

April 12, 2021

Dear Maria,

I hope you have been doing well!

As a member of the Save North Brookline committee and as a resident of the five-street area around Coolidge Park, I continue to ask ZBA to consider the views of the overwhelming majority of residents of the area. Please make the developers lower the height of the proposed building at 500 Harvard Street. A tall and narrow six-story building would tower over the whole neighborhood as an overgrown giant that completely does not fit in the neighborhood.

Sustainable Town Development: As I mentioned on a number of occasions, I believe in sustainable development or development that considers most residents' interests around each construction project. These people and their families live there: they know problems with traffic patterns, parking, and other aspects of life around each site not because of traffic or parking studies based on several hours-worth of observations. The residents know a lot about their neighborhoods because they have observed the traffic, parking, and other aspects of life for years. They are more likely to identify both positive and negative externalities that new buildings may cause. The opinions of many residents, rather than those of just a few people from outside of their neighborhoods, are more likely to implement the wisdom behind the title of a famous book by James Surowiecki, *"The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations."* During the pandemic, we (members of the Save North Brookline committee) collected 110 signatures of residents under the petition to limit the building's height. The six-story building, especially with a "tall" first retail floor, is highly unpopular in the neighborhood.

Unsustainable Town Development: On the opposite, unsustainable development is based on a small number of people's interests and is often based on flimsy estimates. For example, in the case of 500 Harvard Street, the traffic study was done at the darkest hour of the COVID-19 pandemic when almost all adults and children in the area (80%-90%) were confined to their homes. Very few people were driving anywhere, and the traffic patterns measured by the developers' team are as different from the real post-pandemic patterns as "a night from a day." In its current form, the project focuses only on satisfying the interests of developers, a small number of people who would get affordable units, and some activists, most of whom support ideas for the construction of huge buildings, as long as they are built far from where they live.

Some developers share the depth of views of the latter group. During the previous call on the 500 Harvard Street building, it was simply funny to learn that the developers completely changed their "deeply-rooted" views on developing huge buildings. They changed their views as soon as another developer proposed constructing a building across the street from the 455 Harvard Street building. That building was built by the would-be developers of 500 Harvard Street. Suddenly, they realized the truth about all the problems with constructing oversize buildings that Brookline residents talked about for years and opposed the other building vociferously.

On a side note, during the conversations in Coolidge Park, people laughed, wondering what happens to the developers' views about constructing huge buildings if other developers decide to build a high-rise building or buildings on the plot of land where the Newbury College used to be. This land plot on Fisher Hill was purchased by the Town of Brookline and is not far from where the developers live. It would have been nice if all people remembered what the Bible said on the topic, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Article on Upzoning: Our views on the subject of only a few benefitting from the construction of oversize buildings is supported by leading urban development scientists. I am sending you a link to

an article titled “Build More Housing” is No Match for Inequality.” The article gives a macro view on upzoning, or changing the zoning code to allow taller and/or denser buildings, that we have been discussing in relation to the 500 Harvard Street building from the micro perspective for years. Not even reading the article, we presented the arguments that the authors of the article support. I have found the Bloomberg article re-published on the website of the Brookline by Design group, another group of citizens interested in the sustainable development of Brookline, after a member of the Save North Brookline committee told me about the group. This article was written by Richard Florida, a leading urban studies theorist and an author of bestselling books on urban development and regeneration. He serves as a Professor and the Head of the Martin Prosperity Institute at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and a Distinguished Fellow at NYU’s School of Professional Studies. Here is a link to the article:

[“Build More Housing” is No Match For Inequality, by Richard Florida \(brooklinebydesign.com\)](https://www.brooklinebydesign.com/build-more-housing-is-no-match-for-inequality-by-richard-florida/)

The 2019 article by Richard Florida focuses on a paper titled “Housing, Urban Growth and Inequalities” on upzoning that was written by two leading economic geographers: Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, The Princesa de Asturias Chair and a Professor of Economic Geography at the London School of Economics, and Michael Storper, an economic and urban geographer who teaches at the University of California (UCLA), Sciences Po and London School of Economics. According to Wikipedia, “in 2014 he was named by Thomson Reuters as one of the “World’s Most Influential Scientific Minds” of the 21st century for his writings being among the top 1% most cited in the field of social sciences.”

Below are two important conclusions from the article. I do not want to change anything in them and quote them from Richard Florida’s article.

“Upzoning is far from the progressive policy tool it has been sold to be. It mainly leads to building high-end housing in desirable locations.”

“The two are not the only scholars to raise such concerns. Economist Tyler Cowen agrees that the ultimate beneficiaries from zoning and building deregulation are landlords and developers. As he puts it, “the gains from removing taxes/restrictions on building largely will be captured by landowners ... More stuff will be built, urban output will expand, land still will be the scarce factor, and by the end of the process rents still will be high.” And a recent study by Yonah Freemark found that upzoning in Chicago led to higher, not lower, housing prices, while having no discernible impact on local housing supply.”

Tyler Cowen is a Professor and Holbert L. Harris Chair in the economics department at George Mason University. Yonah Freemark is a senior research associate in Metropolitan Housing and Communities at the Urban Institute. According to his profile on the Urban Institute’s website, “his research focuses on the intersection of land use, affordable housing, and transportation.”

I am attaching the Bloomberg article by Richard Florida and the underlying paper by Andrés Rodríguez-Pose and Michal Storper in PDF format.

Please support the “wisdom of the crowds” of the residents around Coolidge Park and limit the proposed building’s height. Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Very best regards,

Vitaly Veksler
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Member of the Save North Brookline committee