

Celebrating 29 Years of Environmental Leadership

September 23, 2019

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Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Newton Planning and Development Board



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Dear Newton City Councilors, Mayor Fuller and Newton Planning & Development Board Members,

Green Newton wholeheartedly endorses the proposed Northland Newton Development.

Our Building Standards Committee first met the Northland Newton leadership in January. We asked them to build a landmark green development that would feature Passive House-certified residential buildings plus heat pumps and reduced embodied carbon in all of their buildings. They were hesitant, because they had never built to these standards before, and because Massachusetts doesn't yet have such a large Passive House development.

However, Northland's leaders did engage with us. Then, to our delight, they hired the nation's foremost green building consulting firm to study our ideas. Later, they sent members of their team to Passive House training programs.

We talked to the Northland leaders often to discuss green building practices, and to point out educational opportunities and MassSave incentives. *Last week, they confirmed that they will indeed build a landmark green development.* Their decision to follow Green Newton-approved building principles is bold and laudable—and we're thrilled!

There are only a few sites left in Newton on which developers can make a significant contribution to reducing per capita energy use and transforming the building stock to reduce greenhouse gas impacts. The Northland site is one of them.

Newton has a choice. We can establish ourselves as a leader in the movement to adapt cities and towns to 21st century social and environmental exigencies, or we can decide to further entrench the existing problems that we face. By approving the Northland development, Newton will position itself as a green building leader.

Northland earned Green Newton's endorsement by agreeing to incorporate our four principles.

1. **Passive House Buildings.** Passive House is the most stringent energy standard currently in use. In its way, it's more stringent than zero net energy. It's also a standard particularly well suited to multi-family buildings. The average single family home in Newton uses the same amount of energy as ten to fifteen apartments in a Passive House development. Northland has committed to build at least three large Passive House-certified buildings, *which would make it the largest Passive House multifamily project in MA.*

Northland has hired a firm to do energy modeling on five other residential buildings in its complex to determine whether they are good candidates for Passive House certification, too

The state of Massachusetts has implemented incentives and policies that are paving the way for

widespread adoption of Passive House in multi-family developments, both market-rate and low-income. This is Newton's – and Northland's – chance to be on the forefront of this initiative.

2. Low Embodied Carbon. Northland has committed to work with their design team to assess the embodied carbon of potential building materials, and incorporate that information into the design process. They will use low embodied carbon materials when the cost and performance of these alternatives is reasonable. We will all hear much more about the importance of accounting for embodied carbon in construction, and this is another opportunity for Newton and Northland to be a standard-setter.

3. Heat Pumps. Northland has committed to using latest-technology heat pumps instead of natural gas for space heating. In New England, high-efficiency heat pumps already have a lower carbon footprint than gas-fired boilers. That advantage will only increase as New England incorporates more renewable energy into its electricity grid.

4. Smart Growth. Northland will enact many initiatives to reduce single-occupancy car use. Their 16 hours per day free electric shuttle bus to a Green Line stop and their shuttles to a commuter rail station will serve Northland residents, neighbors and workers alike. It will add range to the MBTA system and make mass transit more accessible. Northland will also foster car-sharing and bike-sharing, and they will make life easier for pedestrians.

The Northland Newton development will be transformative. It will put Newton on the map as a leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the operation of our buildings and the character of our living environment. We encourage City Council to approve the Special Permit and re-zoning petition. Let's get construction started!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel Ruben". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Dan Ruben, Green Newton Chair
Marcia Cooper, Green Newton President

Green Newton Building Standards Committee:

Peter Barrer
Beverly Craig
Paul Eldrenkamp
Betsy Harper
Jonathan Kantar
Lois Levin
Jim Purdy
Peter Smith
Jay Walter