

Comments to the Newton City Council Regarding the Special Permitting Process for the Northland Project

May 14, 2019

There is a lot to commend about the Northland development proposal, most importantly mixed use that offers high density for housing and is near public transit, and the mission to create a community that is pedestrian oriented and complimented by a natural environment. But I am here to testify today about the most important priority that must drive the content of a special permit and determine the criteria for approval of the Northland development - the climate crisis.

Yesterday we heard officially that we have now passed 415 ppm of CO₂ in the atmosphere. When Bill McKibben started 350.org over a decade ago, it was to ensure we did not go past the safe limit of 350 ppm. This is deeply disturbing news, and yet it is only the latest in a long stream of bad news reports. We are not heading toward a crisis, we are in it, and this knowledge must drive everything we do from this moment forward. There is no room for gradual transitioning. The 5-7 year time frame for this development project will bring us more than half way to the 10 year end point on our ability to determine our climate future based on the most conservative IPCC Report estimates. Our planetary crisis is unprecedented and must drive an unprecedented reaction. When we look at what is causing climate change and what can be done to mitigate, the built environment is key. So first we must agree to do no harm. As we continue to build, we must also maximize opportunity for the most cutting edge innovations. We need energy efficiency that meets Passive House certification, we must build all electric, knowing we will need to finish greening our grid within a few years, and we must commit to fossil-free buildings with a low embodied carbon footprint. None of this can be negotiable.

Green building experts assure us that we can do all of this with construction costs close to comparable to traditional construction right now, and in the near future additional technological advances will mean we can have ever-higher expectations. Green Newton's Green Building Principles should drive any special permitting process moving forward in Newton. This cannot be too complicated, too costly, too time consuming for this elected body to require. I urge the City Council to commit to these principles, to avail itself of experts who can advise, and I invite all Council members to participate in an educational process that will ensure clarity of purpose before any development decisions regarding this and other projects are made. Together, we must do our best. We cannot fail.

Thank you.

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