



Newton Lower Falls IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

LOWDOWN FALL 2023

LETTER FROM THE LFIA PRESIDENT

by Sheila Feiss

Since our Spring meeting in April, the LFIA has been hard at work trying to coordinate long-time neighborhood events, seeking input from neighbors, and trying out some new ideas. Here's what's been going on.

- We had a very fun movie night in July watching Jaws on the big screen in the field. Shoutout especially to Kathy Kasabula, Ted Chapman, and Michael Lorant for setting everything up and making sure things went smoothly.
- In September, Becky Connors organized the family-friendly appetizer get together. Between 70-80 people went to different houses to reconnect with neighbors and meet new neighbors over drinks and fun snacks. The kids got to run around, and the adults had fun too.
- On October 29th we had our annual LFIA Fall meeting. For the hour before the meeting, we invited the City Council candidates from Ward 4, and the at-large candidates in contested races from Wards 5 and 6. All 8 candidates showed up and talked about why they are running and what their concerns are. It was very informative, to say the least. During the meeting afterwards, we heard from all of the board committees about what they have been doing. Barbara Gruenthal gave an update on what's going on at Riverside (and thank

you, Drew, for making sure we could view her PowerPoint).

- Several blocks held block parties – such a great way to connect.
- Cyrisse Jaffe has done a terrific job keeping the neighborhood in the know about all of the civics issues going on in Newton.
- **SAVE THE DATE: November 18th the progressive dinner (a bit modified) will happen. Thank you, Marta Kuperwasser and Michael Lorant for taking this on. They've already sent out the first sign up email, so please sign up and I look forward to seeing you all.**

Sadly, the Garden Tour planned in June had to be canceled due to bad weather, and no one stepped up to help Karen Gage co-chair the Falls Ball. We truly hope that the Falls Ball will happen next summer. It is a special event and we will do everything we can to make it happen next year.

Once again, let's give thanks to Summer Zeh, who works hard to coordinate articles and put the Lowdown out twice each year. If you are willing to help with layout (see her note below), or anything else, let her know. The Lowdown keeps us up to date about new neighbors, issues affecting our neighborhood, and it's always fun to read. If you know anyone that needs a hard copy, let me know and we'll make sure they get one, otherwise get yours on-line.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

by Summer Zeh

Hello, Readers! Nestle in for a great issue of the Lowdown, in which we travel from a 19th century paper mill and into the future to learn about how urban trees fight climate change. Our neighbors share their adventures and awe-inspiring sights. We have good deeds, bad

jokes, and cute dogs. (Seriously, how are Lower Falls dogs the cutest on Earth?) And please read to the end for a Riverside update.

I love the Lowdown because you all love it. Each spring and fall, you write the content and share your lives and news with us. All I do is put it in columns, and fix a typo here and there. Speaking of columns, I am asking for some help from our collective brain trust. I'm hoping one of you with design skills will have suggestions for improving the Lowdown layout. I'm looking for a format that is easier to read on mobile devices, can be printed, doesn't require special software, and allows for text and pictures to be easily formatted. Simple, right? If you have any ideas or tips, big or small, please reach out to me at summerzeh@gmail.com.

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NEIGHBORHOOD SHOUTOUTS!

By Summer Zeh

Beverly and John Hurney of Concord Street celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in October. If you see them, please pass along your best wishes for many more anniversaries.

Neighbors **David Garrison** and **Yiping Wang** are happy to report they summited highest peak in Africa, Kilimanjaro (19,341 ft), on October 4, 2023 via the 8-day Lemosho route. The wintery weather of the summit day combined with strong wind added to the challenge but they did it! Together with other group members and of course guides and porters. They fell in love with Tanzania. The people there were so kind; the food was delicious and flavorful; safari was amazing and the Zanzibar beach was paradise post Kilimanjaro: cold beer, white sand, warm water and tropical fish swimming around corals. If anyone wants to hear more about it or is planning a trip, feel free to reach out to them.



Janet and Paj Bigdeliazari just moved to Crehore Drive from South Boston with their adorable dog, Tate. If you see Tate around the neighborhood, be sure to say hi! They are looking forward to meeting everyone!



Bonnie, Poorvi, Arul, Rajani, and Selva Nataraja moved from Wellesley Hills to Grayson Lane. Both Selva and Rajani work in pharma. Selva is the Site Head for Mitobridge, a connoisseur of wine, and likes blues. Rajani is the associate director for process development in Batavia Biosciences, and loves Yoga and BollyX (Zumba for Bollywood songs). Arul attends New England Center for Children residential school, and is interested in Legos and going on long drives. Poorvi is a sophomore in the Newton South, loves Manga, debate, and saxophone. Bonnie loves chasing bunnies and playing with her hedgehog toy. They are looking forward to extending their community in NLF.



VOLUNTEER LOCALLY WITH ST. MARY'S

By Ann Bonner-Stewart

St. Mary's Episcopal Church (at the corner of Concord and Washington) organizes and hosts volunteer opportunities throughout the year, to all of which our Lower Falls neighbors and friends are most welcome. Here's what is coming up.

★ **November 4th Winter Clothing Drive:**

St. Mary's is holding a clothing drive on Saturday, November 4, from 9 a.m.–12:00 p.m. (258 Concord St.). Donate gently used or new winter items, such as clothing, hats, gloves, mittens, and scarfs for Cradles 2 Crayons and other local agencies. New socks are always needed. Questions? Contact Amy Molloy at amolloy@qoutlook.com or 339-225-0816.

★ **November 18th at 4 p.m. Concert Benefiting Newton Food Pantry, St.**

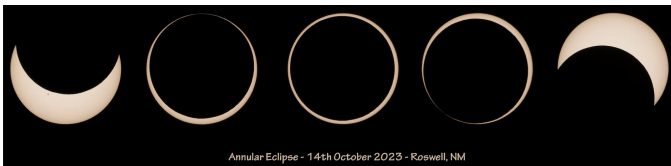
Mary's will host the incredible Labyrinth Choir, a professional, mixed vocal ensemble of 22 musicians who will perform contemporary classical songs and songs from the gospel tradition. The evening's repertoire will include *Joyful*, *Joyful* from Sister Act 2, *You'll Never Walk Alone* from Carousel, *Psalm 23* by Bobby McFerrin, and more! The concert is free with a suggested donation of \$30; all donations will benefit the Newton Food Pantry. Children can come to enjoy the concert or make kids' snack bags for the Newton Food Pantry (sign up in advance by sending an email to office@st-marys-episcopal.org). An art show entitled "Invisible Artists in Boston," will follow in the parish hall, during which attendees may enjoy and even purchase paintings, jewelry, or sculptures, all created by people who have or are currently experiencing homelessness. All

proceeds of the art show go directly to the artist and St. Mary's Food Pantry in Dorchester.

★ **November 29th Community Event on What You Need to Know about Opioids (but are afraid to ask).** Do you know the #1 cause of death for those under the age of 25 in the United States? No, not car accidents. No, not suicide. **Opioids.** In the past decade, there have been almost 100 deaths in Newton alone. What do parents, family, and community members need to know? Come learn from public health experts living in Newton, including Lower Falls resident Dr. Sarah Bagley, a medical expert on opioid use disorders. More info coming soon.

★ **December 9th** pack 100+ lunches for folks experiencing homelessness on Boston Common; more info coming soon.

More details about upcoming events will be posted on the neighborhood listserv and on St. Mary's instagram page.



Neighbor **John D'Souza** made a trip to Roswell, New Mexico to be in the path of the Annular Eclipse on October 14th 2023 and took these photos.



NEWTON'S TREE ORDINANCE

By Ted Chapman

Newton is considering revising the existing tree ordinance. A [proposal by Councilors Julia Malakie and Emily Norton](#) initiated a response

for a new tree ordinance by the administration. The city council's Program and Services Committee has reviewed the two proposals and is about to submit their revision for the entire City Council for the vote. The differences between the two proposals lies largely in the size of protected trees, the costs incurred for removing trees and the kind of properties that are exempt from these regulations.

Before diving into the details of these proposals, it's worth articulating the importance of trees. Trees are more than a telephone pole with leaves. If you ever read the book [The Man Who Planted Trees](#), you will understand the effect that trees have on the environment, both natural and manmade. The story describes the work of one man who quietly planted trees in a wasteland created by man's destructive activity, a place devoid of nature and civilized human habitation. Within 30 years this man's quiet work brought the place back to life, restoring a thriving ecosystem of plants, animals, and humans. This happened simply by planting trees! Trees provide shade, cooling, wind breaks, clean the air, generate the oxygen that all aerobic forms of life require and allow other plant and animal species to thrive in their understory; trees produce the organic matter needed to feed soil microbiome and organisms living in and on it, fixing atmospheric CO₂, and reduce flooding and its consequence.

Newton has made a significant commitment to its green canopy through purchase of open spaces like Webster Woods and funding an Urban Forestry Department. The non-profit [Newton Tree Conservancy](#) supports neighborhoods to plant several hundred street trees a year. Despite these efforts Newton's tree canopy has [decreased by 50% since the 1970s](#). Newton's current, but failing, tree ordinance protects public trees and trees of a certain size on certain properties:

- 8 inches diameter and larger at breast height on large residential properties (more than four units) and on commercial property.
- “Protection” in this context means that removal of these trees requires a permit and either replacement with saplings or payment into a tree replacement fund.
- Unfortunately, occupied properties with one to four family units are exempt from tree protection measures in the current ordinance.
- The “occupied” clause was intended to have developers—but not Newton residents—replace cut trees. It’s not working, for many developers get residents who sell their property to cut down trees before they close the sale. (Adding a look-back period would help this.)
- There are no protections for abutters’ trees and no notification requirement, so many neighbors do not know trees will be cut until the bucket trucks show up.
- Enforcement of this ordinance has been inconsistent: last year the Newton Center Cemetery was allowed to clear cut several acres, including more than 200 mature oaks, without paying the \$300,000 required.

Over the last 9 months it has been the work of the Program and Services Committee chaired by Ward 4 at-large councilor Josh Krintzman to reconcile the robust tree ordinance proposal of Malakie and Norton, supported by 11 other Councilors (Leary, Ryan, Wright, Lucas, Humphrey, Bowman, Markiewicz, Oliver, Downs, Laredo, and Grossman) with the proposal from the administration.

The Program and Services Committee’s draft of a [new ordinance on August 11, 2023](#) (p. 36-50) included some stronger provisions:

- permits will be required for removal of any tree 6 inches or larger (instead of 8);
 - certification by a certified arborist that a tree is dead, diseased, or dangerous;
 - protection for abutters’ trees & notification to abutters; and
 - tree replacement or payment into the City’s tree fund for some properties.
- However, it contains exemptions that leave trees unprotected on more than half of City lands:
- Exemptions continue for 1-2 family lots without planned construction in the next 24 months
 - o 1-2 family lots are 53% of City lands, 80% of residential properties
 - o 1 family lot includes the wealthiest residential properties in Newton
 - A new exemption is created for the Newton Cemetery Corporation (NCC), which recently cut down 220 mature trees and lobbied to maintain their ability to remove any trees it wants in order to make more space for burial plots
 - o NCC holds 4.4 million square feet of land in Newton
 - o accreditation as a Level 2, 3, or 4 arboretum is misleading, for only level 4 requires tree conservation
 - o NCC’s tree payment fee for cutting 220 trees (waived by the mayor after appeal) was \$300,000—almost as much as one year of what the mayor requested voters to fund in the override (\$500,000)
- A citizens group [Protect Newton Trees](#) has been formed to lobby for a more robust ordinance including these provisions:
- Protect trees 6” in diameter at breast height (DBH) and larger on ALL lots
 - No exemptions for 1-2 unit lots
 - No exemption for cemeteries (or at the very least, a requirement of level 4 arboretum accreditation to be exempt)

- Removal of trees certified as dead, diseased, dangerous, or benefiting the overall canopy does NOT require replacement trees or payment of fees.
- Require BOTH tree replacement AND payment into the City's tree fund
- Required payment should reflect the enormous environmental benefits of trees and the costs of their loss to neighbors and the City
- Reduce payment only for property owners with documented fixed or low incomes

The Program and Services Committee continues to entertain amendments to the draft tree ordinance, but review of the minutes of their last meeting October 4th, 2023 shows the Committee has consistently rejected most proposals to make the ordinance more robust.

This debate largely ignores the role of trees in mitigation of our ever more present climate crisis in favor of the rights of individual property owners and developers over the health of our community. A temporary moratorium on removal of trees > 6" dbh, while a new ordinance is worked out, was rejected. The preservation of mature trees in an urban environment is critical. The Newton Tree Warden Mark Welch offers us this graphic summary.



Source: Marc Welch, "The Environmental Importance of Mature Street Trees," 4/21/2022

Since we are losing trees, especially street trees planted in the 1970s, please contact your city council to vote for a more robust tree ordinance that protects existing trees. We also need to replenish this invaluable element of our green infrastructure. If you want to join in that effort contact the [Newton Tree Conservancy](#) or their Lower Falls coordinator [Ted Chapman](#). The deadline for applications for the Spring 2024 planting is December 1, 2023. The NTC also has a tree giveaway – young trees that you can plant on your property.

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*How does a tree use the internet?
They log on.*

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SPOTLIGHT ON 577 GROVE STREET – THE KEYES HOUSE

By Tori Zissman and Cyrisse Jaffee

Some of you may have noticed that **577 Grove Street**, long-time home of the Keyes family, has recently been sold. The Newton Historical Commission (NHC) ruled the property "preferably preserved," which imposes a one-year delay on the full demolition requested by the current owners, Keystone Custom Builders, LLC of Marlborough. The owner can appeal the delay after four months and proceed with demolition once the full year delay is completed. (To be permanently preserved, a building must be designated by the NHS as a local landmark.)

The history of 577 Grove Street is in many ways the story of Lower Falls. Built in 1837 for a papermill worker, it is one of a small collection of wooden single and multi-family homes that changed the nature of Lower Falls from a

scattering of farmhouses into a cohesive, vibrant village.

Long before “affordable housing” became a buzzword, papermill owner Lemuel Crehore saw an opportunity to carve out a large farm estate that he had purchased into smaller lots, thus creating “affordable housing” for his workers and their families. Crehore’s own home was just a bit further along Grove Street. He would have passed by 577 Grove Street regularly on his way to work.

Timothy Richardson was the first owner of 577 Grove Street. He was a local boy, born on the other side of the river in 1797. Beginning at age 16, he served nine years in the Lower Falls volunteer fire brigade. When he got married in 1824, he went to work in the paper mills.

In an 1848 map, you can see the Richardson house and its neighbors, the Flagg House (581 Grove Street) and the Jones House (585 Grove Street). All three houses stand in their original locations—a section of the 19th century village streetscape that you can still visit today.

By 1886, Timothy Richardson’s son, Charles W. Richardson, lived just around the corner in what is now **85 Cornell Street**. Charles worked for Crehore as a machine tender, arriving at work at 4:00am. After a 12-hour workday, he would walk home in the afternoon, passing his childhood home, now occupied by his brother, George Richardson, a brakeman for the railroad. Then he would pass **91 Cornell Street**, the home of Levi Wales. Built in the 1870s, this stick-style home still stands. Levi Wales was the son of Nathaniel Wales, chief of the fire brigade (and married to one of Charles Richardson’s daughters).

The Keyes family lived at 577 Grove Street for more than 40 years, into the 21st century. The large 3D model of Lower Falls displayed at the last LFIA community meeting was created by a member of the Keyes family in the 1970s, a time of great change for Lower Falls. Some

might say that even though some things have remained the same, this is another such period.



RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

By Liz Mirabile

As you may remember, the Riverside development has been on hold for economic reasons. To move the project forward, the state and Mark Development have been in talks since last April about a subsidized housing development at the site. The result is a proposal from Mark Development and Beacon Communities, a real estate developer of affordable housing, for a new development that would consist of housing with some supportive retail. This proposal needs state approval before it would come before the City.

Below are the proposed details and how they compare to what was approved in 2021. Please note that there may still be changes, although likely relatively minor ones.

Development Size

- The development itself would be reduced from 1.025 million sq. ft. to approx. 680,000 sq. ft.
- The site would be reduced from 13 acres to 8.8 acres.

- The development would be confined to the existing Hotel Indigo land and the left side of the parking lot (the area approx. to the left of the existing Grove Street entrance).
- The MBTA would use the property to the right of the Grove St. entrance for surface parking and possible future transportation needs. Mark Development may be given a right of first refusal to develop this side of the property in the future.

Housing

- There would be 602+/- units instead of the 550 units that were in the approved plan of 2021.
- 194+/- of the units (33%) would be affordable. This compares to 110 affordable units (20%) in the approved plan.
 - The 194+/- affordable units would be for residents who earn up to 60% AMI. In the approved plan, there were a mix of units at 50%, 80% and 110% AMI.
- 92+/- of the affordable units would be for seniors (age restricted, no care) and developed in a separate building. The remaining 102+/- units would be mixed among the market-rate units.
 - In the approved plan there were no affordable units specifically for seniors, and all the affordable units were mixed in with the market rate units.

Commercial Space

- There would be no lab or office space.
- The amount of retail space would decrease from 20,000 to 10,000+/- square feet.

Building Heights

- The buildings facing Lower Falls would be significantly shorter. One building would be 58+/- ft. instead of 157.6 ft. and the other would be 71+/- ft. instead of 109 ft.
- There would be three buildings instead of four on Grove St.
 - The one near the current Hotel Indigo would be 47+/- ft. instead of 57 ft. above Grove St., and 4 stories instead of 5. It would also be set further back from the street.
 - Coming from Lower Falls, the next building on Grove would be 52+/- ft. instead of 62 ft. above street level, and 4 stories instead of 5.
 - The building closest to the current entrance to the site would remain at the same height and be 4 stories tall.
- The parking garage in the interior of the site would be the same height as in the approved plan.

Parking

- There would be a garage with 790+/- parking stalls, 170+/- of which would be dedicated for the MBTA. The balance of the parking would be for residents and customers of the retail.
- The approved plan provided for 952 MBTA parking stalls inside the parking garage. The proposed plan would provide the MBTA with 650+/- spaces (345+/- spaces of surface parking, 170+/-1 dedicated spaces in the garage and 135+/- shared spaces that would be shared with the residential component during daytime hours). As noted above, the surface parking lot would be located to the right of the existing Grove St. entrance).

Roadway Improvements

- There would be no direct highway access to the site from 128 North. (There would still be direct access from the site to 95/128 North.) Instead, there would be a roundabout at the top of the ramp from 128 North. (This is basically the same design as the 2013 Normandy plan.)
- There would still be a roundabout at Asheville Rd.
- Coming from Lower Falls, the development entrance would still be off Recreation Rd.
- To prevent backups, there would be no left turn into the development from Grove St. (The left turn prohibition would need Traffic Council approval.)

[See comparison of 2021 and 2023 Riverside proposals on the next page.]

Bike Path

- The bike path on Grove St. would end at the Grove St. entrance to the development (instead of at the train trestle bridge).

Mitigation Funds

- In the approved plan, MD provided \$10 million in mitigation money. This would be reduced to \$5 million in the proposed plan. How these funds would be allocated would be up for discussion.

Approval Process

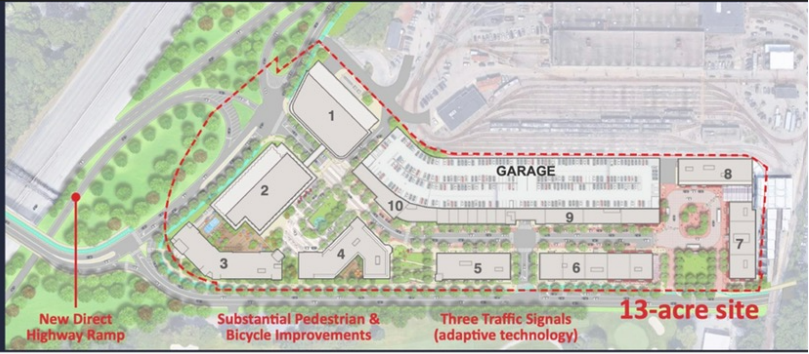
- MD plans to apply under the state's chapter 40B law and would go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. The previous plan was approved by the City Council through its special permit process.

Timing

- Construction would start in 2025 and could last from 4 to 6 years.

2021 Approval

OPEN SPACE	
Total Site Area	13.05 Acres
Total Open Space	4.27 Acres (32.7%)
Beneficial Open Space	2.03 Acres (15.6%)
Public Beneficial Open Space	1.15 Acres (8.8%)



2023 Proposal

OPEN SPACE	
Total Site Area	8.84 Acres
Total Open Space	3.69 Acres (41.7%)
Beneficial Open Space	2.13 Acres (24.0%)
Public Beneficial Open Space	0.93 Acres (10.5%)

