

June 8, 2016

To the members of Newton City Council –

My name is Tricia Cunningham, and I currently reside at 6 Washington Terrace, located in the village of Newtonville. I am writing this evening to share with all of you my direct experience with Mark Investment – specifically with Robert Korff, in relation to the proposed “Washington Place” development. My preference would have been to share this information with you last night at the hearing which took place at city hall, but unfortunately I was one of the six remaining people, who after sitting through the three hour hearing, was unable to speak due to the time constraint. While the purpose of this letter is to inform the city council members of my experience thus far in this development process, I cannot go without saying that I was very frustrated leaving City Hall last night without my five minutes at the podium. I do not know what the other five people who also did not have the opportunity to speak were prepared to say, but I feel that being directly involved in this process as a displaced tenant, I should have had an opportunity to speak. I should hope that in future hearings – in relation to this topic and others – that those speaking in groups are asked to do so at the end of hearings, or not at all. Additionally, those looking to voice their opinions at the podium are held to their time constraint given by the chairman, allowing for all those with comments and concerns to have their right to voice their opinions.

As you know, Washington Terrace became a part of the proposed “Washington Place” project shortly after the announcement of the initial plans for the Orr Building, displacing tenants in the 5 homes on the right side of the street (which are all rental properties). I am aware that as a rental tenant in my building, I am limited to what my families rights are in a process such as this. One of the larger risks which one takes when renting any property, is that when it comes time to sell the property the renter has no voice in the decision making. I would like to say that I have no ill feelings towards my landlord in making the decision to sell his property, in fact, my husband and I think that he would be crazy not to sell. This letter is not about the fact that we are being displaced or the physical displacement at all. Cities change all of the time, and sometimes people become involved (directly and indirectly) whether they want to be or not. This letter does not address the rights of a renter; rather it focuses on the relationship(s) that the developer is trying to form with those he is displacing.

When we learned in January, via a conversation with our neighbors, that there was a building being proposed to take the place of the Orr Building, with the potential to build through Washington Terrace, I panicked. I panicked for several reasons. My husband, my daughter and I have resided at 6 Washington Terrace since 2009. We chose Newton because we heard wonderful things about the city, it kept my husband Dennis within his mile restrictions from home to work (he is a Weston Firefighter), and because overall the city seemed to be a good “fit” for our family – with crime rates low and amazing school systems, it seemed like a win win. Since 2009, my daughter has flourished at the Newton Public Schools. My daughter has had specific needs that have come up over the years, which the teachers and staff at both Horace Mann and Day Middle school have not only addressed, but exceeded our expectations in meeting her needs. These experiences are what assured us that my daughter would thrive at Newton North in September 2016 as a freshman. She began the process of “transition” to the high school – visiting the school, speaking with her guidance counselor, having a 504 exit meeting, filling out her schedule etc. For the first time in many years, she has become excited about a large transition – something that we have yet to experience with her. There are no words to describe as a parent, watching your child be able to master a life skill that has been such a struggle for so long for their child. When we heard it was likely we would be moving in the upcoming year, it seemed like all of our positive

progress came to an abrupt halt. There was a possibility that I was going to have to pull my daughter from Newton Public schools if we were unable to stay in Newton.

After attending the first meeting in February at Newton North High School to share the idea of the proposed development, I did not feel like I had any more information than I had prior to attending the meeting. I did not stay for all of the public commentary, as at that meeting Washington Terrace was being considered, but not part of the proposal at that time. From the date of that first meeting, until approximately the end of February, I had Julia Malaki and members of the historic society knocking at my door seeking information, and my landlord had yet to inform us of any information of his intention to sell. Anxiety was high – as I am sure you are aware, no information or misinformation can be deadly. Shortly after the first meeting at Newton North, Jeff Dagostino reached out to us (and it is my understanding other tenants whom would be displaced) via phone conversation. He identified himself as working with Robert Korff, and he gave us contact information in case we had questions during the building process, as well as asked to share our current situation with him/Robert Korff so that they could get a better understanding of the individual tenants whom they would be displacing and their individual needs. A short time after the phone call, I emailed a letter to Mr. Dagostino, outlining how the upcoming displacement would affect my family. I specifically referenced my daughter – her struggles and her gains over the last several years. I made mention that it would be our families goal to stay in Newton and allow her to finish her schooling at Newton North, and how it would be difficult for us to be able to do this – as the rent in Newton is high, and our current rent is relatively low. Mr. Dagostino got back to me several days later, asking if my husband and I would be willing to meet with him and Mr. Korff. On March 9th, Mr. Korff came to my home and it was the first time in this entire process I was able to “put a face to the project.”

Mr. Korff was very sensitive to our families particular needs – both in our financial situation, as well as with our daughter. He listened to our concerns, and recognized the importance for our family to stay in Newton. Mr. Korff assured us that we would not be asked to move in the immediate future, and that we had time to devise a plan that would best fit our family. Although he was not able to give a timeline which was set in stone, he encouraged us to reach out to him if we were able to find a solution for our family and if there was anything that he could do to help. While we did not directly ask for financial support at that time, Mr. Korff touched upon the fact that he was not looking to place families in hardship, and was willing to help families during this time of transition. At the end of our meeting Mr. Korff gave us his direct contact information to be able to work with him directly in the future. For the first time in several months I felt as if I could breath.

My husband and I began to keep our “eyes open” for a two bedroom apartment that would be within our price range, but did not actively view apartments from March through the beginning of May. Ironically, through a neighbor on our street, we heard of an apartment which would be available as of June 1st – a 2 bedroom apartment in our price range, open to allowing my cat, but most importantly within Newton North’s school district. We got in contact with the landlord to the new apartment immediately, and at this time I also reached out to Mr. Korff as well. We set up a time to meet with Mr. Korff to meet, again in my home, to discuss our new opportunity. During this meeting Mr. Korff not only remained professional, but showed a personal interest in this opportunity being the right fit for our family. He wanted to be sure that we were not taking something less than what we had now, that it meet our goals financially moving forward, and that it met everything we were looking for in regards to meeting my daughter’s needs. Our primary concern moving forward was that, as most apartments do, the landlord would be requiring first, last and security upon moving into the apartment. With a potential move in date of June 1st, and it being the middle of May, this was not an amount of money

that we would be able to provide our new landlord with – but we were afraid to lose the opportunity to take on this new apartment. Mr. Korff told us to meet with the new landlord, view the apartment, and if it was the right choice for us, he would be willing to help us provide the required funds to secure the apartment. After seeing the apartment and meeting with the new landlord, the apartment proved to be a perfect fit. The new apartment is slightly bigger in size than Washington Terrace, provides 2 car off street parking, has a backyard (which we did not have before), has been kept in better condition than the apartment on Washington Terrace – and most importantly, allowing us to stay in Newton and is within Newton North’s school district. Without Mr. Korff’s help, we would not have been able to secure the apartment.

City council members, I write this letter to you to share my positive experience with this displacement process. While we did not intend to move from Washington Terrace in the next 5 years, we completely recognize the fact that change occurs when you least expect it. This experience could have been the complete opposite – and quite frankly it could have been detrimental to my daughter in many ways. Instead, as we embraced the change, my daughter has learned so much from this process. Last night one of the speakers spoke of how those being displaced would “leave Newton, never to return again.” Mr. Korff is not pushing people out of Newton – in fact, he helped us fight to be able to stay in Newton. One city council member mentioned how the developer of the Austin Street project told her to “google it” when she sought information in regards development plans. Mr. Korff’s attention to those who are affected by his proposed build is an example of compassionate character. I ask the members of city council to consider the examples of compassion that I have experienced while working with Mr. Korff when moving forward with this proposed project. The people, the man in this case, who stand behind their projects, are a reflection of what the project can produce.

City council members, I thank you for your time in reading my letter and acknowledging my experience. If you need anything further from me, I have listed my contact information below. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Tricia Cunningham

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