Yes for a new school and skyline

The upcoming Special Town Meeting, commencing on March 14, means a lot of things to a lot of people, but for everyone living in and, particularly if paying taxes, the biggest motivation should be self-interest which, let’s face it, is most everyone’s primary concern.

A group of Residents, employees and public officials are seeking TM’s blessing for funding to build a replacement for the Cookley Middle School. The total cost for the project is $154 million (of which $46 million will be paid by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)). The MSBA recently unanimously voted to approve the project, and if TM endorses the article the only obstacle left will be at the ballot box on April 4.

Some have argued that not enough actual cost based/benefit analysis has been conducted to justify taxpayers getting whacked once again in support of a better Norwood. And an argument could be made that a detailed analysis of the dollar and cents, as was produced prior to the new high school being approved, is justification enough for denying the endorsement. This newspaper doesn’t agree.

First and foremost, almost a third of the project is being picked up by the state, and that should alone mitigate, at least to a certain degree, the grossness of any cost to the taxpayer. If someone was to offer to pay a third of your house purchase, no strings attached, how many would say “no thanks, I really need more time to do my due diligence.”?

When opportunity knocks, you jump on it. And that’s like the decision to build new was made in a vacuum. Plenty of very smart people over the last few years have determined this is the right direction to take, and we agree. This vote will only promote property values, so TM endorsing the money is no brainer and should pass unanimously.

TM will also have to decide whether or not to approve a request from the Norwood Planning Board, Moderna and its landlord to turn the old Polaroid Campus off of Route 1A near the Westwood border into a biotech hub. What this does, if approved, is for Moderna to build its new 80-foot logistics center and possibly more very tall buildings (up to 100’) in the future. And though it pains us to admit it, this newspaper feels the approval should be granted.

Substantial arguments can be made to deny the approval, but the overriding motivation for residents is the tax benefits (yes, even though there will probably be TIFs granted) and the fact that huge multi-unit rental buildings is probably the alternative. It would be wonderful if that land could stay untouched and appreciated for the open space it currently provides, but the reality is that land is just too valuable for profitiers to let that happen. It really is the better of awful choices.

Norwood is already fighting the perception that it is more a city than a suburb and the last thing it needs is more housing monoliths. There is also a certain degree of panache to having one of the leading biotechnology firms in the world located here. Yes, the skyline will most likely change, but some satisfaction should be garnered from the fact that because the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, the skylines and skylines on Upland Road and Norwood forever. Residents will see Moderna’s skyscrapers as they ride by one of the last woods in Town.

William Cameron Forbes willered the property to the Town in the 1960s. The Town rejected it and a Special Permit was rejected. For Forbes’s alma mater, and a contractor offered it to the Town and again, rejected. Then came Polarisar, Putnam Investments, Universal Technology Institute (UTI), Mercier, now all out of business. The Town bought and sold it to Alexandra. So how long do you think Norwood will be in business? No one knows. But if it is not long term, the Town of Norwood will be left with several empty buildings with maximum heights of 80 and 100 feet. Kindly note Moderna was approved for underground storage of chemicals, and recently got a Tax Incentive Finance Agreement.

“Economic development” already is having negative effects on our Town. Two unintended consequences over those who live here. Who are we as a Town if Town Officials are not listening to the taxpayers and guardians of constituents? A changed skyline, deforestation of trees, large high-density apartment complexes, open space loss, no businesses? The registered vehicles are not in the best interests of our Town.

The TOWN OF NORWOOD is not a “city in the suburbs.” It has Ripped Off the Planning Board and the FAA (Norwood Airport) (emphasis added).

The maximum building height for the Boston Provi- dence Corridor and Norwood/Elm Street District is 60 feet. Now, with this LSDD, the applicant, Al- exandra Real Estate Equities (who leases it to Moderna) wants to change the maximum height to 80 feet for some buildings, and 100 feet for another with a Special Permit from the Planning Board. Planned for one building now, but how many in future?

The Planning Board approves practically everything that comes before it by promoting the interests of applicants and fails to notice what could be adverse effects on the community and its resi- dents. Moderna and its landlord by the Planning Board with this request, not one, so as expected the Planning Board gave unanimous approval to the height requests.

Forbes Hill is already the highest hill in Town. An 80 foot or 100 foot tall building will change the skyline for a long time and allow us to recognize this is the start of a great relationship.

The one constant throughout the year-long planning process was that the commit- tee agreed all that working with The Skating Club of Bos- ton has been one of the most pleasurable experiences in our volunteerings. The coop- eration, generosity, hospitality, right attitude and support the Club has given us made for an incred- ible “150th Celebration On Ice”.

Norwood 150th Committee

Not a city in the suburbs

To the Editor:

Special Town Meeting will be held next week and many important Articles on the War- rant will be discussed. One of great importance will be Arti- cle 2, to amend the Zoning Bylaw and insert a new Zon- ing District entitled: Life Sci- ences Development District. Please note the word Devel- opment. This has such signifi- cance because of the profound effects it will have on the TOWN OF NORWOOD.

The Districts of Norwood are divided into 3 classes: Residential, Businesses, and Industrial. Each class indi- cates various uses that include but are not limited to Single or Multifamily residences, Central Business, the Boston Providence Highway Mixed Use, and now the Life Sci- ences Development District (LSDD). The Table of Dimen- sional Requirements for LSDD lists, among other things, the Maximum Build- ing Height to be 80 feet. How- ever, there are caveats, and Footnote 20 states: “Increase by one foot for each foot by which the building requirements are exceeded, to a Maximum of 100 feet in height” with the required ap- proval of the Planning Board and the FAA (Norwood Air- port) (emphasis added).

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