



Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

Members:

Lizbeth Heyer, Chair
Mark Caggiano
Eliza Datta
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CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Newton Housing Partnership

April 20, 2020

Brooke Lipsitt
Chair, Newton Zoning Board of Appeals
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Ave
Newton, MA 02459

RE: Newton Housing Partnership's Support for the Dunstan East Project

Dear Chairwoman Lipsitt,

In 2019 Mayor Fuller reconstituted the Newton Housing Partnership, entrusting us with the important job of advising her, the City Council, the Zoning Board of Appeals and other City boards and commissions on efforts to expand affordable housing opportunities in Newton. As we work to advance the Mayor's commitment to be a city that is welcoming to all, we are pleased to submit this letter in strong support of the Dunstan East project that is before the ZBA for a Comprehensive Permit. The Partnership believes that this well-planned project will make an important contribution to desperately needed affordable housing in Newton. In addition to our support, we have several suggestions to strengthen its affordable housing components.

The project sponsor came before the Partnership earlier this year to present their proposal and discuss their approach to housing affordability. While the Partnership primarily focused on the affordable housing components, the overall success of the project is critical to achieving the housing goals. We therefore considered our support in the context of the project's location, massing, density and programming (e.g. unit mix, services provided, mixed-use components, parking and open space).

Based on our review of these elements, **the Partnership voted to support the project** because of its appropriate program, massing and density given the transit-oriented location, its enhancement of public amenity space and, its contextual mix of uses that are consistent with the Washington Street vision plan adopted by the City Council in December of 2019. In addition, the following summarizes our support and recommendations relative to the affordable housing components:

Dunstan East – Housing Recommendations

- The 61 affordable housing units (25% of the overall unit count) are desperately needed in Newton.
- The affordable unit mix appropriately mirrors the overall mix in the project.
- Especially given the location near several modes of public transit; we recommend expanding and deepening affordability in the following ways:
 - Shift the housing affordability to 20% at 50% AMI (rather than the proposed 25% at 80% AMI); the deeper affordability justifies the reduction in affordable units (note: seven of the eight members supported this recommendation);



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- The project sponsor indicated a willingness to provide more affordability if the original proposed density is preserved – we support greater density and affordability in this transit-oriented location;
- Increase the number of 3-bedrooms to serve more families, thereby also increasing the number of affordable 3-bedrooms.

We also recommend that the ZBA encourage the project sponsor to seek CPA funding to create additional affordable units above the 20% -25% required under Chapter 40B. When used as capital funding, CPA funds offset a portion of the permanent debt which in turn support affordable rents for the CPA-designated units. The CPA program is extremely underutilized by private developers who, with just a little extra up-front effort (they will already be engaged with the City long-term on compliance for the 40B units), could greatly expand housing affordability in Newton at no cost to the project. The Partnership feels strongly that the Dunstan East project should utilize CPA funding for at least another 10 units, and we would appreciate the ZBA's assistance in requesting this of the sponsors.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Partnership, I strongly encourage the ZBA to approve, with our suggested changes that will expand and strengthen the affordable housing provided, the Dunstan East Comprehensive Permit application so these important project can move forward.

Sincerely,

Lizbeth Heyer
Chair, Newton Housing Partnership

CC:
Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Councilor Andrea Kelley
Councilor Julia Malakie
Councilor Pamela Wright