

September 8, 2014

Marc Laredo, Chairman
Land Use Committee
Newton Board of Aldermen
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, Massachusetts 02459-1449

Dear Chairman Laredo,

We did not speak at our hearing before the Land Use Committee meeting on July 29, 2014, out of respect for the process and the members of your committee, as we were represented by our attorney, Stephen J. Buchbinder. We would like to take the opportunity to share a few of our thoughts in hopes that they might be helpful in your decision process.

We have lived in Newton since 1999 and have resided at 394 Kenrick Street, directly abutting the Durant-Kenrick Homestead, for the past thirteen years. That treasured house was our first introduction to historic preservation in the City of Newton. Dena was one of the first neighbors to get actively involved in fundraising for the restoration project, eventually becoming a member of the Board of what was then the Newton Historical Society. We didn't love all aspects of the project. The proposed addition was modern and suited to neither our tastes nor (in our opinion) the original 1734 farmhouse. It was taller, larger, and closer to the property line than we would have preferred. The proposed deck at the back of the addition seemed superfluous. The potential for additional vehicular traffic in the neighborhood, cars parked on the street, and visitors on the other side of our backyard fence threatened our quiet and privacy. We decided, however, that the benefits to the greater community – accommodating more Newton school children visits, hosting exhibits to put the history of the home in perspective, making the home accessible to those with special needs, and ensuring the preservation of the home in perpetuity – were an important consideration and, in any event, it wasn't our place to dictate the changes to someone else's property.

Fast forwarding to the present day, we are extremely blessed to be the next family to have the opportunity to steward the unique home at 93 Bellevue Street. The house has undergone a rejuvenation over the past year during which time we have unobtrusively added some modern conveniences to meet our family's needs and make the house more energy efficient (adding high efficiency climate control and insulation) and made the house safer (replacing the original knob and tube wiring and updating the dual fuel chandeliers to electric-only) while restoring and preserving the historic aspects of the house. It has been a long, costly, and, at times, frustrating labor of love but we are excited by the prospect of raising our four children and growing old at the house.

93 Bellevue Street/Petition #229-14

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David A. Olson, Clerk
Newton, MA 02459

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We can appreciate the apprehensions of our new neighbors. The Naddaffs lived peacefully in the home for forty years. We never had the pleasure to meet Marti's parents but we suspect they were less boisterous during the decade that they lived on the third floor than any of our children, and much less so than all four of them put together. Quite simply, our neighbors likely feel the same way that we did when the changes were happening on our doorstep at the Durant-Kenrick Homestead. We hope to alleviate their concerns through thoughtful planning, consultation with the foremost landscape and preservation experts both on our design team and at City Hall, and exercising a level of caution and care with the exterior project that will be commensurate with that devoted to the restoration of the interior of our house.

We understand the tremendous responsibility demanded by our stewardship. We are eager to conduct our project in a way that is respectful of the long history of the property and will leave the site in better shape going forward. We have had several conversations with Marc Welch to get his insight and, in an effort to alleviate concerns regarding this issue, have offered to subject the property to his oversight for a prolonged period in an effort to safeguard the long-term health of the trees. We have also agreed, at Mr. Welch's urging, to retain a Certified Arborist for the project.

Our intention is to take all steps necessary to ensure that the landscaped area around the proposed driveway is left in better shape than it is today. We do appreciate our neighbors' concern for the aesthetics of the property and believe we are totally aligned with them in this respect. Indeed we have the greatest incentive to make sure that the existing and new plantings are beautiful and poised to flourish for the next chapter of the house's history. We are very hopeful that with suitable foresight and care as per the suggestions of Mr. Welch and our hired experts - thoughtfully selected new plantings and respectful treatment of the existing vegetation included - we will end up with a revitalized property that both is deferential to its history and accommodates the needs of our family.

Our well-respected landscape architect, Lucinda Brockway, who also designed the landscape for the Durant-Kenrick Homestead, probably put it best in an email to one of your colleagues on the Board of Aldermen. She wrote, "You are right, there are no easy answers, and really no answer that can please everyone." We have tried to be genuinely responsive to the requests and feedback from our neighbors and the members of the Board of Aldermen. We hope that you will deem our plans to be sufficiently respectful of the various competing interests and worthy of your approval.

We very much appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our application.

Sincerely,

Michael + Dena Rashes

Michael and Dena Rashes