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NEWTONVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02460

February 6, 2017

Dear Newton City Council Members:

I am writing in the hopes that there are at least nine members of our City Council with the political and moral courage to vote against the rezoning ordinance that would allow the Orr Block project as currently proposed. The project is too high and too dense for its environs. The proposed buildings are essentially architectural "glop." They may provide the developer with the economies that come with unimaginative design, but will leave Newtonville with an over-imposing cityscape that will not be saved by some expanded walkways or bike lanes (the proposed bike lanes on Walnut Street will increase traffic congestion, and will endanger, not aid cyclists).

The promise of approximately 24 units of affordable housing – 40 if one considers units for individuals earning between 80% - 120% of the median income, to be "affordable" – is somewhat illusory, and a poor tradeoff for this developer-friendly/neighborhood-unfriendly proposal. Several units of existing, relatively affordable housing will be destroyed, reducing the net gain in affordable housing. Ironically, the proposed project will result in a gentrification of the section of Newtonville where the buildings will be situated. Currently, rents are sufficiently affordable for the types of small business that give a neighborhood a community feel. The new rents will make such businesses no longer viable. Perhaps that is the cost of any new development, but one that should not be ignored.


Most significantly, adding a small number of affordable rental units to a city with 31,975 housing units (according to the Newton.gov web site) is insufficient reason to permanently harm the character of a neighborhood. While I have not conducted a scientific survey, it strikes me that vocal supporters of the project often live outside of Newtonville, while Newtonville residents understand the permanent harm the current project will cause. People move to Newton, not only for the schools and amenities, but because they prefer a suburb of villages, to the density, clogged streets, and pricey shops and chain stores of Boston or Cambridge. No neighbor with whom I have spoken, has a desire for the urbanization for Newtonville. That vision seems to rest primarily in the

Mayor's office and with some elected officials. We have seen in the recent presidential election, the fallout that can occur when elected officials believe they know better than their constituents, what is in the constituents' interest. Your constituents do not want the big city-style massing of the proposal that is on the table.

What, then, should happen to the Orr Block? That the currently standing buildings will be demolished and a new project will arise in its place, is inevitable. The current developer, however, must be required by the Council to significantly revise his proposal. What is required is less height, less unbroken mass, fewer units, and more architectural imagination. Such a proposal would no doubt cut into the developer's profit. Height, mass, density, and cookie cutter buildings are always developer's dreams, too often at the expense of the community in which the project will be built. If the current developer is unwilling or unable to do better, let him sell the property to someone who can. There will be buyers for a community with the vitality and benefits of Newton.

If I understand the history of this proposal correctly, the developer purchased the entire Orr Block on spec, with no exit contingencies should he be unable to build as he wishes. He began with the typical developer's playbook of proffering a clearly and outrageously inappropriate proposal, so that his merely inappropriate proposal would look like a fair compromise. There should be no compromise for the future character of Newtonville. If the developer made an imprudent gamble, that must not become Newtonville's problem. Please heed your constituents' wisdom and desires. Reject the developer's rezoning request, and demand a proposal that is in keeping with necessary change while maintaining Newtonville's village character.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Margolin", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above the printed name "Kenneth N. Margolin".

Kenneth N. Margolin