

January 26, 2015

Dear Mayor Warren,

As you are aware, Austin Street Partners has recently been providing updates to a variety of civic associations. When the Newtonville Area Council learned of these presentations, we extended an invitation to Austin Street Partners to come and make their presentation at one of our meetings. To our surprise and dismay, we were told by Austin Street Partners that they had been advised by the Newton Planning / Economic Development Department NOT to present to the Newtonville Area Council.

Involvement in a project such as the development of the Austin St. lot is well within the purview of the Area Council. The first function defined within the Charter makes this clear:

*Advisory or delegated substantive authority, or both, with respect to such programs as a community action program, urban renewal, relocation, public housing, planning and zoning actions, and other physical development programs, crime prevention and juvenile delinquency programs, health services, code inspection, recreation, education, and manpower training.*

From the day the Newtonville Area Council was first sworn in, we have attempted to be a communication conduit between the City and the residents of Newtonville with respect to this project. This function was endorsed by the Board of Alderman by a unanimously vote when a vote was taken on item 47-14(4), which stated:

*Community input: The Mayor will ask the Newtonville Area Council to take a leadership role in the process by sponsoring community meetings in order to vet the design and potential impacts on the neighborhood directly with residents so that the developer will be able to revise the plans accordingly...*

While we understand that we are a body with little power or authority, we take our role in the city very seriously. We wish to express deep concern that the Newton Planning Department appears to be intervening in a fashion that damages our ability to successfully execute our designated function. We have forwarded an inquiry with the Law department on whether there were legal issues with the Developer speaking to the Area Council, but, other than to note that the meeting would be bound by open meeting laws, we have heard of no legal issue with Austin Street Partners addressing our body. Surely, the Planning Department would not be interfering to avoid a presentation bound by the Open Meeting Laws.

We ask that you address this issue, and take whatever corrective action is necessary.

Respectfully,

Newtonville Area Council

cc: Newton Board of Aldermen, Nancy Hyde, James Freas