



Joan McNamara <jmcnamara@natickma.org>

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## future of Eliot School

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**Cindy Bates** <cbates@alumnae.smith.edu>  
To: selectboard@natickma.org

Tue, Feb 28, 2023 at 7:58 PM

Members of the Select Board,

I urge you to accept the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's bid for the Eliot School — a bid in line with the town's goals laid out in the 2030+ Master Plan, specifically to "Provide housing affordable to the full range of income levels."

I moved to Natick in the fall of 2019 after 21 years in Roslindale. Though moving was not my choice, Natick immediately became my first-choice community and I found an apartment I could afford on Lincoln Street, three doors away from the Fire Station from which I look out on the rooftops of the Center and a slice of the Common. I love it here. The sense of community, caring for others, vibrant downtown, well-run town government, great schools and libraries, historical commitment to open space, access to highways and public transportation, spirit of volunteerism, Farmer's Market, etc.

Six months after my arrival came Covid and online opportunities to learn more about Natick. I can't remember the source, perhaps a presentation organized by the Historical Society, but I read or heard about Natick's history of citizen activism in the early 1950s that led to the creation, in 1956, of the Natick Fair Housing Practices Committee to "bring about the situation wherein all people of good character are welcome to live in Natick, and are not subject to discrimination because of race, religion or national origin." Natick was first in the nation with this sort of initiative. Learning that made me proud to have moved here.

Seventy years later, affordability has become an insurmountable obstacle to many families in Massachusetts. This in turn affects the ability of businesses to hire and retain workers, and the Commonwealth risks losing companies to more affordable states. For those who stay in Massachusetts — moving further and further from Boston and surrounds to find a place they can afford — longer commutes take a toll. Jobs are going unfilled. Of the four bids on the Eliot School, just two include affordable housing, both proposals 100% affordable. The advantage of MetroWest's proposal is that it includes families and would not involve the further delay of an RFP from the Natick Housing Trust. I can't think of a better initial affordable housing project on which to allocate Natick's CPA funds ... monies raised from taxpayers with a portion from the state. As you know 63% of Natick's voters supported the CPA last November.

Being an historic building, the Eliot School rehabilitation would also be eligible to apply for CPA funding for historic preservation, and it would be eligible for other grant funding because the bid is for 100% affordable units. Combining CPA funds, grant monies, and the generous \$600,000 offer from the Natick Affordable Housing Trust could approach, if not completely cover, the amounts bid by the private developers. The MetroWest bid also includes keeping the area by the river open to the public, a more tranquil setting than the intersection of Union-Pleasant and Eliot streets.

To me this is a clear case of the public's interest outweighing the interests of private development plans. It would give me a great sense of pride to see the Select Board use this vote as opportunity to support the town's number one goal for the future:

Natick is a healthy *community* of diverse and interconnected citizens, businesses, organizations and neighborhoods, *where citizens of all* ages, backgrounds and *income levels can live*, work and thrive; [emphasis added]

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Cindy Bates  
5 Lincoln St. Apt. 3  
617-325-9967