



## Summary of the Newtonville Area Council (NAC) Presentation to the BoA Land Use Committee 9 June 2015

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## NAC Opinion Survey

### Demographics

- 10% (738) of 7,370 residents age 14+ participated in the online survey
- Respondents encompass 83% of streets in Newtonville
- Margin of Error  $\pm$  5%

### Insight

- 75% would support development *if it met their criteria*.
- Residents' criteria *differ in key ways from developer's plan*.

### Survey Results Summary

- NUMBER OF UNITS: 80% of respondents prefer 40 units or less. ASP calls for 68 units.
- HEIGHT: 82% of respondents prefers 3 floors or less. ASP calls for 4 floors.

- PUBLIC PARKING: 40% of respondents would prefer 150 or more parking spaces; 39% of respondents would prefer 100 or 120 parking spaces. ASP calls for 127 parking spaces. (As Tom Kraus' presentation detailed, the actual number of public parking spaces is ONLY 89 after allocating all parking spaces (new retail = 23 spaces; Zip Car = 3 spaces; guest = 5 spaces; staff = 2 spaces; handicap = 5 spaces.)
- AFFORDABLE HOUSING: 49% of respondents prefer 25% of apartments be affordable. ASP calls for 25% of apartments to be affordable.
- PHYSICAL APPEARANCE: 81% of respondents felt this was very important.
- ARCHITECTURAL STYLE: 66% of respondents felt it was important for the new building's architecture complement the historic buildings in the village. ASP proposed use of cement board siding does not match this desire.

—Timothy David Stone, NAC, [timothydavidstone@gmail.com](mailto:timothydavidstone@gmail.com)

## Parking Analysis

### Overview

- The Austin St parking lot provides 2/3 of the metered parking<sup>1</sup> south of the Pike, and services over 50 businesses plus the Senior Center.
- 2/3 of the parking use in this area is short term<sup>2</sup>, which mirrors the needs of the current business mix of the village.
- Current peak use south of the Pike exceeds the 85% maximum target<sup>2</sup>.

### Parking Mix

- Majority of businesses, such as coffee shops, bakeries, drug store, take-out food, cleaners & banks are critically dependent on convenient, short term (~1/2 hour) parking.
- “Destination” businesses, such as restaurants, fitness & yoga studios & Senior Center require medium term parking.
- Commuters, employees, office workers use full day parking.
- The Senior Center is a city-wide municipal resource which is critically dependent on a large number of near-by spaces. Weekday program participation is ~200 people, the majority of whom travel by automobile.

### Parking Studies

- The original parking study, showing peak parking of 81 spaces, does not reflect current use. 2015 data collected by the Area Council shows demand is substantially greater than shown in the 2014 GPI study. A new parking study is needed before finalizing the project.
- GPI study was based on a small number of fair-weather spring days. A new study must be designed to accurately measure use.

### New Development Commercial Use

- ASP proposes reducing parking to 122 metered and 5 HP spaces. For the past several years, there have been 127 public metered and 4 HP spaces used.
- While “Innovation Center” use would likely be satisfied by current surplus in off peak times, other proposed uses (restaurant, spin studio, general retail) would share peak demand with existing businesses.
- Based on zoning review<sup>3</sup>, additional commercial parking load would be ~23 spaces, assuming “Innovation Center” shared use. However businesses such as restaurants and spin studios have demands that frequently exceed zoning guidelines.
- ASP proposal adds use not reflected in zoning requirements, such as residential guest parking, building staff and zip-car reserved spaces.
- While ASP proposal of 1.25 stalls per residence may be sufficient for residents, controlled access means that the guest parking and zip-car parking would consume public resources.

### Concerns

- ASP is proposing fewer resources (122 metered spaces) than are currently used at peak times.
- ASP is adding NO spaces for new commercial use. With conservative estimates of new use, fewer than 90 spaces would remain available for general village parking, compared to current peak of > 125.
- ASP building design contains features that are likely to reduce parking further if corrected, such as insufficient area for trash, no rear doors to commercial spaces, no full size parking stalls and no pedestrian egress at west entrance.
- There is NO allocation for growth. The city must reserve capacity for needs of current vacant storefronts, growth from Walnut St hardscape improvements, business mix, and general economic growth.

— Thomas Kraus, NAC, [tdkljk@gmail.com](mailto:tdkljk@gmail.com)

1. Based on 127 metered spaces as used for past several years. Total capacity is 164 parking stalls.

2. Based on GPI data.

3. Zoning Review Memorandum, April 1, 2015

## Austin Street Development Architectural Review

An assessment of how well the design of the Austin Street Partners Development fits into the neighborhood and the existing architectural context.

### 1. Building Materials

- Newtonville center is predominately composed of commercial buildings that are clad in brick, limestone, and concrete. The proposed project is covered almost entirely in cement board. This material is relatively inexpensive and durable, however it does not have the historical visual references that brick and stone do.
- The material is also being widely used on new apartment buildings in the area and is not an inappropriate cladding material, but it should not be used at the ground floor level where pedestrians are in close proximity.
- When cement board is visible from eye level, it appears to be much less convincing as a durable material. There are many “brick like” modular concrete materials that could be used at the ground floor instead of the cement board. This change would still be less expensive than “real” brick and stone and would come closer the image created by the neighboring buildings.

### 2. Building Height

- The buildings surrounding the Austin Street parking lot are predominately one and two stories in height. Within the surrounding blocks, there are the Masonic Hall, Churches and former church buildings that do reach heights of up to four stories at tower locations, but the new development will be taller than its immediate neighbors.
- In order for the new development not to appear to dwarf its neighbors, there is a need to reduce the perceived height of the new project. This is most critical on the sides facing public ways. The developers have done a good job of reducing the apparent height along Bram Way to three stories, but not as well along Austin Street.
- On the Austin Street side, there is a reduction from four to three stories at the corner setbacks from the facade and there is a change in color for the top floor.
- It would be more effective if the setbacks of the top floor that now occur only at the corners, occurred as a continuous setback along the entire Austin Street façade.
- Even a modest setback of the fourth floor would change the visual height of the building for Austin Street pedestrians and drivers and make the building more responsive to its context.
- Note, that from a distance, the size of the new development will tower over its neighbors no matter how extensive the setbacks, but if a continuous setback were added to the Austin Street facade it would improve the close by pedestrian experience.

—Wayne Koch, NAC, [wkoch@wkarchs.com](mailto:wkoch@wkarchs.com)

## Public Plaza Summary

### A Plaza for Newtonville (slide 1)

- A well designed public plaza could transform Newtonville from a place for errands into a destination spot.
- In our survey, residents strongly favored public space for outdoor leisure, dining and community building.
- The plaza component of this development represents a once in a generation opportunity to create a real town square for Newtonville and it would serve the many people who live, work, and visit there.

### What Makes a Good Plaza? (Slide 2)

Designers, urban planners, and sociologists have written about the qualities that make a plaza attractive to people.

- A good plaza is well located — convenient and visible to pedestrians.
- Sun exposure is necessary, especially in our cold climate, for a plaza to be usable for three seasons a year.
- An appealing plaza has a room-like feel. It has a well-defined shape and a sense of enclosure that can be produced by adjoining building walls and lines of trees, streetlights or bollards.
- A good plaza is appropriately sized — not so small that people feel cramped and unable to find place to sit — but not so large it seems deserted.
- Abundant seating is a critical factor in a successful plaza and this seating should offer users some choice — so they can sit in sun or shade, in a group or off on their own. A mixture of fixed seating (like benches) and lightweight moveable chairs is ideal.
- Other desirable features include greenery, shade, attractive paving and a focal point such as a fountain or sculpture.

### Austin Street Partner's Proposal & NAC Suggestions (Slide 3)

There are many good features in the current plaza proposal.

- The plaza is well located. At the corner of Austin St. and Bram Way, it will be visible to pedestrians on Walnut St. and people parking in the lot will pass through or alongside it on their way to village businesses.
- Also the plaza is sited so that it has a sunny southern exposure which will allow it to be used in spring, summer and fall.
- The plaza is attractively paved, generously planted and has a fountain which could be very nice. So nice, in fact, that it might be better to relocate it from the periphery to a more central location.
- Another suggestion for the city as client would be to ensure that there is abundant public seating as this will, in large part, determine how welcoming and well used the plaza will be. Consider including lightweight flexible chairs and tables and a place to store them in the off season.
- Perhaps most importantly, the city should consider eliminating car traffic on the northern portion of Bram Way. With parking lot entrance on Austin St. under the ASP building and no Walnut St. business parking behind the Starbucks/Golden Scizzors buildings, there is no need to allow cars to turn onto Bram Way from Austin St, impacting the public plaza.
- This move would transform what is now a long, narrow plaza, hemmed in by moving vehicles on three sides, into a generous pedestrian space. With tables and chairs spilling out from the Austin St. Development and from Starbucks, and with people able to move and sit freely without looking out for cars, we could shape a sizeable, attractive, car-free space for all to enjoy.

—Helene Sroat, NAC, [hsroat@yahoo.com](mailto:hsroat@yahoo.com)

## Walnut Street Improvements

### Walnut Street Improvements — NAC's Highest Priority

- Goal: Transition Newtonville from an Errand Stop into a Destination

### History

- 2+ years ago, city Planning Department proposed using MA Chapter 90 funds to widen sidewalks and add lighting and benches to make Newtonville's commercial center more attractive as a part of Walnut St. repaving.
- NAC endorses a plan to widen both sides of Walnut St.
- The City paved Walnut St. from Commonwealth Ave. to Cabot St. in 2014.
- Bil Paille argued that Walnut St. improvements should wait until 2015 to accommodate demands from a potential Austin Street development.
- While the NAC met with Bill Paille and Nancy Hyde throughout 2014 and 2015, the city did not develop engineering plans for widening Walnut St.
- Hoping to jump start the planning process in winter 2015, Newtonville resident and landscape architect Natalie Adams prepares landscape architecture plans for Walnut St. using city provided base maps. The plans detail the location of benches, trees, and new street lights for a widened Walnut St. The plans accommodate the needs of retailers — keeping easy access to store fronts. Native tree types would avoid blocking retail windows.
- The city transportation department and economic development office have not responded to Natalie's proposed plans nor have they developed any plans of their own.

- Beautiful Newtonville, a local non-profit, started raising private funds for purchasing benches and flower boxes for Walnut St. Because the city failed to develop or respond to plans, fundraising had to stop. Funds raised are currently in escrow.
- Widening Walnut St. in the commercial center represents a rare opportunity for Newtonville. Mayor Mann had proposed a similar widening of sidewalks in the village center 20+ years ago. Alas, they did not materialize.

### Concerns

- Concern that city hall will use Chapter 90 paving funds elsewhere in the city in anticipation of using developer payments on Walnut Street. What if ASP does not get a special permit?
- City could move forward with Walnut St. changes NOW independent of Austin Street. Detailed engineering plans are needed to relocate street drains, locate electrical boxes for new street lights, provide foundations for benches, and design bump-outs for pedestrian street crossings.
- The combination of widened and improved Walnut St. and a public plaza as a part of the Austin St. development would dramatically improve the economic vitality and community life of the village. All would benefit.
- Delink Walnut St. improvements from Austin St. to bring about urban design changes.
- Sequence Walnut St. widening so that loss of parking due to street construction occurs prior to loss of parking during Austin St. construction.

— Marc Kaufman, NAC, [ddgdesign@gmail.com](mailto:ddgdesign@gmail.com)

## Community Concern — Austin Street Infrastructure

### Background

A number of citizens at NAC meetings have raised questions about the size and quality of the water and sewer infrastructure on Austin Street. We are appending these questions to the summary of the NAC presentation in the interest of sharing information with the Land Use Committee.

### Status of the Water and Sewer Infrastructure on Austin St.

- The City's 2010 Request for Interest addressed the current infrastructure of Austin Street — Section 2, page 3:  
“Any development would be required to install water, sewer, gas and electric connections as required for the development.”
- The City's Engineering Department has established that the existing water main is 6” and dates from the 1880s, such that its replacement/expansion might be necessary. Further, the Engineering Department is aware that there is a history of sanitary sewerage back-ups in the area, making it possible that some sanitary sewerage facility replacement might be needed.<sup>1,2</sup>

- The City Engineering Department lists the following age (year) and size of water mains on Austin St. and surrounding streets<sup>2</sup>:
  - Austin St. (Shaw's block) 1877 — 6”
  - Austin St. (West of Shaw's block, uphill toward Forest) 1890 — 6”
  - Lowell Avenue (near Austin St.) 2013 — 10”
  - Washington St. (at and around Walnut St.) 1877 — 12”

### Engineering Department Analysis

- Has the City Engineering Department released to the Land Use Committee an analysis of the condition and size of the water and sewer infrastructure on Austin Street and its ability to handle the increased use from the addition of 68 apartment units and new commercial space?

### Who Pays for Infrastructure Improvements, if Needed?

- If needed, will ASP pay for upgrades to the Austin St. water and sewer infrastructure? If not, will the City pay for potential improvements?

Notes:

1. Austin Street Partners (ASP) presentations reference the size of the water mains on Austin St. as 8”.
2. All data provided by citizens, and presented to the NAC. The NAC has not researched nor verified this information.