



To City of Newton Planning Department

From: Newtonville Area Council (NAC)

Re: Walnut Street Improvements

Date: 24 January 2014

This memo is a follow-up to the city's public meeting on improvements to Walnut Street held on 14 November 2013 at Day Middle School.

We are very excited by the prospect of improvements to the commercial section of Walnut Street from the bridge over the turnpike to Newton's Senior Center.

- We support widening the sidewalks on both sides of the street, supported as reflected in public meetings and in the Beautiful Newtonville Survey (2013).
- We support bumping out sidewalks to make it easier and safer for pedestrians to cross Walnut Street. However, given the shortage of on-street parking, we would like this done in a manner with the least impact on parking. In fact, if it were possible, we would like to see the reinstatement of parking spaces that were removed when bump outs were added last year.
- To increase pedestrian safety, we propose that the city install signage as well as motion-sensitive elevated lights, or motion sensitive LED lights embedded in the roadway (e.g. outside Terminal E at Logan International Airport) at bump out curb areas.
- We support installing the infrastructure that will support attractive lighting and benches. If funds were available, such as a pass through from the developers of Austin Street, we would like to see trees, lighting and seating installed in the fall of 2014, shortly after the road work is completed. This has both environmental and economic benefits — tall trees provide shade that cools sidewalks and businesses. (Short trees that block retail signage should be avoided.)
- To encourage traffic calming, we support "Welcome to Newtonville" signs, planters, and other features to announce to drivers that they are entering a commercial center with high pedestrian traffic. If warranted by traffic studies, we would support adding mitigation measures to improve pedestrian safety (e.g. flashing lights, stop signs, raised roadways).
- We support adding bicycle racks to the shopping area in Newtonville to promote local economic activity and as a tie-in to Newtonville's many transportation options. We strongly recommend that bike racks do not impede pedestrian flow on Walnut Street, but be placed in areas adjacent to Walnut St. and the new Austin St. development (e.g. next to the bus stop

on the corner of Walnut St. and Austin St.). Further, bike racks should not displace on-street parking.

- We would like to ensure that Walnut St. plans account for the future possibility of businesses subscribing to a season of movable flower planters, as described previously by Beautiful Newtonville. (Beautiful Newtonville will provide planter dimensions and if needed, adjust the size to your plan.)
- If the city's experimental program in Nonantum and elsewhere proves successful, we support projects to renovate and improve store facades, including for signage lights, which can enable businesses to replace electric back lit neon lights with more appealing signage.
- We support requesting that the Senior Center provide lighting to the front of the building on Walnut Street on Friday-Sunday nights, with signage inviting pedestrians, including residents/diners waiting for a table to use the green space and benches. (Current signs say "No Trespassing".)
- We think it is important to communicate regularly with retailers and building owners in the village to build their support for Walnut Street enhancements. We would like an active role in organizing and facilitating a meeting where the mayor can sit down with area business owners on the proposed improvements.
- We support conducting comprehensive traffic and parking studies that combine the changes to Walnut Street with potential changes from the development of the city lot on Austin Street. Both Newtonville projects have the potential to enhance the quality of life in Newtonville. However, it is important to conduct a comprehensive, integrated traffic and parking study of our downtown, especially of Walnut St., Austin St., and the surrounding areas, before a developer is selected. This is a once-in-a generation opportunity for the village, and "getting it right" can only be enhanced by a comprehensive traffic analysis. Waiting for the Austin St. developer to prepare a traffic study is inadequate.
- We have concerns with the preliminary design proposals to add parking to the bridge over the turnpike and the elimination of Austin St. & Newtonville Ave. turn lanes. New population on Austin St. will likely demand greater access for drivers and pedestrians. This concern can be addressed in a comprehensive traffic and parking analysis.
- We would like to have an active role in the process leading to final designs for Walnut Street enhancements. The nine members of the NAC come from all parts of Newtonville, and can represent the interests of many stakeholders. Active participation of the NAC is one of the reasons Mayor Warren encouraged the creation of new area councils.

We look forward to working with the Planning Department, the Office of the Mayor, and others in Newtonville on the successful implementation of Walnut Street improvements.

*For further information, please contact:*

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