

Nadia Khan

From: David A. Olson
Sent: Thursday, December 15, 2016 3:07 PM
To: citycouncil
Cc: Nadia Khan
Subject: FW: Tonight's Orr meeting, please forward

From: Barbara Bix [mailto:barbara@bbmarketingplus.com]
Sent: Thursday, December 15, 2016 12:43 PM
To: David A. Olson
Subject: Tonight's Orr meeting, please forward

Hi David,

I'd appreciate your forwarding this email to the City Councilors involved with tonight's Land Use meeting. Thank you.

To whom it may concern:

I'm writing about transportation concerns related to the proposed Orr block development. I've voiced similar concerns in previous emails but have not seen a sufficient change in the plan so am writing again. I'm assuming that <http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/79590> contains the latest proposals on this topic.

Orr Block means many more cars—proposed transit solutions are inadequate

I live in the neighborhood so am painfully aware that far better transit solutions are required to accommodate a development of this size—without adding a lot of cars and gridlock to Washington Street. High fares, while a barrier, are not the only issue.

Public transit runs infrequently and unreliably, even during rush hour

The train and 500 buses you mention in the proposal serve only people who need to go into the city in the morning and out in the evening—during bankers hours. Even this group requires flexible employers and extra time so that employees can travel when transit is available. The express trains don't stop in Newton. The local trains run less than once an hour most of the day. Even at rush hour, there is only a short period when they run every half hour. Moreover mass transit options are frequently late or canceled, although better than they used to be. The express buses run more frequently but are less reliable. The MBTA has made it clear that they are not adding additional transit to Newton any time soon.

Public transit at off-peak hours is spotty or non-existent.

Realistically, in today's 7 x 24 workday, the current trains and buses are reasonable options for only a very small percentage of people. Neither the train or buses are an option for people who work irregular hours, need to travel at night or on the weekend, or need to work anywhere other than downtown.

3 hour commutes, at non-peak hours, force people to avoid town or take cars

Many people, like me, need to travel in and out of town at offpeak hours for appointments, etc. The buses run only once or twice an hour, depending on the time of day, and are often late or canceled. As a small business person, I needed to allow 1.5 hours to 2 hours each way for appointments. So most days, I took my car, if I only had one meeting in town so that I could get other work done that day.

Proposed bike and pedestrian solutions are not realistic

Newton residents rarely walk or bike anywhere. Our neighborhood schools have overcrowded blue zones because people drive their children to school even if they live within half a mile. The teachers also will not walk more than a few blocks because they don't walk and carry things at the same time. The library parking lot is also full at all times, ditto for the Austin Street lot.

By way of background, I am an avid biker and walker. I am the only person in my senior center classes that walks there. I rarely see other bikers when I am traveling on the most bike-friendly north/south and east/west corridors to and from Newtonville (Walnut Street, Commonwealth Avenue, and Beacon Street). Those that I do see, primarily use Commonwealth Avenue and for recreational use. While they may walk to Newtonville, there is no reason to believe that, even if enhanced, more people will bike on Washington Street to run errands or commute more than ½ mile.

The vast majority of residents—even people like me--will not bike at night, during inclement weather, or when roads might be slippery. This is particularly true for older residents who may be partially disabled (limbs, eyesight, or hearing).

Possible solutions

1. Orr- or city-funded mass transit to ferry residents into and out of town more frequently at rush hours and during off-peak hours. This might be a mini-bus with a regular schedule or by appointment, perhaps only available to Orr residents.
2. An extensive Zipcar program with cars available, on location for 1/3 of the occupants (the number that is likely to need to drive anywhere at any given time (no subsidy to encourage use of mass transit)
3. Additional minibuses available to Orr residents by appointment to take them to Riverside, school, hospitals, and other places they may need to go outside Newtonville.
4. High parking costs for spaces in the lots at the new Orr development (possible mitigation for handicapped)
5. Overnight ban on parking on Washington Street or any of the surrounding neighborhoods, except by permit

To work, all five of these ideas—and perhaps more--will need to be implemented. People need to have a way of getting everywhere they need to go so they really don't need a car—or at least a second car. Bikes are nice to have but don't cut it for an elderly population or mothers with young children.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.