

Good evening,

I'm Andreae Downs, and I live on Chestnut Street in Waban. I support the revised proposal for the Orr Block and rezoning to MU4. We need more housing in Newton for downsizing families like mine as well as for my children's generation as they move out of student housing. These units will help fill that need.

At your last hearing, John Pelletier eloquently addressed the transportation aspects of this development, and why it would qualify as a Transit-Oriented Development. He is correct, and I have also read much of the research on which he based his arguments. I won't repeat them here.

In Newton, we have a lot of cut-through vehicle traffic, and I want to address that in the context of this development. The current plan is to widen Walnut Street to add capacity southbound. This will make crossing Walnut harder, less safe, and will increase the time the light is red for north-south traffic. It will also make this area less attractive for shopping—because few want to walk along wide-open spaces full of moving traffic. What village has such wide streets? Newtonville at Washington. Newton Centre at Centre Street (where until Newton shortened crossings, we regularly had pedestrians hit in crosswalks). Newton Corner—the circle of death. West Newton, where we are looking to decrease the pavement pedestrians must cross to get across Washington.

Who does this widening most benefit? Not Newtonville residents—they are probably going to get here on foot. It will be people cutting through Newton in a car. What do we in Newton want to do? Do we want to facilitate driving through the city on local streets or do we want to enhance local connections?

If the latter, we will want to keep Walnut narrow—it will keep drivers at the speed limit, and it will mean that those drivers who want speed will choose 128, especially outside of rush hour.

To make it easier for Newtonville residents to get to Washington Place, we will want to make walking more attractive—and the shortened crossing distances will do that—but not on a wider Walnut. To encourage people who live a little further from Newtonville, bike lanes. Research in a number of cities has shown that more people will choose to cycle to this block if bike lanes are painted. But if those lanes are protected, that number increases exponentially. This has held true in Minnesota as well as in Los Angeles, in rainy Portland as well as in Sarasota.

Again, as far as transportation goes, this development, with reduced parking and with parking unlinked from rents, car share, with stores and housing, with wide sidewalks and short crossings, with bike parking and bike lanes, and with current transit options and subsidized T passes, should not notably increase traffic in Newtonville (the widened Walnut might). It is a good project.

Please support it.

PS—I don't think you want a left turn lane into the project on Walnut either. Anyone coming northbound who wants to enter the development can make a signalized left on Washington, and then a quick right into the block. That also keeps Walnut narrower and more manageable on foot.