

Honorable Councilors:

We come before you tonight as residents of Newtonville, and of the neighborhood immediately adjacent to the development proposed for Walnut and Washington Streets. Some of us are young families, others have made their homes in this community for over forty years. Either way, more than most who have appeared before you, we speak with deep familiarity of the streets, byways, traffic patterns, commercial culture, attributes and needs of the area now proposed for this new project. What some have called an eyesore, we call home.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to address you this evening. We ask that you consider carefully the perspective we bring to bear. We appreciate the complexity of the issues before the Land Use Committee. Please accept that we share with all of you an interest in promoting vibrant commercial and residential growth that is appropriate to the city's many villages, including and especially our own.

For over a year now, we've attended many meetings, as have you, with the developer, his attorney, his architects and staff. We have talked with several city councilors. We have listened and tried to be heard in public hearings of the kind you are holding this evening.

And in this process, it has been dismaying to see the essential issues so often obscured.

The core question before this Committee is whether to endorse rezoning and a score of special permits that will allow this project to proceed **on the terms proposed to you by the developer.**

The question is NOT whether you as councilors or we as citizens support affordable housing, more attractive streetscapes, livelier businesses, or a more appealing commercial district on Washington Street. Rather it is entirely a question of **on whose terms** and **in what terms** change should occur.

As the closest abutters to this proposed development, we strongly support the creation of affordable new housing that meets the needs of diverse individuals and families. We see no reason why that goal cannot be achieved on this site under its current zoning.

We would welcome improvements in the commercial landscape of Washington Street. However, we don't accept that it can only be achieved in the form that is presently before you and at the expense of the surrounding community. The current setting isn't simply a barren decaying strip of land running along Washington Street and the Massachusetts Turnpike. It has four boundaries - not one or three.

The proposed development will rise up in a setting with a streetscape and landscape that has evolved even as it retains features that have defined it for over a hundred and fifty years. It is the site of a residential neighborhood, a local historic district - one of only four in the entire City, a variety of small commercial shops, a diverse array of single and two family houses, many of them rental properties.

We don't object to new residences, new neighbors, new commercial enterprises or even a new comprehensive development at this site. We have, in fact, proved very adaptable to the presence of all these things in this area of Newtonville for many, many years. We have quite a bit of experience, after all, in living in close and congenial proximity to a mixed commercial district at this very site since we settled here.

What we object to is the density, scale, height and massing of the project before you as it is currently and has been persistently conceived.

From our earliest meetings with the development team, we expressed openness to a new commercial and residential project on the proposed site. We simply asked, from the beginning,

that it not be five stories tall, that it not be overly dense at 171 or 164 units, that it be kept within existing zoning parameters, and that it **work with rather than against** the existing community.

Why do we seek to retain the current zoning? We know it works. We know it will ensure that the new development will not overshadow, diminish, and indeed destroy the residential neighborhood, the visual context of the historic district, and the traffic patterns in this setting.

Building attractive affordable housing, creating new commercial space, and redefining streetscapes requires adaptation from all of us. But it doesn't require imposing a massive structure that overshadows neighboring landscapes and the existing community. We don't have to destroy the village to improve, build and save it.

We ask this honorable Committee to think broadly, as we are certain you strive to do, about the community you serve. You have heard in detail the needs articulated by the developer. We hope you will be equally attentive to our concerns. We appreciate the difficult task before you but are not entirely reassured that the impact of this development on the larger community has been fully assessed.

Some months ago, the City Planning department submitted an extensive report for your consideration that **never mentioned** the historic district that forms the Northern boundary of the project it urged you to approve. This from the department that oversees historic preservation in the City of Newton. A year ago, the City's own Historical Commission deemed most of the Orr Block preferably preserved - a judgment that has received barely a mention in the many weeks and months of these proceedings. The focus have been entirely on what will occur when the wrecking ball flattens those very buildings.

So be it. We do not, as we have said, object to a development on this site. But we assume you would agree it would be unwise not to look beyond its front facade on Washington Street

and its East and West boundaries.

As citizens, taxpayers and voters, we are puzzled by the degree to which the impact of the development on the Northern residential boundary has been not been fully addressed. Surely the goals of enhancing the quality of life of future residents should be balanced by equally careful attention to the quality of life of those who reside in the City today, who pay our taxes, and who count on you as our public servants to protect and serve the public good as we have no doubt you all seek to do. The existing zoning allows for development and protection, growth and preservation, change and stability. It forces all parties to compromise to create a workable and livable community. We urge you to uphold it. Thank you again for giving us this opportunity to express our views.

Ellen Fitzpatrick	20 Foster Street	Newtonville, Massachusetts
Elizabeth Smith	40 Foster Street	
Robert Smith	40 Foster Street	
Bette White	14 Foster Street	
John Wilson	30 Foster Street	
Mari Wilson	30 Foster Street	
Meghan Smith	34 Foster Street	
Adel Foz	16 Page Road	
Bonnie Foz	16 Page Road	
Francesca Koss	137 Lowell Avenue	
Patrick Slattery	221 and 227 Walnut Street	