



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWTON

PO Box 610207 Newton, MA 02461 www.lwvnewton.org

617-383-4598 Email: info@lwvnewton.org

June 14, 2017

Dear President Lennon and Members of the Newton City Council:

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The League of Women Voters is writing to provide our full support to the Washington Place project proposed for the Orr Block in Newtonville. This is an outstanding project that will provide many benefits to our community. As a mixed use project with retail on the ground floor and housing above, with close proximity to public transportation, this project carries through our longstanding Village Center model into the modern day.

The following outlines the reasons the City Council should support this project.

Land Use Planning

When the City of Newton approved the creation of the Mixed Use 4 zone, the City Council recognized that there were areas of the city that would be appropriate for additional density. The Orr Block is an outstanding location for a MU4 project. The parcel is large enough and it fronts a wide street opposite from the Mass Pike; as a result, the project is appropriate in scale to its surroundings. There will also be wide sidewalks to encourage pedestrian accessibility and adequate space for parking.

Equally important, the project is located across the street from a commuter rail station and within walking distance to shops, dining, and entertainment activities. The market has shown that renters are interested in locations that support easy commuting into Boston and walkable access to other amenities. This type of project will have the benefit of lessening dependence on individual vehicle travel.

Housing Choice

By all measures, we have a housing affordability and accessibility problem in Newton. By adding diversity to the housing stock, more current and future residents will have improved choices for housing in our community. From seniors who are looking to transition from older, high maintenance homes to single-floor elevator accessible living to young people who are interested in living in the community where they grow up, Washington Place creates a positive new choice.



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As it relates to affordability, the developer has committed to 24 affordable apartments for households earning an average of 65 percent of the area median income and 16 units restricted to households earning between 80 percent and 120 percent of the area median income. With 25% of the units protected as affordable in perpetuity, Newton will benefit from this project for many years to come.

Community Benefits

There are numerous benefits that come with this project:

- **Ground floor retail and community space:** With 40,000 square feet for retail, the project offers opportunities for longstanding Newton businesses to have better space (the Shoe Barn has already indicated interest in one of the retail spaces) and to draw new uses to the block. Additional retail will enhance the vibrancy of the village center, supporting existing Newtonville businesses as well.

The project also offers an outdoor plaza and interior community space, which will be programmed by the New Arts Center.

- **Pedestrian:** Uses on the ground floor encourage pedestrian activity, which will be supported by wider sidewalks and redesigned crosswalks to create a safer environment for visitors who are accessing the area by foot.
- **Transportation infrastructure:** In addition to pedestrian focused improvements, the developer has committed to working with the city's transportation department to support an upgraded signalization project to improve the driver experience and for cyclists dedicated bike lanes on both Walnut and Washington streets and two bike share-stations. To encourage transit use, the developer has developed a creative new program offering up to \$300,000 in transportation stipends for project residents.
- **The natural benefits of this centrally located site** (proximity to transit and shops), a focus on alternative and improved modes of transportation includes plenty of short term and long term bike parking, Zip Car availability on the property, and designated spots and charging stations for low emitting vehicles and electric cars.

Environmental Sustainability:

Washington Place has clearly been designed with sustainability and energy efficiency in mind. Plans for the building design and construction are environmentally sensitive and created with resiliency in mind. A well-insulated building, complemented by mechanical systems that prioritize high efficiency equipment will reduce overall energy use.

The Washington Place has committed to a building that is "solar ready" for renewable energy systems; in other words, the building will have structural capacity to include a renewable energy system in the future.



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In addition to the green roof areas, the project will include a substantial subsurface storm water treatment system designed to treat and retain all storm water within the site, further improving the water quality in the watershed and reducing the strain on the municipal drainage system.

The combined impact of the above commitments, along with many others, will be a building that is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certified.

Please consider this robust endorsement of the project and its benefits as you make your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Flicop".

Susan Flicop
Vice-President, LWVN