



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Newton Housing Partnership

October 27, 2016

Setti D. Warren
Mayor

Land Use Committee
c/o Marc C. Laredo, Chairman
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Barney Heath
Director of Planning &
Development

Re: Petitions #179-16 for change of zone to Mixed Use 4 and # 180-16 for special permits for development consisting of three buildings at the NW corner of Washington and Walnut Streets.

Members and co-chairs:
Andrew Franklin
Philip Herr
Peter Macero
Lynne Sweet

Dear Committee members,

The Newton Housing Partnership has followed the progress of this proposal since its first becoming public, and has had member representation at each session of the public hearings on these proposals to date. At our October 13th meeting we met with the developers for discussion regarding the proposal, which we have subsequently discussed (Ms. Sweet abstaining), though we have not yet again met. This is my best understanding of our thoughts.

CHANGE OF ZONE TO MIXED USE 4

The Department of Planning & Development on pages 3 and 4 of its September 30, 2016 memorandum to the Land Use Committee makes a clear summary of the basis for rezoning the proposed site from Business to Mixed Use, citing the history and purposes of that zoning and its appropriateness for this site, parallel to Austin Street. Having chaired the Mayoral-appointed group which drafted the 2012 *Comprehensive Plan* "Mixed Use Centers" amendment for adoption, I find that description to be accurate. I support the rezoning without reservation.

SPECIAL PERMIT APPROVALS

In June of this year the Mayor distributed a set of housing materials, with "Newton Leads 2040" as the summary document. That document took the 76 potential housing development sites listed in the longer RKG "Housing Needs Analysis and Strategic Recommendations" document down to just seven sites for "Priority Actions." Washington Place was one of them. The developer proposes to

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provide more housing than was shown for any two of the other six sites whose scale was noted.

Unarguably, having a large-scale mixed use development at this site is solidly consistent with the City's planning, and for good reason. At nearly 124,000 sq. ft. the site is unusually large by Newton norms, so can potentially make a substantial contribution to addressing the City's documented serious housing needs, while offering proximity to schools, services, and good transportation. From a different perspective, a strikingly large number of Newtonville residents spoke up at hearings amid protesters to testify to the serious need near there for modestly-priced housing such as the developer proposes, and that the City's authority regarding new housing can assure compatibility if carefully exercised.

Having such a mix of uses at this site much as proposed is clearly consistent with the City's planning, but we have had some reservations regarding some of the proposed aspects of the development. Specific concerns are these.

1. The number of and tenant income level for the 3-bedroom and other units to be provided.

It was good to see in the most recently presented materials that there will be some 3-bedroom units in the development, and it was good to have been told that subsequent to our meeting with the developer the number of such units has been raised from 4 to 6 units, with two of them affordable. For most families of size calling for more than two bedrooms this location may not be ideal, but for some it will be perfect. I appreciate the increase.

2. The handling of equity across income levels for parking charges and alternative transport approaches.

Our understanding is that there will be a parking rental charge for tenants except for those in affordable units, for whom some alternative arrangement will be made. We hope to learn how that equity will be achieved.

3. Information gap.

The data we were shown indicated anticipated incomes from 1 to 4 persons for both "Inclusionary" and "Middle income," but showed rentals only for studio, 1 bed, and 2 bed units, omitting the 3 bed units. More seriously, it was absent full information as is required under Newton Zoning Section 5.11.9 Inclusionary Housing Plan and Covenants, such as a marketing and residential selection plan. Without such information our support will have to remain conditional.



Very truly yours,
Philip Herr
Committee Co-Chair