

To: Members of the Newton Board of Alderman
From: Tricia Amend Bombara 32 Auburndale Ave. West Newton, MA 02465
Date: January 5, 2015
RE: **BOA Meeting re: Special Permit Petitions #273-14 and #273-14(2)**

Dear Members of the Board,

I am writing as a 20-year resident of this neighborhood in regard to the above Special Permit petitions. The first petition (273-14) seeks to change the zoning of the parcel at 114 River Street in West Newton from Business 1 to Multi Residence 2. The second petition seeks to construct 4 single-family attached dwellings on the combined parcels at 5-7 Elm Street and 114 River Street. While I am not opposed to the re-zoning of 114 River Street from Business 1 to Multi Residence 2 (#273-14) per se, I do believe that the 4 single-family attached dwelling development proposed for this parcel and the adjoining parcel at 5-7 Elm (#273-14(2)) is not appropriate for this neighborhood.

I would strongly urge the Board to consider the recent history of development in this neighborhood. In 2007, the same developer sought and received permission to build 5 single-family attached dwellings on the adjacent parcel at 13 Elm Street (Special Permit Petition #40-07). Please note the dramatic change in 7 years in this small area of Elm and River Streets, Oak and Auburndale Ave, as evidenced in the Planning Department responses:

2007: *The block itself consists of a mix of multi-family (generally two-family) and single-family residential uses.*

2014: *The land uses surrounding the site are mostly residential, including single-family, two-family, and attached/multifamily dwellings.*

Note that in 2007, the area is predominantly a mix of two-family and single-family homes; there is no mention of attached/multifamily dwellings.

2007: *In relation to the land area, the **development will be significantly larger than the average for the neighborhood** (average FAR for the neighborhood = -0.2 ; the proposed FAR = 0.42) ...the Planning Department has some concerns that the **unit sizes differ from the existing (neighborhood) average** and would recommend a reduction in the size of at least one unit... the Planning Department remains **concerned about the project scale (bulk)**, which should show careful respect for neighborhood context.*

2014: *...the size of the proposed project is **not out of character** with the surrounding neighborhood... the existing uses in the surrounding neighborhood include a number of multi-family/attached dwelling structures, some of which are even denser than the proposed project.*

Note that in 2007, concern was raised about the size and scale of the project, as it was significantly larger than the neighborhood average. Since that time, several multi-family attached dwelling projects have been built via the Special Permit process, tilting the neighborhood context toward more density and bulk; in effect, **the Board has allowed the character of the neighborhood to be changed to one which actually encourages more density.**

2007: *...One of the other goals of the Draft Comprehensive Plan is to **maintain and add to the economic diversity of housing** in the City, particularly for those people who cannot afford to buy housing in Newton given median housing values, but also who do not qualify for affordable housing.*

If the additional 4 units of housing are built, the Board will essentially have allowed a 9-unit development of \$1.2M+ luxury single-family attached homes with 4 bedrooms, 4.5 baths and 2-car garages, to replace 2 two-family houses with moderately priced rental units. This is not in keeping with the Comprehensive Plan's goal to maintain and promote economic diversity of housing in the City. If the driving force behind allowing high density developments in residential neighborhoods close to village centers with easy access to mass transit for commuting is the desire to maintain economic diversity of housing, the \$1.2M+ 4-bedroom homes with 2-car garages are not the answer.

Thank you for your consideration.