

Kent Station Street Affordable Senior Housing Project

Letter to the Select Board • May 17, 2022

Warrant Article History and Status

I'm here to offer some history and look ahead. As an abutting resident and owner of Liz Linder Photography (and newly elected Town Meeting Member for Precinct 4), I was involved in Warrant Article 34 back in 2016. I joined committees and worked with some of you to work up an RFP and select a developer. I brought the neighborhood into the conversation, and we came to support the project.

Warrant Article 34 proposed a winning solution: *to preserve essential parking by developing affordable housing above town-owned lots*. The Kent/Station lot was targeted as an initial site. Given a small footprint and that the building be designed to scale within a historic area, the RFP substituted air rights with a requirement to replace on-site parking of 39 spots for community use. It seemed a fair exchange at the time, but fast-forward 6 years to Warrant Article 30.

WA30 gives the selected developer the option to eliminate or reduce these central parking spaces at their discretion to close a budget gap. It pits affordable housing against parking while neglecting context and community. It cites alternate parking options that don't exist. The original petition is based on misinformation and simplistic moralistic appeals, and as such is irresponsible, the fallout of which will imperil brick-and-mortar businesses locally.

Following significant involvement and concern as business owners and associations caught wind of this, it appears a proposed rewrite corrects facts and requires due diligence via a parking study and promise to replace spaces for business use.

To visualize 39 spaces, this is equivalent to usable metered spots up Harvard St between Washington and Aspinwall. Imagine how the Village would function with that parking suddenly removed? How will the business community – still dealing with economic fallout from COVID – continue to recover?

Warrant Article 34 would not have been considered if it eliminated or redistributed parking, since it was *based* on preservation of parking. The business community and residents like myself who don't own off-street parking rely on these spaces to function. Currently, my employees and clients' frequent other establishments locally – a bite, a gift, a haircut, another appointment... meeting friends for the above. Imagine losing employees or clients because they can't find parking – which has compounding effects. I don't have to imagine this; without available parking, I will need to reconsider where to run my business.

A compromise would include language to identify suitable replacement spots beforehand – could there be a deck above the Kent/Webster Street lot, for instance? It

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would mandate in the RFP the developer manages construction workers' off-site parking. And it would protect current parking for customers and visitors.

Warrant Article 30 in its original form violates the trust of the community and brings into question original intent. The unintended consequences are too great a cost with too little benefit. A rewrite of Warrant Article 30 must reflect with integrity the realities of the community it proposes to serve. As institutional memory fades quickly, Town Meeting Members will vote with Brookline Village in the balance, and we need guarantees, as opposed to vagaries and aspirations. Thank you for your attention.