



Setti D. Warren
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Barney Heath
Director

CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARING MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 28, 2016
MEETING DATE: November 1, 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, September 13, 2016, and October 4, 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 November 1, 2016, meeting will focus on the design of the building, the reasons the petitioner is seeking a zone change to MU4, and a follow up on the traffic impacts of the project. The next meeting is expected to occur on November 29th.

Building Design

The petitioner has stated all along 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 share 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 October 27, 2016. At the public hearing the petitioner will be presenting two design options for the building. Option A is similar to what was shown at the last hearing and includes portions of the buildings that are 5-stories. This option also includes extending the building further back along Washington Terrace that the original plans that were filed with the special permit last May. Option B is an all 4-story model that includes residential wings over the parking lot on columns (with parking below). Both options require a zone change to MU4 for the lot area per unit. The petitioner will be looking for feedback from the Council on the two design options at the next meeting. Information on the number of units and the square footage of the two scenarios was not submitted to the Planning Department in time for this memo but we expect to get this information prior to the public hearing. The Planning Department will be prepared to make further comments at the hearing. In general the Planning Department supports putting the height on Washington Street in order to increase the setbacks with Foster Street.

Urban Design Commission

The petitioner appeared before the Urban Design Commission on in April 2016 and again on October 19, 2016. The UDC found that the applicant has addressed many of their comments from the April meeting (**Attachment A**).

Traffic Impacts

The petitioner made a traffic simulation available the evening of October 17 in Newton City Hall. The simulation will be available again the night of the hearing, November 1, from 6-7PM in room 204. The simulation shows no perceptible impact from the project on traffic with the proposed traffic improvements.

The petitioner's transportation engineer will be at the November 1st hearing and traffic simulation.

Request for Rezoning

The Planning Department's last memorandum dated September 30, 2016, summarizes the basis for rezoning this site from Business to MU4 and supports the appropriateness of the site for the MU4 zone. It should also be noted that only the MU4 zone allows the Council to waive the lot area per unit requirement, which is relief the petitioner is seeking in order to provide smaller units consistent with the City's 2016 Housing Strategy and the *Comprehensive Plan*, and to help achieve the density envisioned to promote a lively and sustainable mixed-use environment. The Business zone would require a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals in order to waive the lot area per unit requirement.



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Attachment A

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Telefax
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TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Barney Heath
Director

DATE: October 27, 2016
TO: Alexandra Ananth, Chief Planner
FROM: Urban Design Commission
RE: Conceptual Review of the Washington Place new construction project
CC: Land Use Committee of the City Council
Petitioner

At the request of the Department of Planning and Development, the Urban Design Commission has reviewed and provides the following comments to the Department of Planning and Development and the Land Use Committee of the City Council regarding the proposed special permit project at the intersection at Washington and Walnut Street, Washington Place. The following information is intended to give advice on specific matters affecting urban design and beautification for the project.

WASHINGTON ST AND WALNUT ST

The Urban Design Commission (UDC) held public meetings on April 20, 2016 and October 19, 2016 to review the proposed special permit project at the intersection of Washington St and Walnut St (Washington Place). Based on the plans submitted and the presentations by the applicant's design team, the Urban Design Commission offers the following commentary.

The UDC was **appreciative of the applicant's responsiveness** to comments provided by the UDC at the April meeting. In April, the UDC had recommended:

- breaking up the massing the Walnut Street side of the project and stepping down the height as the buildings approach the residential neighborhood
- creating a pedestrian connection from Walnut St to the inner plaza
- narrowing the plaza, and creating gathering space along Walnut St
- using design to reduce the sense of height
- creating a stronger division between the public ground floor and private residences above
- showing the context of the proposed project in the context of neighboring buildings and the history of Washington St

The UDC found that the **applicant had addressed their comments from the April meeting**, that the design was **well organized**, and that they were **getting to a good place with the architectural development**. The UDC further discussed façade materials, windows, and creating a strong anchor element at the Washington/Walnut corner. **Additional comments are summarized as follows**. These comments were **meant to be taken more as things to study** than direction, and the UDC **encouraged the applicant to have a point of view** when it comes to design.

The variety of materials used on the façade was discussed. The Commission expressed a preference for durable materials particularly at the public retail level where the public will interact with the facade. They appreciated the use of traditional bricks. The Commission also appreciated that the applicant has used a limited range of materials and encouraged slightly less subtlety in the range of colors, noting that it's a delicate balance.

The UDC appreciated the variety of window types between buildings, but suggested keeping it to a limited but diverse range as well.

The UDC noted that the variety of paving materials was well organized to indicate distinct uses and connections. It was suggested that the paving in the activity zone, adjacent to the storefronts, could be varied depending on the tenants' designs.

The added overhangs were favored for bringing the visitor's gaze to the public retail level and creating a distinct zone from the private residential upper floors.

Signage was discussed, since all signs would eventually need to be reviewed by the UDC. Mr. Allen described the idea of hanging signs from the overhangs. The UDC encouraged the applicant to do more detailed studies of how sign band would work into the retail zone as the project progresses. Blade signs were recommended for pedestrian traffic. On Washington St, the overhang shape was recommended to remain and use a lighter touch sign hanging method on it.

Several ideas for the form of the corner element at Washington/Walnut were discussed: material change, window change, breaking the roofline to include a tower element, broadening the scale of the curve, using more glazing or less glazing on this portion of the façade. The UDC encouraged the applicant to explore this element a little further, and discouraged making the tower floor to ceiling glass since it appears more commercial and less residential.

In future presentations, the Commission encouraged the applicant to show more views of the building that include neighboring buildings for context.