

Nadia Khan

From: David A. Olson
Sent: Wednesday, December 21, 2016 2:25 PM
To: citycouncil
Cc: Nadia Khan
Subject: FW: Orr Block size

From: Naomi Myrvaagnes |
Sent: Tuesday, December 20, 2016 5:28 PM
To: David A. Olson
Subject: Orr Block size

(David, Please send to the Councilors, as you always do. Thank you. NM)

To: the Newton Councilors
 Breathing room, elbow room, quality of life

The City of Newton is focusing on increasing population density. One project makes sense to me: to develop the large, under-used parcel along Highland Avenue and create a new Newton village there. That would of course entail adding public transportation as well as somehow planning for an increased school population and other City services.

However, Newtonville and our other existing village centers are a very different story. Keeping to Newtonville, I believe that the area cannot afford more density. (I won't repeat here the arguments against claiming Newtonville as a Transit Oriented location.) Two developers are going to develop large complexes there. Austin Street is already decided (though I dearly hope the specs for the parking spaces can be improved). The Orr block should not be given permission to be higher or denser or closer to zoning boundary lines than current specifications allow.

I care about quality of life. That means enough room to open the door of your car in a parking space. Enough square feet in your apartment to have personal possessions—we are not yet equipped with implanted chips to replace our books, papers, mementos, art works. We need green space and sky and daylight, not masses of brick and concrete.

It's true that much more thought is being given to the design of the Orr block than to the horrors of apartment buildings leaning in on Pleasant Street in Watertown all the way from North Street to Watertown Square. (If you haven't personally driven along that stretch, you should do so before voting on projects in Newton.) Yet Newton is heading in the same direction—more stacks of boxes to “house” renters. Most of these tenants will be commuters, using their “units” for little more than sleeping. This is not a people-friendly model. It does not invite residents who are interested in “living” there and building community and civic life. To keep this short, I will not go into the many reasons that downsizing Newton elders would not find the Austin or Orr project an acceptable place to move to from a 2000 square foot house.

I fear that a larger and denser Orr block will accelerate the land grab that developers are sure to engage in along all of Washington Street. (They already are, I believe.) Route 9 in Chestnut Hill is an instructive example of over-development. Traffic is brutal there (traffic jams any time of day), as it is already along Washington Street. The Chestnut Hill builders were supposed to put up an attractive face to the street. Instead (was there any government oversight once they got approval for the project???) there is a solid blind wall of ugly commercial construction way out at the very edge of the land right next to the roadway. That's overdevelopment. That's building for maximum profit.

I hope the Land Use and Planning committees will remember that their role is to permit building to serve the public interest, not to make developers happy with extra profit. Density can be an environmental plus, but only in locations equipped to handle it. Our existing village centers cannot take on more than modest increase without changing their character for the worse.

Please slow the rush to urbanizing our balanced, suburban small city. Limit the Orr block to what fits existing size and density and footprint at its edges. Don't give a big green light to more land speculation in Newtonville or anywhere else in our neighborhoods.

Naomi Myrvaagnes
59 Morseland Ave
Newton 02459