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CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARING MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 30, 2016

MEETING DATE: October 6, 2016

TO: Land Use Committee of the City Council

FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
James Freas, Deputy Director of Planning and Development
Alexandra Ananth, Chief Planner for Current Planning

CC: Petitioner
Planning Board

PETITION #179-16 & #180-16

NW corner of Washington and Walnut Streets

Request for a change of zone to Mixed Use 4 and for special permits to construct a mixed-use development consisting of three buildings with heights up to 60 feet and 5-stories incorporating 171 residential units, approximately 40,000 square feet of commercial space and 346 parking spaces.

The Land Use Committee (the "Committee") opened the public hearing on June 7, 2016, and the hearing was held open. A site visit was held by the Committee on June 13, 2016, and the hearing was continued on July 12, 2016, and again on September 13, 2016. In response to questions raised at the Land Use Committee public hearings or by written communication thereafter, and/or staff technical reviews, the Planning Department is providing the following information and analysis for the upcoming continued public hearing. This information is supplemental to staff analysis previously provided at public hearings.

The October 6, 2016 meeting will focus on the design of the building, as well as the design of the intersection. The next meeting is expected to occur on November 1st.

Building Design

The petitioner has stated that the project design is inspired by the historic buildings of Newtonville which were comparable in height to the proposed project. The architect's vision for the site is for

three buildings that have some common characteristics of massing and scale that help to create a sense of place yet differ in the use of materials, texture, color and height, so that they fit together but do not necessarily match. Revised plans were submitted to the Planning Department on September 29, 2016. At the recommendation of Planning Staff the new plans include the following significant changes from the previous plan set:

- A new pedestrian passage from Walnut Street to the interior plaza;
- Updated sidewalk renderings showing wider sidewalks on both Walnut and Washington Streets utilizing the petitioner's property;
- Updated plaza renderings;
- New design for the west building on Washington Street;
- Updated renderings of the center building on Washington Street;
- Revised Walnut Street renderings showing step backs from Walnut Street and at the rear of the site;
- Updated landscape plans;
- The proposed community room has been moved and will be accessed from the new pedestrian passageway.

These plans will be presented by the petitioner at the October 6th meeting. Overall the Planning Department is pleased with the revised plans but requests additional renderings from the Foster Street neighbors perspective as well as a shadow study. Further comments will be made by the Planning Department at the October 6th meeting.

Intersection Design

The petitioner will present a conceptual drawing of the intersection of Washington and Walnut Street at the October 6th meeting showing wider pedestrian bump outs at all corners of the intersection to narrow the existing crossing for pedestrians, and a new bike lane on both sides of Walnut Street over the bridge. The petitioner has worked with the Department of Public Works on the plan and is able to keep two lanes of travel southbound on Walnut Street in addition to the bike lane by shifting the Walnut Street building further west and contributing a portion of their property to the area available for these improvements. The intersection redesign and signal improvements significantly improve this intersection for accessibility and pedestrian safety and will reduce vehicle queue time at the intersection over existing conditions. Sidewalk and road improvements paid for by the petitioner would stretch from Foster Street over the Mass Pike to the bridge joint on the south side of Walnut Street on both sides of the Walnut Street.

Should the Board choose to approve this project the petitioner will continue to work with the Department of Public Works and the Planning Department on the final design for this intersection. The redesign of the intersection will be compliant with the City's new Complete Streets Policy and consistent in design with the redesign of Walnut Street south of the bridge, and the petitioner has agreed to those requirements.

The petitioner's transportation engineer will be at the October 6th hearing.

The Mixed Use 4 Zone

In 2012, an amendment to the *Comprehensive Plan* was approved to include a "Mixed-Use Centers" element to further encourage mixed-use development, particularly in village centers adjacent to transit services. The idea was for what is essentially a "floating zone" that can be applied to a parcel(s) by legislative action where deemed appropriate by the Council in order to guide their redevelopment. This resulted in the crafting and adoption of the Mixed Use 4 (MU4) village zoning district adopted by the City Council in 2012 (Ordinance A-4, dated October 1, 2012).

The purposes of the MU4 district are to:

1. Allow the development of buildings and uses appropriate to Newton's village commercial centers and aligned with the vision of the City's *Comprehensive Plan*.
2. Encourage development that fosters compact, pedestrian-oriented villages with a diverse mix of residences, shops, offices, and opportunities for entertainment.
3. Allow sufficient density and intensity of uses to promote a lively pedestrian environment, public transit, and variety of businesses that serve the needs of the community.
4. Expand the diversity of housing options available in the City.
5. Promote the health and well-being of residents by encouraging physical activity, use of alternative modes of transportation, and creating a sense of place and community.

In designing the proposed MU4 zone, staff consulted the City's *Comprehensive Plan*, especially the recently-adopted Mixed-Use Element, and best practices in village zoning and planning. The *Comprehensive Plan* calls for "enhancing village centers [and] supporting their vitality" by providing "services to nearby neighborhoods," "housing alternatives," and "focal areas" to create a "sense of place" while recognizing the unique roles each village plays in the City. The Plan calls for "moderate growth" in the larger village centers and "revis[ing] the zoning rules that presently impose restrictions on residential uses in village centers and other business areas" to "encourage mixed uses in business areas and village commercial centers, particularly where public transportation is available." Incentives should be provided for the "creation of more multifamily housing" and "multi-story buildings;" zoning should also be more "proactive" in "encourage[ing] the uses and design criteria" that are desired. The Mixed-Use Element, though focused on guiding the development of larger sites in the City, also emphasizes the importance of fine-grained mixed uses, pedestrian appeal, and residential proximity in the past success of Newton's village centers.

Staff also consulted the American Planning Association on best practices in village zoning. Their resources recommend locating multiple-story buildings at the front of the property in a common street wall to create a sense of visual enclosure and sense of place. To encourage pedestrians to linger, greet each other, and visit many businesses in one trip, zoning can emphasize active uses and an attractive public environment, including plentiful street-level windows and entrances to buildings.

The Council created the first MU4 district in 2012 on the Austin Street Municipal Parking Lot directly across the Mass Pike from the subject site. It was intended that the MU4 zone may also be

appropriate for guiding the redevelopment of other sites in Newtonville, such as the Star Market site, or in other village centers where the Council deems appropriate.

The petitioner is seeking a zone change for this site from Business to Mixed Use 4. When considering the request to rezone the site the Council must consider if the proposed zone change promotes the public welfare and is consistent with the City's *Comprehensive Plan* and the Council's vision for this area of Newtonville. Recognizing that a sufficient density is necessary to promote a lively pedestrian environment the MU4 district allows for three stories by right and up to five stories by special permit if the proposed structure is compatible in visual scale to its surroundings, does not adversely affect its surroundings by creating shadows or blocking views, and advances the purposes of the district.

The Planning Department is supportive of the request to rezone this site to Mixed Use 4 as the project is consistent with Newton's *Comprehensive Plan* and the intent of the Mixed Use 4 village zoning district. The proposed project is located in a village center close to multiple transit options, will significantly enhance the safety and accessibility of the pedestrian environment, and will encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation. The MU4 zone appropriately supports mixed use development at a density that will help sustain a lively village center and the proposed project will add more amenities and points of interest to the village, help knit Newtonville together with an improved streetscape and gathering place and will add to the diversity of Newton's housing stock including affordable and moderate income units.