DeCotis had reported that some residents who could be good Council members think that running for election is an enormous effort. It makes it difficult to recruit some people to join the Council. Consensus was to stay with an election, but the Outreach Committee is coming up with ways to ease the burden. They are proposing to keep the existing signature requirements the same (25 for area candidates and 50 for at large candidates), but to help candidates get signatures by using our Outreach Committee mailing list and to offer an option for candidates to submit their application paperwork digitally as well as in person. The iPetition option used to collect nomination signatures will still be offered. Bernie Doherty thought that collecting signatures in person is very important, allowing candidates to talk to residents about community issues one-on-one. It is the best way we have of spreading the word about the JP Neighborhood Council. Motion by Nick Chaves to conduct the 2025 JPNC Election on Saturday, June 21. Seconded by Dave Baron. Passed 14-0-0.

The next Outreach Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, April 8 at 7:00pm.

4.4. Zoning Committee (ZC): David Baron reported that the Zoning Committee met once on Wednesday, March 5. The agenda had only one issue - the Squares and Streets initiative by the City of Boston Planning Department. Peg Preble and Sarah Freeman had asked for a discussion of the Roslindale Square Squares + Streets (S+S) to learn something about that process and what JP can expect when the Planning Department begins a similar Small Area Planning Process for JP Center. The S+S "Small Area Planning Process" actually amends the Zoning Code for the neighborhood (in Roslindale it is Article 67) and its Zoning Maps. The six subdistricts, "S0" to "S5" were already added to the Zoning Code by the first phase of S+S. The Committee's invitees for this meeting included Kathleen Onufer, Deputy Director of Zoning for the Planning Department, and Laurel Radwin, a Roslindale community member and coordinator of the Roslindale Coalition. Ms. Radwin did not attend because the City's Planning Department were also invited; however the Committee's discussion was very useful. The idea is to designate certain busy commercial centers and allow added density by putting in zoning amendments to these districts. Some amendments allow 5-story and 7-story buildings. In addition, planners work on traffic and parking, affordability and anti-displacement strategies. We know that Squares + Streets will be coming to Jamaica Plain center. Gert Thorn asked where in Jamaica Plain? It will probably be near the Post Office and JP Licks. Some feel that S+S takes away community power. Alcurtis Clark has been talking to Roslindale folks and also reached out to other neighborhoods. She said that the Roslindale anti-displacement plan is not a good plan and the Roslindale Coalition is trying to change it. Carla-Lisa Caliga said that the Boston Planning Department claims they are working on plans to reduce displacement. Bernie Doherty urged folks to go to the City Planning Department online and read their information. It is very useful.

The next Zoning Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, April 2. On the agenda will be 19 Cheshire Street, 8 Greenley Place, 90 Allandale Street (actually in West Roxbury), and 3390-3390R Washington Street (BMS Paper). The Boston Planning and Development Agency approved BMS Paper in May 2023, but the Board of Appeal has not. They have to come back because it was so long ago.

4.5. Housing & Development Committee (H&DC): Renée Stacey Welch asked Bernie Doherty and Gert Thorn to report on the Housing & Development Committee meeting of March 18. Willie Mitchell also contributed. Mr. Doherty and Mr. Mitchell said that the Hatoff's/Acme's project (3430-3440 Washington Street) was discussed. This plan includes 212 new rental units in two buildings with 104 parking spaces. 23% of the units are affordable. This development is within the Plan:JP/Rox planning area and some neighbors thought that the 6- and 7-story buildings are too high. The developer has modified the proposal to add 3-bedroom units and decrease the number of studios. Gert Thorn thought that the design was very good. Dave Baron added that increased density on these two lots seems to be acceptable because the Plan:JP/Rox process started the neighbors thinking about the future of their community. In general, abutters were supportive. The project developer was amenable and will be coming back with a changed design based on community comments. Carla-Lisa Caliga thought that we should be more creative and not just build higher and higher. Overbuilding is not an answer to the housing crisis. We have to be very careful to protect the light and air of abutters and to prevent wind tunnels. Alcurtis Clark, from the Stonybrook Neighborhood Association and who lives one block from Hatoff's, said that the developer, Joe Hassell, is a good guy and made a good presentation, but the project is too dense and will create a wind tunnel effect and closes in the Stonybrook neighborhood. Lots of comments on how this area of Jamaica Plain has changed and is not livable any more. Bernie Doherty said this project is asking for too many variances from the Plan:JP/Rox guidelines. Gert Thorn decried the lack of good planners at the Boston Planning Department. Willie Mitchell reminded folks about an older proposal for the Hatoff's lot which had overwhelming opposition. The reaction to the present proposal was very different.

The next Housing & Development Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 15.

5. Old Business/New Business: None

6. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:45pm.

Minutes submitted by Michael Reiskind

Next scheduled JPNC meeting: Tuesday, April 22, 2025 at 7:00PM via Zoom.

Next scheduled JPNC Executive Committee meeting: Thursday, April 17, 2025 at 7:00PM via Zoom.