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## **M E M O R A N D U M**

January 25, 2017

TO: Honorable Members of the City Council

FROM: Scott Wolf, Chair - Planning & Development Board  
Jonathan Yeo, Planning & Development Board Member  
Sonia Parisca, Planning & Development Board Member  
Barney Heath, Director of Planning & Development

SUBJECT: Affirmative Vote by Planning & Development Board to Approve MU-4 Zoning for  
Washington/Walnut Street location

As members of the Planning & Development Board who prevailed in the successful motion, 4-2, to recommend to the full City Council that the MU-4 zoning be approved for the Washington /Walnut Street location, we wish to share the rationale for the Planning & Development Board's affirmative decision.

- The MU-4 zone was designed specifically for application in village centers to promote pedestrian activity and prevent the mishmash of one-story buildings set-back from the sidewalk and containing uses, which don't necessarily contribute in the context of a lively village center.
- The MU-4 zone allowance for up to a five-story height is appropriate for the property frontage along Washington Street as part of the special permit process given the prominence of this corner in a village center and the width of Washington Street.
- The MU-4 zone brings with it many ancillary benefits not permitted in BU1/BU2 zone including: public parking; community use space – an identified need in our village centers; options for improving our environment through a reduction in vehicle trips by expressly allowing car sharing services, bike rental and electric car charging; and open space. The Business zone has no requirement for public open space.
- The increased density allowed in a MU-4 district will likely encourage the development of smaller size units (studios, one bedrooms) which are lacking in Newton, and absent additional rezoning to MU-4 is not likely to result in substantial increase in traffic over the increases one could expect under existing zoning, which again would be within the purview of the City Council to regulate as part of the special permit process.

- The MU-4 zone includes design requirements such as a built to line that requires 75% of the property frontage on a public way be improved with building (versus parking), requires entrances and glazing in order to promote a lively streetscape, and requires a special permits for uses over 5,000 square feet and does not allow for less active uses such as office on the ground floor.
- In short, the MU-4 zone confers numerous benefits which result in a better product and outcome than what could exist under the current BU1/BU2 zoning.
- With respect to examining the City's **Comprehensive Plan** for guidance and consistency in granting this change of zoning, there are numerous pertinent references throughout the Plan which support the selective application of MU-4 zoning in village centers including:

**Land Use Section 3, Page 3-32** – *“One story buildings are often inefficient and a waste of expensive land so should generally be discouraged in the village centers. Where overriding historic or scale considerations are not present, density incentives might be provided to owners or developers who are willing to develop multi-story buildings. There are vacant second and third floors in buildings in village centers but not because of a lack of demand. The space is often physically and economically obsolete. In towns such as Needham, Concord and Wellesley new buildings are being built and old ones renovated in the town centers, and they are full. The reason it does not happen in Newton is because it is too difficult to develop new space.”*

**Economic Development Section 6, Page 6-7** - *“Encourage mixed-use in village centers by promoting housing above retail. Increasing density allowing mixed-use development in village centers would increase the population within walking distance and as a result would likely expand the available range of goods and services offered there. It would also increase the stock of affordable housing located close to employment centers and public transportation.”*

*“Consider the designation of overlay districts to regulate land use in village centers.”*

**Housing Section 5, Page 5-16** - *“We should revise zoning to actively support a mix of uses within a building, a parcel or an area. Such mixed-use can promote housing affordability and a broader variety of living circumstances. Facilitating provision of housing together with retailing can promote a more active environment.”*

In sum, the majority of the Planning & Development Board, after listening to all of the public testimony and weighing all of the evidence, recommends the granting of the MU-4 zoning change for this specific location.