

Citywide Neighborhood Committee Meeting, March 3, 2021, 6:30 pm

Committee Attendees: Larry Cataldo, Lori Soloway, Mark Syracuse, Dave Cosgrove, Paul Mannle, Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine, and Beth Margeson.

City Staff: Peter Stith, Planning Department coordinated Zoom for City and Chief Newport

Members of the public present: Kathy Bergeron, Stacy Moore, Councilor Cliff Lazenby, Ken Goldman, Mary Lou McElwain, Eloise and Jerry Karabelos, Laura Brown, Maureen O’Leary, Robb Schlosser, Andrew Bagley and Kathleen Boduch.

All attendees participated by Zoom.

Discussion Items:

I. and II. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm and attendance was taken.

III. Discussion of Neighborhood Issues:

1. Comments. Eloise and Jerry Karabelos spoke of their concerns about a project that is currently before the Historic District Commission to add another floor and a deck at 449 Court Street. They expressed their deep concerns about the possibility of buildings getting taller and taller in the city due to the lack of land to build on. They are also worried about the lack of neighborhood turnout at the previous work session and that, by law, abutters need only get one notice. The HDC seemed to receive the proposal favorably, which surprised them. They asked for help on getting support for neighborhoods dealing with these kinds of issues. A discussion then ensued between Paul Mannle, Committee Member, and Mary Lou McElwain of 259 South Street about the way projects do the rounds of the various land use boards to gain traction in other boards. There was also a discussion about what was needed to obtain variances from the Zoning Board of Adjustment and what a “hardship” really meant for obtaining a variance. (Note: shortly after the meeting, Eloise Karabelos reached out to Peter Stith who provided contact information.)

Robin Rousseau of 90 Fleet Street, who lives in the McIntosh Building on the corner of Fleet and Congress asked about the status of the Resident Parking program. She explained that where she lived on Fleet Street, there was no deeded parking, that most of the lots have been developed and are either no longer available or are simply too far from town. Parking was getting worse. To this, Paul Mannle, remarked that in the High Hanover parking garage 750 of 900 spaces are leased out, only leaving 150 spaces.

Larry Cataldo, replied that due to Covid, the Islington Creek neighborhood parking program was put on hold. But to go forward with it, meant to go through the Parking, Traffic and Safety Committee; implementing it was very complex. It involved creating stickers, fee structures and enforcement mechanisms. Ken Goldman, a resident of Islington Creek, had objections to the previous plan in that Islington Street were excluded to which Paul Mannle responded that this was so because there were already parking regulations on that street.

Andrew Bagley objected to a parking program in that this is a shared resource that should not be allocated to some people. He noted that there were other options to parking, including the garages and getting a monthly pass. Andrew Bagley also noted at the beginning of the meeting that he was in favor of putting sidewalks on Chevrolet Avenue and talked of the impact on the Middle Street area that was affected by the 30-hour power outage.

There was additional, wide-ranging discussion as to what a neighborhood parking program really is with Committee member Paul Mannle observing that it was less of a guaranteed parking space and more of a hunting permit allowing neighborhood residents to look for spaces set aside particularly for them. Mary Lou McElwain noted that, as a member of the Parking and Traffic Safety Committee, there was an item on the March 4 Agenda about neighborhood parking.

Chair Larry Cataldo informed the committee that he received a letter from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation about the installation of signs and a communications tower on the east side of I - 95 between Exits 5 in NH and 2 in Maine. This will impact the Atlantic Heights Neighborhood for which NHDOT will schedule a public information session shortly. Larry Cataldo already alerted Cristy Cardosa of the Atlantic Heights Association.

2. Approval of Chevrolet Avenue Letter to City Council. Chair Cataldo introduced the draft of the letter to be sent to City Council to direct DPW to expeditiously undertake the design phase of installing lights and sidewalks along the cut through to Hannaford's. The undersigned suggested two additions to the letter to include consultation with the Planning Department for information on zoning and whether or how that would impact the project and also to consult with the city attorney for an analysis on taking the land through a negotiated easement or through eminent domain. Upon motion of Mark Syracuse and a second by Lori Soloway, the committee unanimously voted to adopt the letter with the suggested changes. Vote was made by roll call.

IV. Committee Business

1. Recommendations on how to make the Holiday Lights contest better. Committee member and vice Chair Lori Soloway started the discussion of how to improve or expand the Holiday Lights Contest. No decision was made but the Committee engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about the categories, whether the contestants should pick their own categories, if there should be a children's categories or historic house or condominium category. Assistant Mayor Splaine suggested having a category of no lights but decorations that could be seen in the day and also be sustainable. There was discussion of finalizing this by September of 2021 so that there is enough time to get prizes.

2. Discussion of how the City Council representative can best serve the Committee. Asst. Mayor Splaine began the discussion of how a City Council representative could best serve the Committee. He stressed that he wants the committee to remain independent of the City Council and appreciates that the committee selects its own leadership and is concerned about setting precedent. He hopes that it can become even more independent of the City Council by not being

a mayoral-appointed Committee. He spoke about including the meeting minutes in the City Council packet so that the Council can remain apprised of developments in the neighborhoods and making a committee member available to speak to the Council when needed.

The undersigned endorsed the idea of putting the meeting minutes in the council packet and suggested that the role of the City Council representative is, when needed, to place items on the agenda for action by the City Council. Using the Chevrolet Avenue issue as an example, Asst. Mayor Splaine can place the letter from the CNC under his section of the Agenda to help give the city staff direction, with assistance from other departments, for installing sidewalks and lighting. As the City Council itself would need to approve easements or take the land for sidewalks via eminent domain, the councilors could begin to think about how to approach that and provide further direction to city staff. In addition, and most important, this provides the neighborhood around Chevrolet Avenue a direct route to getting their concerns addressed by the City Council, making the process more responsive to neighborhood concerns and building in efficiency at the front end of the project, rather than dealing with some issues at the approval stage by the council.

The undersigned went on to say that the CNC is uniquely positioned to serve neighborhoods in that the Chair and members are allowed to speak to city staff while the City Council representative can bring forward items for actions to the whole council. Asst. Mayor Splaine confirmed that per the City Charter, councilors are not allowed to speak to city employees except through the City Manager but that they can consult with the City Attorney.

The committee did not come to any explicit agreement or even a consensus about the topic. Asst. Mayor Splaine concluded the conversation by saying that he found a 1995 Year End Report by the CNC that he spoke to City Manager Karen Conard about and which he will be distributing to the Committee for it to consider how the CNC functioned in the past and what it was able to accomplish

3. Ward 1 Forum. Lori Soloway announced that the Ward 1 Forum will be held on March 31, 2021 at 6:30 pm.

V. Meeting Adjournment. With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Beth S. Margeson

Beth S. Margeson
Secretary