

October 7, 2016

Dear Newton City Council Members:

As abutters and neighbors to the Orr Block in Newtonville, we are the residents who are most directly affected by the proposed development there. We trust that you will give very serious consideration to the concerns raised in our petition opposing the zoning changes requested for that project.

While the petition speaks for itself, we wanted to clarify several points so that there are no misconceptions about them:

First, we are not opposed to the redevelopment of this area. We support development that is consistent with current zoning restrictions, respects the boundary the site shares with Newtonville's Local Historic District and is in keeping with Newtonville as a village. What has concerned us from the very beginning of this project, and continues to do so, is the height, scale and massing of the proposed plan, which is not in keeping with the rest of the community or the local historic district. We do not understand why the Planning Department, which oversees Historic Preservation in the City of Newton, never mentioned the development's proximity to the local historic district in assessing the impact of the project on our community. Nor have we seen to date the City give any consideration to the impact a development of this size will have on those citizens who reside directly behind it and nearby.

Second, we wish to stress that we strongly support efforts to provide more affordable housing in Newton. Many of us have lived in Newtonville for decades, and we are proud of the fact that Newtonville has always been a neighborhood with reasonable rents as well as subsidized housing units. This tradition reaches back to the nineteenth century and to our neighborhood's origins as a streetcar suburb where many homes provided rental housing and where one of the city's first apartment buildings was constructed. The Orr Block as currently planned will actually eliminate 20 units of very affordable housing. We are concerned not only about this loss but also about the potential negative impact this development may have on existing affordable housing in the neighborhood by driving up rents.

Third, at least one commentator has suggested that neighbors would achieve only a "symbolic victory" if the building were limited to existing zoning restrictions. Our concerns about the size and density of this project need to be considered in light of the precedent that will be set if the City Council approves a five-story development. We know that other developers are following the outcome of this vote closely. The notion that the village character of Newtonville might survive this one development ignores the practical consequences of establishing this precedent for other developments that will very likely be proposed along the Washington Street corridor, not only to the east and west in Newtonville, but also in Newton Corner and West Newton.

Finally, in deciding to buy homes where we did, we knew we were adjacent to an area of small stores and businesses. We have valued these relationships for many, many years. Having lived in congenial proximity to the commercial areas of Washington Street, we are concerned that

these wonderful local amenities are already being forced out of the neighborhood. Just because Newtonville is divided by Washington Street and the Mass Turnpike does not mean that it should become the village that is subject to the type of very large development that would not be acceptable in other parts of the City.

We are not opposed to mixed-use development, but the size and density should be appropriate to the surroundings, and it should be spread equitably throughout the City. We urge that you reject the proposal to rezone the Washington Street/Orr block area.

Respectfully,

Ralph Abele	15 Page Road
Ellen Abele	15 Page Road
Jonathon David	128 Lowell Avenue
Kim Davis	128 Lowell Avenue
Ellen Fitzpatrick	20 Foster Street
Adel Foz	16 Page Road
Bonnie Foz	16 Page Road
Maura Harrington	157 Lowell Avenue
Francesca Koss	137 Lowell Avenue
Robert Smith	40 Foster Street
Meghan Smith	34 Foster Street
Bette White	14 Foster Street
Mari Wilson	30 Foster Street
John Wilson	30 Foster Street