

Vanessa Lipschitz and Matthew Helming
39 Summit Street
Newton, MA 02458

March 19, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing to provide insight into our request for approval of proposed renovation plans to 39 Summit Street, the home our family have lived in for the past six and a half years. We have lived most of our adult lives in Newton, moving to the city in 2006 when we were in our early 20s and now hoping to make the city the long-term home for our growing family.

We purchased and moved into our current house, 39 Summit Street, in December of 2011. We were drawn to the home because of its unique style and character as well as the neighborhood in which it sits which is family friendly with easy access to public transportation. We had our daughter Ella in 2016 and, as we contemplate a growing family, realize we need additional space to make the house livable for a larger family. While we have looked at purchasing other houses in the Newton area, the affordability picture has changed dramatically since we bought our home and we do not believe we could identify a property that meets our needs within a feasible price point in the city. We also adore the compact nature and historical style of our current house and would love to find a way for it to meet our needs. For us, the house represents everything we are looking for given its efficient use of space, access to a range of low-cost commuting options, and its unique historical design elements.

The major motivation for the renovation is twofold. First, we aim to make all bedrooms comfortable for adults. While we currently have 3 bedrooms and will continue to have 3 bedrooms in the future plan, one of our current bedrooms is very small and really only appropriate for a crib. The new plan contemplates expanding the second floor to allow for a third bedroom of more typical size. Second, we add a second full bathroom to make it more hospitable for a family with two working parents with children. Finally, in 2016, Matt launched his own business and now primarily works from home. To accommodate this change, we have proposed to create a usable third floor office space and accompanying bathroom. As our lives have changed over the past six and a half years, we have a need for these targeted new spaces that will allow us to remain as Newton residents in an affordable way.

In designing the renovation, we have done our best to be respectful of the community around us and the guidance of the city. We have had multiple points of contact with the planning and development office to inform how we think about a design that is reasonable. We have also made a number of deliberate decisions within the proposed design to preserve the look and feel of the house. Specifically, where possible we intend to keep the unique features of the house including historically consistent window shape and format, original parquet flooring, interior moldings, doors, and bannisters. We have also made every effort to control the height of the roof, which we believe in the current design keeps the house nestled in the lot given the aggressive slope of the property, and have taken considered measures to have minimal impact on the neighbors. We have also made sure we will be able to preserve the set of large trees that exist on the lot that also create a significant level of separation from the neighbors and help to make the renovation minimally intrusive.

While we believe the current design conforms to the lot coverage requirements, we do realize we are in excess of the allowable FAR. We want to address this concern specifically as there

are some particular issues that bear noting. First, the house that we purchased in 2011 was already close to the FAR allowance so we inherited the challenge in some sense. Second, we have a number of spaces in the house that count against the FAR as a consequence of having been designed prior to the current regulations, but which are not usable. For example, we have attic space that counts against us currently but is in no way inhabitable being unfinished and with difficult access. We also have a two-car garage that existed when we bought the house that is not how we might have chosen to use FAR, but at this point represents a sunk cost that would be economically damaging to demolish in an effort to appropriate the FAR. While we realize the important objective of FAR requirements and have added space as judiciously as possible where there is a direct foreseeable need, our property is subject to a range of preexisting constraints that are disadvantageous within the FAR framework and, as a consequence, we hope will merit further allowance. In coming to the proposed plans, we have sought to stay consistent with the size, scale and design of other structures in the neighborhood.

Finally, we want to emphasize that we have good relationships with our neighbors and believe they would be supportive of the plan. The landscaping, lot configuration, and fencing that we maintain provide a perceived level of separation such that the impact on the adjacent houses would be truly minimal. The design is intended to allow for our house to continue to be aesthetically appropriate within the context of the neighborhood and considerably extend its use as our home.

We are deeply grateful for your careful consideration of our plans and our request for approval. If there are any additional questions we can answer please let us know. Our family feels deep attachment to the city of Newton and we are hopeful that there is a way to remain as residents despite the rapidly escalating costs.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Lipschitz & Matthew Helming