August 18, 2021

Rick Lipof, Chair Land Use Committee
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Chairman Lipof,

The League of Women Voters of Newton is writing in support of 2Life’s request to the City Council for a special permit in connection with its proposed project for Opus, a development of 174 apartments. This will be located on the JCC Campus adjacent to Coleman House and is specifically for older adults who want to reside in Newton as they age and who are financially “in the middle” (meaning they are over-income for subsidized housing but not able to comfortably afford the more upmarket options). This proposed housing development will further the policies and positions supported by both LWVN and LWVMA to address the housing needs of low- and moderate-income families and individuals.

Opus will be located adjacent to 2Life’s Coleman House on the JCC Campus, which has 146 low and extremely low income apartments and extensive programs and services. The co-location will allow 2Life to create an innovative income inclusive community with scale to support innovation and deeper affordability of services. A few key features, of this innovative approach to senior living, that we want to highlight are:

- Healthcare will be brought to the resident rather than a resident moving to another level of care, e.g. a nursing home. This will enable people to get the right care at the right time, including coordinating their access to a la carte and small increments of care.
- Innovative and solid approach to financing, 2Life will be able to aid residents to stretch their funds with a goal off enabling most residents to remain at Opus for the rest of their lives
- The location will also allow them to integrate the activities and programs that already exist at the JCC, the Newton Community Farm and Nahanton Park.

We strongly recommend that 2 Life include measurable outcomes in its plan to integrate the two different social economic populations residing in Opus and Coleman House. In addition, we strongly encourage you to take the necessary marketing steps to attract and rent units to a diverse population including those who identify as BIPOC in order to ensure that Opus has a diverse resident population in line with the goals of the City and the LWVMA and LWVN.
In closing, I want to reference Newton’s Comprehensive Plan which states “…An economically diverse City, rather than one made up of only either wealthy or subsidized households, is the vision that we seek. The real estate market in recent decades has been transforming that aspect of the character of Newton and threatens to produce even more profound change in the future, as documented in the Housing Element. That process of market-driven change is imposing hardships on many and is damaging the kind of City most residents would prefer. It is damaging from both equity and diversity perspectives. Maintaining access to Newton housing for a broad range of households is a long-held basic community value.”

So, in alignment with the Comprehensive Plan and LWVN values and positions, we urge the City Council to approve 2Life’s special permit for the Opus housing project for older adults with our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Marcia Johnson

Marcia Johnson
President, League of Women Voters, Newton