

To: Members of the Land Use Committee, Members of the Newton Board of Alderman,

From: Tricia Amend Bombara, 32 Auburndale Ave. West Newton, MA 02465

Date: November 6, 2014

RE: Special Permit Petitions #273-14 and #273-14(2) (5-7 Elm St./114 River St.): PUBLIC HEARING/WORKING SESSION MEMORANDUM dated November 6, 2014

This memorandum from the planning board contains the following text:

Context of the Existing Neighborhood

*Based on staff's site visits and data from the Assessors Database, **the site is immediately surrounded by a neighborhood that includes several multi-family and attached dwelling projects**, though there remain a number of single-family residences on **underbuilt lots** with large rear yards. Overall, **the Planning Department believes this is a fairly dense neighborhood**, particularly along River Street across from the site, as well as from the streetscape perspective due to the narrow shape of many of the lots. Several of the new development projects in the neighborhood have taken advantage of the depth of the lots by building towards the rear of the site. For these reasons, the Planning Department believes that **the proposed project is within the context of the neighborhood development patterns in terms of its lot area per unit, floor area ratio, and even the unit layout.** (Emphasis mine)*

The large “multi-family and attached dwelling projects” referred to in this paragraph are not part of the original “neighborhood development pattern” – they have been built over the past 7 years, most via Special Permit. Please note that in 2007, when the same petitioner applied for a Special Permit (#40-07) to build 5 units on the adjacent property at 11 Elm, the Planning Board wrote that: *The block itself consists of **a mix of multi-family (generally two-family) and single-family residential uses.*** While the Planning Board now believes that the FAR for this project is within the context of the neighborhood, in 2007 they wrote: *Although there is a range of Floor Area Ratios in the immediate neighborhood, **the proposed units will be larger than most and much larger than the average floor area/unit... the Planning Department remains concerned about the project scale (bulk), which should show careful respect for neighborhood context.***

The bottom line is that the “neighborhood development pattern” toward more bulk and more density was set in motion by the Board and is now self-perpetuating. In a neighborhood where many of the homes were built before 1900, there are certainly many modest houses on small lots quite close to the neighboring house, which contributes to density. But there are also many homes - some large, some quite small - on large lots with significant amounts of open green space; these have also contributed greatly to the neighborhood character and context. It would seem that these properties are now considered “underbuilt” by the City and are prime targets for further development, **changing the character of the neighborhood from one of mixed-density with low, moderate, and high-end housing to one of primarily high-density, high-end housing.**

Finally, I would like to note that the petitioners’ Special Permit application (#40-07) for the first phase of this development at 11 Elm was for 5 units, each with 3 bedrooms, 3 baths, and a single car garage, but the units as built are 4-bedroom, 4.5 baths, with 2-car garages. This second phase again proposes 3-bedroom, 3-bath units; **do the proposed unit sizes have any meaning?** If the developer had come forward initially with a proposal for a 9-unit development of \$1.3M+ luxury single-family attached homes, with 4 bedrooms, 4.5 baths and 2-car garages, the developer would have been required to include an affordable unit. By separating it into two phases, the developer was able to make a smaller payment to avoid including the affordable unit in the first phase (under 6 units), and won’t be required to include one in the second phase (4 units).