

On Wed, Feb 26, 2020 at 10:59 PM greg schwartz <greg.schwartz02@gmail.com> wrote:

To the editor,

As a subscriber for more than 20 years, I have often looked to the Globe's editorial board for their insight and guidance. Therefore, I was dismayed to read your editorial on Monday regarding the Northland project in Newton, because it failed so completely to identify the salient issues before the voters in the upcoming referendum next Tuesday.

I was Chairman of the Land Use Committee of the Newton City Council during the last term, which means I chaired over every public hearing and working group session that we had on the project. For two years, the committee spent many hours reviewing and trying to solve the problems raised by the proposal. The issue that we heard from residents about the most, and that we worked so hard to fix, was the expected worsening of traffic on Needham Street, which is already at a standstill on most days at rush hour. We crafted a robust traffic management plan to address this, but had no certainty it would sufficiently reduce the number of extra cars on the road generated by the project's future residents and businesses.

It is primarily this traffic concern that opponents of the project continue to raise as their main argument against the project. Your editorial completely glosses over this valid concern. Instead, you invoke the housing crisis in the greater Boston area and a presumed suburban opposition to affordable housing as the main issues facing voters next Tuesday. That is so far from the truth that I feel compelled to correct the record.

At no time during our public hearings was the proposal for 140 units of low- and middle-income affordable housing opposed by the public. In fact, many from the Upper Falls community, which is most affected by the project, raised concerns that there was not enough affordable housing in the project. They urged the developer to provide more than the bare minimum required under our zoning ordinance. But did Northland increase the percentage of affordable units, which it could have done by replacing market rate units with affordable ones? No, the developer stuck to the minimum, suggesting the pursuit of profit, not housing justice, was their goal. Your editorial's suggestion that opponents of the project are against affordable housing, while the developer is motivated by altruism, simply ignores the record.

Greg Schwartz, Chairman Land Use Committee 2018-2020, Newton City Councilor at Large 2012-2020.