

October 23, 2022

Dear Chair Hai and Select Board Members,

My wife, Lori, and I live at 4 Summit Road in Lexington and our property is part of the proposed Mt. Independence Local Historic District. I write to you ahead of the Select Board meeting on October 25<sup>th</sup> as I believe you will be discussing Article 9, the proposed local historic district. The reason for my correspondence is to lay out the reasons why we support this proposal and to provide you with facts ahead of your discussion.

As you know, there have been many people involved in the process of putting this article together, and there were numerous steps that needed to be undertaken in a timely manner to bring Article 9 to this point. Many of us involved have begun discussions with Town Meeting Members as they will ultimately determine whether the Article passes. Over the course of these discussions, we have received plenty of favorable feedback and support as well as some constructive criticism. This criticism has fallen into three main categories- 1. The creation of the LHD will impede the growth of affordable housing in Lexington, and the Follen Hill neighborhood is exhibiting a form of NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard), 2. These houses are not that historic, and 3. The Planning Board is not supportive. Please allow me to address these in turn.

1. Affordable Housing/NIMBYism- The developer of 12 Summit Rd. has proposed one affordable unit along with nine other condominiums that would likely be priced between \$1mm and \$2mm and would be larger than some of the houses on Summit Rd. and many houses on the rest of Follen Hill. Our neighborhood is strongly in support of creating more affordable housing in our neighborhood, just not at the expense of potentially destroying or permanently altering a historic home and property. We have attempted to engage with the developer, and we suggested he submit a Site Sensitive Development special permit application that would still allow for affordable housing at 12 Summit Rd while better preserving the existing house and grounds than under his initial plan. We have not received a response.

In addition, if Mt. Independence were established, it would not preclude the development of affordable housing at 12 Summit or on other properties within the LHD. It would allow for additional oversight to make sure the historic nature of the homes and the properties within the LHD are preserved. Lastly, we have been proactive in trying to enable more affordable housing. One of our Summit Rd. neighbors, whose house is included in the LHD, owns additional lots that also fall within the LHD. He has had preliminary discussions with LexHab about the feasibility of developing more than one affordable unit on these lots. There are no guarantees this will come to fruition. However, I can clearly affirm that our neighborhood is overwhelmingly in favor of trying to produce more affordable housing "in our backyard".

2. Historic rationale- The Lexington Historic Districts Commission underwent an extensive study and along with the Mass. Historical Commission, determined that not only should the proposed LHD be established, but the two properties at the core of the district, 12 Summit Rd. and 52 Follen Rd. are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places- the historical bar for inclusion in the National Register is high. So, we do not believe there is any question that the proposed LHD is historic enough.

3. Planning Board- Based on the PB's recent meeting, it is clear they do not support Article 9. What remains puzzling is the reasoning behind this position. My understanding from listening to the PB meeting held on 10/20 is four of the five members believe that the LHD should a) follow the Mass. Historical Commission guidelines for establishing a local historic district, and b) include more properties. To be direct, this position does not seem to be grounded in sound reasoning. The Mass. Historical Commission unanimously voted to support the establishment of the Mt. Independence Local Historic District, so it is explicit that this same body's guidelines were followed in the process. Regarding the size of the district, over half of the LHDs in Massachusetts contain one property, and many others contain less than ten, so the relative size of the Mt. Independence LHD clearly falls within the precedent established throughout the state. Given that this is the first LHD potentially created in Lexington in many decades, it seemed a modest proposal to preserve the core properties was an appropriate starting point. If Town Meeting and other Town officials express an interest in expanding the district, this can be accomplished moving forward. But due to the complexity of the process and its deadlines, what the PB has suggested cannot be accomplished in advance of Town Meeting, and not prior to the expiration of the demolition delay at 12 Summit Rd.

In summary, I urge you and other Select Board members to consider these facts as you deliberate Article 9. Your support is critical as we continue to work constructively to preserve Lexington's rich history while also preserving and growing its diversity. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Bill Benjes  
4 Summit Rd.