

MEMORANDUM

To: The Brookline Select Board
From: Vitaly Veksler, Anna Veksler, 23 Kenwood Street, Unit 2
Subject: Problems with the Proposed Building at 500 Harvard Street
Date: December 7, 2018

Dear Brookline Select Board Members:

Thank you for sending us a letter notifying us about the application that The Danesh Group submitted for construction of a building at 500 Harvard Street. Also, thank you for organizing a public hearing that allowed us to look at the proposed building's design.

We oppose the proposed design of the building at 500 Harvard Street for the following reasons:

- 1. Wrong Benchmark or Wrong Town:** The developer's architect talked about the building and how it would match building in Allston or Brighton in terms of its population density. Yet, they propose to build it in Brookline. Shouldn't the building match the population density and architectural style of Brookline? The building that the developer advertises as a 5-story building is close to a 7-story one, with a very tall first (business) floor. In fact, there is not even a single 5-story building (even without a business floor) on Harvard Street north of Beacon Street. The proposed building would stick as a giant eye sore in the neighborhood around the Coolidge Park, where the tallest building is 3-story high. The size of the building, the developers' benchmarking it against buildings in Brighton and Allston, and the developers' focus on attracting people renting apartments to the neighborhood with a very high house- and condo-ownership rate makes us believe that the design was developed not for Brookline but either for Allston or Brighton. In our opinion, each building design should be developed to match the style of the town or neighborhood where it is going to be built.
- 2. Significant Parking Situation Deterioration around the Proposed Building Site:** The developers propose to build a building with 30 residential units on the corner of Kenwood Street that has only 23 houses. Since most of these houses are single-family homes, several of which were converted to two-family homes, the addition of the building at 500 Harvard Street would more than double the street's population. Since the building has inadequate parking, with only 6 spots for 30 units, its occupants would heavily rely on service vehicles, such as taxis, Uber, Lyft, and food delivery cars and trucks to support their needs. In addition, traffic and parking deficit would increase due to the need for visits by additional vehicles that would include postal delivery trucks, FedEx and UPS trucks, utility vehicles, repair people's cars and trucks, and many other ones. Since there is inadequate parking on Harvard Street, the main thoroughfare, even before the addition of the proposed building, all these vehicles would flood Kenwood Street and three neighboring streets – Verndale, Russell, and Columbia. However, it is difficult to find parking spaces on these streets as it is. Please see attached photos of parked vehicles on Kenwood, Russell and Columbia Streets taken previous Friday afternoon.

Recent additions of two large residential buildings similar to the one proposed by the developers on Brainerd Road (60 and 69 Brainerd Road) in Allston, demonstrate that traffic and pedestrian safety would be at risk as there are almost always double-parked vehicles (i.e. Uber, Lyft, taxis, repairmen, etc.) in front of these buildings.

3. **Reduced Safety due to Increasing Traffic around Coolidge Park:** Coolidge Park is a local gem that provides tranquility, sports fields and shade not only to residents from the four streets around it, but to residents of other parts of Brookline as well as of Allston and Brighton, who walk to Brookline from as far as North Beacon Street. In order to reduce traffic around the park and increase safety of people walking there, the Town of Brookline has permanently closed for traffic Columbia Street that used to connect Brookline and Allston. The extra traffic affiliated with 500 Harvard Street project would inevitably reduce safety for pedestrians walking to the park and kids that sometimes run out of it. What is especially troubling would be the fact that most of the drivers of the service vehicles would not be local residents and would drive faster than the residents, who do not speed in their neighborhood.
4. **Harvard Street is Congested and is Getting More So with New Projects:** There are three large construction projects, including one by The Danesh Group, that are under construction on Harvard Street. Even before residents moved in these three properties, the street is congested. During the rush hour, it often takes more than 10 minutes to get from Kenwood Street to Beacon Street (a distance of just 0.6 miles) and 20 minutes to Mass Turnpike (a distance of 1.5 miles). Even without the proposed 500 Harvard Street building, adding traffic from the upcoming three projects would further increase congestion on Harvard Street. Vehicles that would service residents of 500 Harvard Street and residents' cars would further add to the congestion.
5. **Lowering Values of Houses in Brookline:** The developers suggested that they want to build the building for renters. Most houses in our section of Brookline are owner-occupied. That is why all houses are meticulously maintained and the streets are clean. Our neighbors and we do not wait for the garbage day to pick trash up on the streets. But as the saying goes, "Nobody washes a rented car." During more than 15 years that we lived in Allston in a building mostly with a mix of young professionals and students, while we were saving for buying a condo in Brookline, we observed that the renters' care for the neighborhood was on average much lower than that by owners. For example, the renters dropped cigarette butts and other garbage out of their windows on our and other vehicles parked below, kicked vehicles parked in front of the building causing serious damage, organized huge parties when the whole building shook from music and noise without much regard to common areas and other people in the building. As us, many people saved for years and still took huge loans to afford their move to Brookline, a town that provides tranquility and a good school system in the middle of a bustling metropolis. The massive inflow of young renters that the proposed construction of a huge building at 500 Harvard Street would entail, would also undoubtedly bring some "bad apples" among the young renters and would reduce prices of the existing buildings in our neighborhood in Brookline.
6. **Noise from the Building:** The proposed building is similar to the Dexter Park complex, another building focusing on rentals for young professionals and students, a development that is known in Brookline for its noise and partying. Unlike the Dexter Park, which has an attendant on duty, 500 Harvard Street does not plan to have one. Since there would be nobody to complain to in cases of loud partying, we would have to call police further straining their limited resources. Before houses on Verndale Street were purchased by

families that renovated them, a number of them were rented out to students and young professionals, who organized parties that could be heard in Allston. We simply do not want this noisy environment, especially, with music blaring from the top floors of the proposed building all over the neighborhood.

7. **Shade and No Privacy:** Several of the houses closest to the proposed 500 Harvard Street Building would be in its shade and would have to have their blinds closed for privacy protection all the time.
8. **Disregard for the Neighbors:** During the meeting, we were shocked by the fact that the developers blatantly disregarded interests of people living at 514/516 Harvard Street. It was heartbreaking to hear comments of an old lady who lives at 514 Harvard Street and who would lose the only source of sunshine through the window in her apartment after the developers would build 500 Harvard Street building with a solid wall just inches from her window. The developers' willingness to do this shows that their motivation in building the building is purely financial with no regard to their neighbors. The developers' behavior is opposite to the behavior of an old painter in O. Henry's "The Last Leaf" story. There he sacrificed his life to encourage his neighbor to gather her forces and fight against a deadly disease. The 500 Harvard Street developers propose a project that would rid people from 514 Harvard Street of natural light and sunshine, which was shown in multiple studies to improve people's mood and be a source of hope. According to the Free Dictionary, a ray of sunshine is "someone or something that makes others feel happy and positive, often during a difficult time." We understand that we all need to make living, but there are different ways about it.

Conclusion: We ask the Select Board not to pursue a project at 500 Harvard Street, at least not in its current form. Under the guise of providing six units at affordable prices, the developers are trying to make the Town of Brookline waive its zoning regulations, which were developed and religiously applied across Brookline for decades. During a recent yard renovation project, for example, our neighbor and we were not able to widen our driveway by less than a foot because it would be too close to the border of our property. In the meantime, the developers of 500 Harvard Street are proposing to build the biggest and the tallest building on Harvard Street north of Beacon Street, a building that is simply too big for the footprint. It would be good if these developers or other developers would build a building that would fit Brookline's (rather than Allston's or Brighton's) population density and the neighborhood's low-rise nature. If this or another development group decides to renovate the existing restaurant, it would also be a great solution for the neighborhood.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.