

January 12, 2017

Newton City Council
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton Centre MA 02459

RE: Rezoning for MU4 and Washington Place

Dear Councilors,

I reviewed the zoning ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan this week, and attended the Planning and Development Board hearing on January 11. I am now fully convinced of how compelling it is to approve a zone change to Mixed Use 4.

When the Board of Aldermen created MU4 in 2012, it was a progressive move for Newton (other forward-thinking communities had already hopped on that bandwagon) that addressed changing needs in housing, sustainability and economic development, as well as limited land availability. It created a new mixed-use district that could apply to just a few, less than a handful of, appropriate sites that are in a village center, with access to public transit.

Focusing on the criteria for approving this change makes for a clear case for approval, in my view. Looking at the language of the ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan, it is true that “**public convenience and welfare will be substantially served.**” There will be “**no substantial detriment to the public good**”. A zone change will **not substantially derogate from the “intent or purpose of the Zoning Ordinance”**.

On many points in the Comprehensive Plan (which may have its data projection flaws but is still a highly valuable visioning document) this proposal fits: it will better connect businesses and residences between the north and south sides of Newtonville’s Walnut Street, it will allow sufficient density and intensity of uses to promote lively pedestrian activities both day and night, weekdays and weekends. The mixed income rental units of varying sizes are within proximity to services, shops, retail and transit which encourage use of public transportation, walking and of bicycles. The **growing need for smaller, accessible, energy efficient, one-floor units for people of all ages and incomes** will be significantly met.

This is an appropriate location for this mixed use. It will enhance the long term **economic growth and vitality** of the village, as well as add to the City’s tax base.

There are many design feature advantages the MU4 gives the City Council in shaping a development on this site, over what could occur in BU1 or BU2. You have the ability here to get 60% of the street-facing facades to have **windows for transparency**, visibility and visual interest. Instead of a solid, unfriendly façade, with MU4 you can have street-facing windows at the first level and **entrances every 50 feet** to encourage foot traffic and welcome walkers, visitors, customers. It could

otherwise be an opaque block like a wholesale store, gym or CVS-type use might prefer.

Open space which promotes environmental sustainability and enhances the public realm is required in MU4, and not in BU1 or 2. You have the ability with this project to ensure an active, pedestrian-oriented, outdoor space both safe and inviting for the public. A standard special permit for BU zones doesn't give you the same amount of leverage to make this happen.

MU4 gives the City Council more oversight and the public more input than BU zones. You have the possibility of including some smaller residential units, as BU does not provide for less than 1200 s.f. With this MU4, you will have a greater number of overall units because of the 5th floor and the lesser square footage per unit: a big help in **meeting our affordable housing goals**.

I personally applaud the range of incomes that will be provided for here, from low to moderate to middle income along with market rate. This mix reflects what Newton already is and we want to maintain that diversity. No matter where on the economic scale a family may lie, whether aged 22 or 85, there will be a space at Washington Place that can meet those needs.

Please vote YES for the zone change, and then YES to the project. You have the know-how and ability to craft a Board Order under MU4 that gets Newtonville and Newton a beneficial new place. I hope to be able to live there in a few years!

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