

Section Overview

Resident Sentiment — What Newtonites Think

A substantial number of Newton residents want to see limited size and density in new developments. Neither the city nor anyone else has conducted a city-wide systematic survey on this issue. But we have compelling evidence that a large portion of Newtonvillians and Newtonites generally oppose large dense developments.

1. Since May 2016 we have circulated a petition asking the City Council not to rezone the Orr Block.¹ We've collected 3020 signatures (no duplicates) to date, the end of 2016. 90% of signatures were on paper; the other 10% came from an on-line site. Besides the signatures, the personal contact we had with residents yielded an intimate knowledge of people's concerns.²

Among the wards:

- 30% were from Ward 2 (we petitioned mostly in and around Newtonville).
- 39% were from the other North Side wards (1, 3 and 4).
- The remainder were from other villages.

2. The organization *Beautiful Newtonville* conducted a survey of Newtonville residents in 2014, at the time Austin Street was being debated. The results clearly show preference for less massive and less dense development.³

Key findings:

- 82% said a development of three stories or fewer would work best.
- 80% of residents wanted 40 or fewer residential units. That includes 20% who wanted no residential units at all.

These sentiments would be very relevant to other nearby developments, including the Orr Block, which is just .2 miles away from Austin Street.

¹ In this section: *A Petition against Rezoning the Orr Block*.

² In this section: *Typical Comment from a Signer*.

³ In this section: *What People in Newtonville Want — Results of the Austin Street Community Survey*.

Contents of This Section

Resident Sentiment — What Newtonites Think

Page numbers start afresh for each article.

- *A Petition Against Rezoning the Orr Block*
Peter Bruce, Ph.D.
¾ To date, 3020 residents have signed our petition asking the City Council to reject rezoning of the Orr Block. Many thought the development was just too large.
- *Comment from a Newtonville Resident*
Tom Gorman
¾ This online comment captures many of the themes that residents have expressed to us.
- *What Newtonville Will Be Like If the Korff Colossus Is Built*
Fred Goldstein
¾ Another comment from a resident.
- *What People in Newtonville Want — Results of the Austin Street Community Survey*
Beautiful Newtonville
¾ The results of Beautiful Newtonville's 2014 survey are relevant to the Orr Block. In that survey, 82% of people said they preferred a development of three stories or less. And 80% of them wanted it to have 40 residential units or fewer.

A Petition Against Rezoning the Orr Block
Conducted by Neighbors for a Better Newtonville (NBN)
Status Report by Peter Bruce, Ph.D.

Beginning in mid-May 2016, NBN has led a petition drive through which residents of Newtonville and other parts of Newton could express their opposition to rezoning the Orr Block to MU4 status. The essence of the petition was to object to the size and density of the buildings that Mark Newtonville, LLC has petitioned to build there.

This report marks our progress to date. In about five months of active petitioning (we took a break in July and August) we have accumulated 3020 signers Newton-wide. This compares favorably, for instance, to the eight years it took the League of Women Voters and other groups to gather 8000 signatures for the Charter review.

We gathered signatures in front of Star Market, the Main Library, sporting and civic events, and by going door-to-door. Our petitioners were instructed to have people write clearly and confine signers to town residents. In the scanned copies of petitions sent to City Councilors, we have lined-out almost all duplicate signers and non-residents. This includes one person who changed her mind, and now favors rezoning (who does not live in Newton). We have also excluded those who have given incomplete or illegible information which we could not reasonably match in Newton's *Annual Listing of Residents* or voter lists (about 45 signers). By cross-referencing our signers with the *Annual Listing of Residents*, we have learned something about who they are, demographically, and what party they are enrolled in.

We have turned over the names and addresses of our signers to City Clerk David Olson.

In gathering signatures, our small group of petitioners focused mostly on getting paper petition signers rather than online signers. Some City Councilors have voiced (valid) concerns that online petition totals can be padded by people signing more than once. We are happy to report that more than 90% of our signatures came via paper petitions.

Demographic and Partisan Breakdowns of Supporters

By Ward: The largest portion of our signers came from Ward 2 (30%), where the Orr Block is located. The next largest came from adjacent north-side wards, Ward 1 (15%) and Ward 3 (14%). But fairly strong support also came from Waban, Auburndale, and the closer parts of Newton Centre (Wards 4, 5, and 6). No doubt we would have had more signatures from the southern parts of Newton if we had had the manpower to petition there.

Ward	Number	Percent
1	449	15%
2	911	30%
3	436	14%
4	297	10%
5	300	10%
6	310	10%
7	166	6%
8	150	5%
Grand Total	3020	

By Party: Signers were most likely to be Democrats, and next most likely to be unenrolled in any party. Only 5% of our signers were Republicans.

Nearly 80% of our signers were listed as registered voters in the *Annual Listing*. The percentage would be higher now because others undoubtedly registered recently in order to vote in the November general election. The table below is based on the 2380 signers whose affiliations were in the *Listing*. It's striking that the Democratic proportion of signers is 9 points higher than the total proportion of registered Democrats in the city. This suggests that the Mayor and other prominent Democratic leaders who support this project may be somewhat out of step with their base.

Party Affiliation	Signers	Total City*
Democrat	53%	44%
Republican	5%	8%
Unenrolled	41%	48%

*From City Hall's "Voter Total Sheet" of 10/24/16, which is more current and comprehensive than the *Listing of Residents*.

Does the high percentage of Democratic signers reflect the disproportionate weight of Ward 2 signers — and the fact that Ward 2 has the second-highest concentration of Democrats of Newton Wards? The answer is No: Within Ward 2, Democrats were over-represented among our signers by only about 6 percent. But in the rest of Newton, they were overrepresented by about 10 percent.

Of further interest, in Ward 2 nearly half the active members of the Newton Democratic City Committee, including some of the most prominent, have signed our petition or otherwise expressed opposition to rezoning the Orr block. This contrasts sharply with the Austin Street project, for which the Ward 2 Democrats had been active “Friends of Austin Street,” and (to our knowledge) the only Ward Committee that took that position. A number of prominent party leaders have also signed.

*By Occupation:*¹ About a third of our signers (32%) were not listed as having money-making occupations. They include retirees (13%), unknown (12%), and small numbers of students, housewives, unemployed, and other such categories.

The great majority of the employed were in professional occupations. The largest categories listed were:

Occupation	Number	Percent
Teacher	114	5%
Physician/M.D./Doctor	85	4%
Attorney/Lawyer	87	4%
Engineer	57	2%
Consultant	44	2%
Professor	39	2%
Manager	31	1%
Scientist	29	1%

These categories are followed by writer, sales, social worker, lawyer, psychologist, artist, and administrator.

¹ Technical note: citizens are free to record their occupation any way they like, and apparently the recording personnel are also free to abbreviate as they like. The result is that many listings are unique or nearly so; for example, there are 19 'nurse,' 10 'reg nurse,' 3 'nurse pract', 2 'nurse prac', and so on. So the occupation numbers are only approximate.

There are also many (587) blanks. Our figures are based on the 2438 respondents who did have occupational listings (including 'unknown'). In spite of the uncertainties, the broad outlines of occupation are clear enough.

Over 680 categories are listed, the majority with just one person per category. However, a quick scan confirms what the chart above shows: the large majority of employed signers are in professional roles.

Comment from a Newtonville Resident
Tom Gorman, an online signer of our Petition

I believe this project is way out-of-scale for this site and that it will create detrimental and long-lasting traffic and parking problems and that it will change the character of Newtonville for the worse.

I am basically pro-development, by the way, but this project is simply too large for this site. ALSO, and this point is key, there is no way this project should proceed until we see the effects of development at the Austin Street site.

I understand that the investment and carrying costs may be burdensome, but the developer made an investment and understood the risks. The City Council exists to protect current residents and business, not to ensure returns on investment for private developers.

I applaud the desire to develop this site, and would like to see it developed, but this project is simply too much, too large, and too soon (after Austin St.).

What Newtonville Will Be Like If the Korff Colossus Is Built
Public Comment by Fred Goldstein

I am a commercial tenant in the Orr Building.

If the Korff project is built as planned, what will visitors experience when they come to shop?

What will Village residents experience as they go by the building, or live or work near it? What will the complex do to Newtonville's sense of place as a Village?

The project includes 40,000 square feet of high-end retail space on the ground floor. The developer expects shoppers from outside the Village to support the businesses — in fact, the high-end stores he wants could not survive without out-of-Village shoppers. That means more demand on parking.

The project's overall ambiance is supposed to be that of a high-end mall, a mini version of Chestnut Hill Square. Street parking cannot accommodate the customers who would come to its businesses, so the developer proposes a parking lot inside the complex, from which most customers will enter the stores. The parking lot itself is still insufficient, which is why the developer is asking for reduced-size parking spaces and has dispensed with trees in the lot. The high-end ambiance will be compromised by the lack of adequate parking.

The project will not blend into our village neighborhood. It will be more like a black hole. On Washington Street, the buildings will create a noise chamber amplifying the sounds of traffic and the turnpike. Walnut Street, which is already quite loud, will become even worse, not a pleasant place to walk. And the new building will cast a great shadow over Walnut Street's narrow, 50-foot-wide space. What kind of Sense of Place will that create? Welcome to *Walnut Canyon*: Dark and loud.

Our current zoning minimizes these effects. Our current zoning supports pedestrian-friendly neighborhood businesses. It helps create and maintain a real village impression. The low rise buildings create an open, friendly atmosphere that is integral to our village identification. With the rezoning and many waivers that Korff requests, Walnut Street will instead be a dark canyon filled with cars stuck in traffic.

I ask that you vote to deny this project and send the developer back to the drawing board to come up with a plan more compatible with our existing village.

What People in Newtonville Want

Results of the Austin Street Community Survey

This survey, done by *Beautiful Newtonville* in 2014, confirms our contention that a large majority of Newtonvillians want limited mass and height in new construction. This survey was focused on the Austin Street project, but the sentiments expressed here clearly would apply to the Orr Block as well.

The following summary is copied from the website, <http://beautifulnewtonville.org/results-of-the-austin-street-community-survey/>.

1 March 2014, 1:19 pm

The Newtonville Area Council conducted an online survey to gauge public sentiment about the proposed Austin Street development. The survey polled Newtonville residents age 14 and older, employees of village establishments, and commercial property owners.

10% (738) of Newtonville's 7,370 resident population age fourteen and older completed the survey, reflecting a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$. Approximately 65% of local [business] establishments completed the survey.

Executive Summary

Three quarters of Newtonville residents (75%) would be receptive to an Austin Street development – if it met their criteria.

What are those criteria?

Scale

Over three quarters of residents (82%) say a development of three stories or less would work best.

Density

The overwhelming majority of residents (80%) want 40 or fewer residential units. That includes 20% of surveyed residents who want no residential units at all.

Public Parking

The overwhelming majority of residents (79%) want to retain 100 or more public parking spaces. That includes 40% of surveyed residents who want 150 or more spaces.

[Ed.: This applies to Austin Street only.]

[Business] Establishments

[Business] establishments paralleled resident sentiment, except some favored higher residential density and a higher building.

Pros and Cons

Two thirds of residents (65%) named “sprucing up Newtonville” as a development’s main potential benefit. Over two thirds (69%) named loss of parking as a development’s major potential drawback.