

January 14, 2017

Dear members of Newton City Council,

We are writing to you as residents of Newtonville who support the rezoning of the “Orr Block” to MU4. We have all been members of the Newtonville Area Council since its inception and, in that capacity, have closely studied the City’s first two instances of MU4 zoning changes. We hope that the knowledge we have acquired through this process may be of help in your deliberations.

We were divided on the Austin Street development. Some of us objected from the start regarding the selling off of public land, and the process leading to the choice of a developer. In the end, we were all disappointed at varied levels with aspects of the Austin Street Partners’ design and the associated special permit. The project was over-constrained, and the final design was compromised downward in quality of materials, architecture, limited public and worker parking, minimal public spaces (such as the plaza,) and the costs pushed back onto the city, such as undergrounding of wires and mitigating traffic impacts.

In contrast, we strongly support the Washington Place proposal. We are especially pleased with the quality of the design of the pedestrian spaces, including sidewalks, paseo and plaza. The quality of the materials is high, and we have been very pleased with the receptiveness of the petitioner to incorporate our architectural feedback into the design. The public parking lot is well designed with full-width parking stalls, and entrances and exits improve traffic flow. While we are generally comfortable with the height, this is the only area in which some of us might wish for something different. However, when we compare the 4-story only design to the 4-5 story mix, the latter is by far the better design and sensitive to abutters of the project.

We are concerned that there is an impression that the residents of Newtonville are overwhelmingly opposed to this project. Anecdotally, our sense from our neighbors, and comments at public meetings, does not bear this out. There was substantial opposition to Austin Street, primarily because of the selling off of a public asset, and the sense that many

residents did not know what was happening until after the RFP was issued. That is not a factor in this project. The petitioner has worked with the Area Council from early on to introduce the project to residents, and has been quite responsive to public feedback. The conceptual design went through four major rounds of changes based on community comments. It is true is that the opposition to Washington Place is far more organized than it was during the Austin Street process; but organization does not equate to large numbers.

We are particularly pleased with the petitioner's willingness to go above and beyond what might be required in terms of public benefit. He is ceding land to the city along Walnut Street for parking to accommodate the City's request to add bike lanes. He is fully absorbing the costs to improve not only the sidewalks that abut his property, but all four corners of the Washington-Walnut intersection. He has offered to fund beautification to the south side of Washington Street in an attempt to link the north and south sides of the village. He is offering an additional \$700,000 for community benefits well outside the scope of "nexus" that would be required.

There have been public statements that the City Council should be cautious in setting a precedent with this development. Our reaction is... we should be so lucky! Whether it be setbacks to residential property, willingness to support current tenants, quality of public space, quality of materials, and openness to funding public benefit, Washington Place is a great step forward from Austin Street. This is why we support the project wholeheartedly.

Thomas Kraus (President, Newtonville Area Council 2016)

Marc Kaufman (President, Newtonville Area Council 2015)

Joy Huber (President, Newtonville Area Council 2014)

Disclaimer: Please note that this letter is from the four signers as individual Newtonville residents, and does not constitute an action of the Newtonville Area Council.