

# NEWTON UPPER FALLS AREA COUNCIL



August 18, 2018

Gregory Schwartz  
Chair  
Land Use Committee  
City Council  
Newton, MA 02459

Re: Docket #425-18, Request to Rezone Three Parcels for Northland Development; #426-18:  
Request by Special Permit to Allow Mixed Use Development

Dear Chairperson Schwartz:

I am President of the Newton Upper Falls Area Council and am writing on behalf of the Area Council. We wish to share some thoughts about the overall project and the above referenced petitions from Needham Street Associates, Northland Oak Street, LLC, and Northland Tower Road Investors, LLC (together “Northland”) currently before the Committee.

The proposed redevelopment of the Northland Site is an exciting development for Newton Upper Falls, the City of Newton, and the region. While the project offers several positive benefits for the village, the size and nature of the project has led to concern among Upper Falls residents. During the past few months, we have hosted representatives of Northland and received comments from the community about the project. One of the main themes of the comments has been a concern about how the proposed project would affect the existing village. This concern can be grouped into four main categories:

## Traffic

This is the biggest concern of residents. The size of the project, both the estimated 822 residential units and the businesses planned, suggests an increased traffic flow that the current Needham Street configuration is not equipped to handle. That will be a challenge the planned Needham Street redevelopment will have to address. The streets of Upper Falls, however, cannot handle increased traffic flows. They are either narrow residential roads or two lane roads that

substantially narrow when cars park on the street. Upper Falls has only three traffic lights (Oak & Christina, Oak & Chestnut, and Chestnut & Elliot) and relies on stop signs to regulate travel. As a result, we feel strongly that any new or increased traffic flows be directed away from the village. The Upper Falls cannot be turned into a connector between the Northland project and Route 9. Therefore, we ask that no entrance or exit be permitted from the parking lot onto Oak Street.

### Schools

Residents are also very concerned that the 822 residential units will exacerbate the school population issues that already exist for Upper Falls families. If this project proceeds as currently proposed, we believe that discussion of a new elementary school for the Upper Falls needs to begin. Today, Upper Falls is a buffer zone for school assignment purposes. This has harmed the sense of community felt by our youngest generation. For example, there is one situation where three consecutive houses, each with girls of the same age, are zoned for three different elementary schools. We would welcome a discussion about how this project could offer an opportunity to improve educational options for Upper Falls families.

### Village Character

Residents have expressed concerns that the proposed development will not be integrated into the fabric of the village. In particular, there are concerns that including only rental units and no owner-occupied housing in the project will make the village more transitory than permanent. Upper Falls residents have great pride in their village and view it as a destination rather than a waystation on the path of life. While renters are an important part of the Upper Falls community today, we are concerned that increasing the percentage of renters from approximately 37.5% to over 60% would significantly alter the sense of community that exists in Upper Falls.

Another important issue cited by residents is the physical size of the development. In particular, several residents and Area Councilors have expressed concerns about the eight story parking structure that has been discussed in earlier project presentations. The concern is that such a structure would upset the sense of proportion in the village and lead to additional high rises.

### Environmental Issues

Two concerns about the proposed project relate to environmental issues. The first is a concern about how any underground parking structures would affect the South Meadow Brook stream that runs under the Northland site. The second is a worry about possible light pollution from the development and its effect on those residents who will be living closest to the development.

While we look forward to the opportunity this project represents and have appreciated Northland's willingness to meet with the community and share their vision, we want to ensure that the project does not negatively affect Upper Falls environment and community. Therefore,

we ask that this Committee and the City Council adhere to the principal of “Do No Harm” as it considers the different phases of the development.

Best regards:



Anil Adyanthaya  
President  
Newton Upper Falls Area Council