



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

To: Zoning Board of Appeals Members
From: Adrianna Henriquez, Clerk
Date: June 20, 2020
Subject: Materials for **June 23, 2020** Public Hearing

Hello,

Please see the following materials for the upcoming hearing on June 23, 2020 Public Hearing. The following board members are scheduled to sit: **Brooke Lipsitt (Chair), William McLaughlin, Barbara Huggins Carboni, Michael Rossi, Michael Quinn, and Timothy Durken**

1. Letter from Meryl Kessler dated June 19, 2020
2. Letter from Doris Ann Sweet dated June 19, 2020

Thank you,

Adrianna Henriquez

ahenriquez@newtonma.gov | (617) 796 1133

Public Comment on Dunstan East Proposal

Meryl Kessler <merylkessler@me.com>

Fri 6/19/2020 3:57 PM

To: Adrianna Henriquez <ahenriquez@newtonma.gov>

 1 attachments (59 KB)

Dunstan_East_ZBA_letter.6.19.2020.pdf;

[DO NOT OPEN links/attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]

Dear Adrianna,

Attached please find my letter regarding the proposed Dunstan East project. Please include it in the Board packet for the June 23 ZBA public hearing.

Thank you,

Meryl Kessler
147 Prince Street
Newton, MA 02464

**Meryl Kessler
147 Prince Street
West Newton, MA 02465**

To Brooke Lipsett, Chair, and the members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

As a resident of West Newton who lives less than one mile from the proposed Dunstan East development, I am writing to express my strong support for this project.

Overall, Dunstan East is consistent with the goal, expressed in both the City's Comprehensive Plan and the more recent Washington Street Vision Plan, of bringing transit-oriented, diverse, and affordable housing options, as well as commercial/retail development, to Newton generally and to the Washington Street corridor specifically. The developer has proposed a visually appealing design for transforming the currently blighted site into a mixed-use development, and, in particular, I applaud:

- the variation in building size and shape (a key principle of the Vision Plan);
- the provision of deeper affordability (at 50% AMI) for eight (8) of the 59 permanently affordable units;
- the commitment to green space and rehabilitation of Cheesecake Brook;
- the 1:1 residential parking ratio, and
- the sustainability features (although I am aware that Green Newton has proposed additional steps that should be considered).

However, one aspect of the proposed project that deserves further review is the height of Building 1 and the transition from the rear of the project to the small-scale residential neighborhood behind and to the west on Dunstan and Watertown Streets. Specifically:

- Given the topography of the site, which falls off by at least a full story to the north, Building 1 — presented by the applicant as a six-story building facing Washington Street — is in reality a seven-story structure when viewed from the east, west, and north. Note that Horsley Witten Group's peer review of the project, dated March 10, 2020, refers to Building 1 as a seven-story building (p.3).
- Furthermore, while the current elevations do show reduced height in the rear of the building, the visual impact of Building 1 on abutters deserves further study given the site's steep slope. The March 10 peer review also raises concern about this transition in the rear of the project and impact on the neighborhoods north of Cheesecake Brook (pp. 3-4).

These concerns have already been raised by abutters and neighbors (who are otherwise supportive of the project) at the ZBA hearings I have attended (both in-person and via Zoom), *and these concerns remain relevant even with the developer's*

modifications presented at the June 8, 2020 meeting (removing part of the sixth story of Building 1 to create an additional step down in the rear).

In assessing the appropriateness of the size and massing of this 40B project (especially Building 1) for the site, I would suggest referring to the following for guidance:

- The underlying zoning of the Dunstan East parcels: While not dispositive for a 40B application, the underlying zoning provides an initial reference point for assessing development of the site. Currently, a special permit in the BU2 zone allows a building with FAR 2.0 and height of 48'; **the proposed project is significantly denser and taller, with FAR of 2.59 and height of 81.1'.**
- Other proximate, recent mixed-use development: The applicant is currently completing development of another mixed-use project, Trio, on Washington Street corridor, less than one mile from the proposed project. Although Trio is in an MU4 zone and is being developed under special permit, not 40B, its site and the Dunstan East site share very similar characteristics. **Trio has FAR of 1.72 and is 60' tall, making it the tallest structure currently on Washington Street between West Newton and Newtonville. Dunstan East, as designed, is more than 20' taller than Trio.**
- Washington Street Vision Plan: While the plan has not yet been codified into the Zoning Ordinance, it does reflect significant input from the community and stakeholders, presenting a unified, forward-looking vision for the stretch of Washington Street from West Newton to Newtonville. Although the Vision Plan envisions the construction of buildings up to six-stories tall, the plan states that "the tallest buildings should be used sparingly along the corridor, marking significant locations and otherwise used to advance public purposes." Moreover, the Vision Plan calls for "gentle transitions to adjacent neighborhoods" and recommends that "building heights be lower adjacent to residences in order to be complementary to the scale of surrounding neighborhoods."

I would therefore urge the ZBA to request the applicant to submit a redesign of Building 1 as a five-story structure on Washington Street (six stories overall) as well as to study further the visual impact of the project on abutters on Dunstan and Watertown Streets and make further revisions to the transitions on the north side of the project, if necessary. With these changes, Dunstan East will address valid local concerns regarding the height of Building 1 and will go from being a very good project for West Newton to an excellent project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Meryl Kessler

Letter for ZBA members re Dunstan East

Doris Ann Sweet <dasweet3@gmail.com>

Sat 6/20/2020 2:26 PM

To: Adrianna Henriquez <ahenriquez@newtonma.gov>

[DO NOT OPEN links/attachments unless you are sure the content is safe.]

Dear Chair Lipsitt and Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

I am writing in support of the Dunstan East project in West Newton. As an affordable housing advocate in the city, I know how important it is, as well as how rare, to have affordable units at 50% AMI offered anywhere in the city of Newton, making those 8 units at Dunstan East particularly important. The 59 units offered at 80% AMI are also a very important addition to our housing stock. If I understand the Planning Department statistics correctly, about 27% of Newton's families are cost burdened by their housing costs, and that is especially true for those families at the lower end of the income scale. Yet, we hear that the zip code in which a child lives means everything in terms of their future success in life. Access to affordable housing can be a life changing event for lower income families. To deny that opportunity to 67 families because half of one building is six stories tall would be a travesty.

I agree with a newer West Newton resident who testified that Dunstan East, with its first floor retail space, rehabilitation of Cheesecake Brook, and its open space will enhance the community feel of West Newton. The location of Dunstan East near public transit, as pointed out by the Newton Housing Partnership, makes it an ideal location for everyone who wishes to be car free or car light, but especially for lower income residents. The location near Trader Joe's and other retail and services enhances walkability for many West Newton residents, not just those residing in Dunstan East. It is also good news that the developer has offered to spend significant funds to upgrade a nearby park for the use of children and adults.

All in all, I feel this is a great deal for Newton. I hope you agree with me and will vote accordingly for Dunstan East.

Doris Ann Sweet
281 Lexington St.