

December 5, 2016

Dear Chairman Laredo,

There was not adequate time for everyone to speak at the last Land Use Committee meeting, and we therefore appreciate the opportunity to send in written communications. The Foster Street neighbors have asked to be among the first to speak at the next hearing. I wanted to share just a few comments of my own based on the presentation and discussion on November 29th as follows:

- As has been stated before, those of us who live closest to the Orr Block, and have done so for years, are not opposed to reasonable redevelopment of the site. We also are very supportive of adding new housing units in Newton, especially those that would be truly affordable, and we have always valued our part of the City for its relative economic diversity within Newton.
- The plan as proposed on November 29th continues to be too large, too dense and too "out-of-scale" for this site. The Planning Department continues to refer to what would be "appropriate" in terms of height given the widths of Washington and Walnut Streets. Given that this development also borders a residential neighborhood that also is an historic district, street widths should not be the determining consideration for building height.
- Related to the point above, we have yet to hear either the Planning Department or the Land Use Committee provide clarity as to whether allowing this development to be five stories high and this dense would potentially lead to similar development along Washington Street. There continues to be concern that such a large development would set an unfortunate precedent for Newtonville as well as other parts of Newton. The City Council has the opportunity to encourage and approve of the development of new housing and commercial space across the City that is thoughtfully planned and more fully embraced by the community.
- The developer stated on November 29th that the entire development is now 90 feet away from Foster Street. This is not the case with the proposed eastern end of the project, which is only 45 feet away from the residences in our neighborhood on Walnut Street and from 14 Foster Street. We also have requested that the developer provide renderings of the proposed development from the residential neighborhood perspective, both during the daytime and at night, and are waiting for a response.
- Testimony was given on the 29th as to the lack of affordability of the housing units being proposed for this development. While the developer would meet Newton's 15% inclusionary zoning requirements, with an additional 10% "middle income" units, it is critical that the Committee make clear that: 1) these units will still not be affordable to those with very low incomes; and 2) the great majority of the units will rent at very high rates. When the Foster Street neighbors met earlier on with Mr. Korff about his proposed development, we asked specifically about whether he had (or had plans to) access public resources in order to develop truly affordable units. His answer was a clear "no". As someone who has been committed to the creation of affordable housing for years, I have a clear sense of what it really takes to make this happen. The need for more housing in greater Boston has been well documented, and we have heard heart-felt testimony from people who want to live in Newton or have their family members be able to live here. But it seems unfair that they might believe that this new housing would be within at least some of their income levels.
- As abutters to the proposed development, it has been difficult to sit in the hearings and hear reports from a Planning Department that meets constantly with the developer and has never once reached out to us as Newton residents regarding our thoughts and concerns. This is a larger issue that the City Council should consider for the future as it does feel like an

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imbalanced process. Development by its very nature is complex and often controversial. At the end of the day, it is critical that all parties feel that at least the process was fair.

- Finally, we believe that each City Councilor should ask him/herself how he/she would feel if the proposed development were adjacent to his/her home. Many may never have to confront this as their homes may be in areas that are even more residential than ours. We are the ones who will have to live with this reality, and, for this reason, we believe that our perspectives should be given serious consideration. Most of us on Foster Street are homeowners that have been committed to Newton for a long time and also have valued the nearby small businesses, and the homes on Washington Terrace, that will be torn down. So while we know there will be redevelopment of this site, we will miss the stores that have been our long-term neighbors. It also has been difficult at times to hear various speakers describe our neighborhood as they have, giving some of us new appreciation for how it might have felt to people whose neighborhoods experienced “urban renewal” in the past.

Again, we appreciate the opportunities your committee has given for public comment, and we are especially appreciative of our own City Councilors’ willingness to meet with us and consider our perspectives.

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth Smith*

40 Foster Street, Newtonville, MA