

Submitted to Article 12 Annotated Warrant by Town Meeting Member Robin Bergman, Precinct 12

Letter from Geoffrey Brahmer

Subject: **What most troubled us about town meeting last night**

October 24, 2023

Dear, elected, selectmen and precinct members,

We live on Newman Way, one of the impacted areas of the proposed zoning changes. Last night, we attended, with 2 of our neighbors, who also live on Newman Way, the Arlington town meeting. We were there from the Star-Spangled Banner to the adjournment. It was a very well conducted and informative meeting, with many diverse and thoughtful perspectives presented. Thank you for all of your good efforts on behalf of all of us, all the neighborhoods and citizens of Arlington.

Out of all the various discussions, however, the thing that most stood out for us, what today we woke up thinking about, was the town's department's and attorney justification for the double – speak notice sent out to the impacted neighborhoods informing residents that their own homes and neighbors were going to be impacted if the proposal was passed by town meeting.

First, we do not remember receiving such a notice. We just spoke with another resident on Wildwood also and she cannot remember receiving this notice either.

Second, based on the justification given last night, if we did receive a notice, we really weren't supposed to see or understand it. If that is the case, why waste the postage?

Third, the gentleman, town precinct member, who spoke about this, who we do not know, got it perfectly right. Please pass this on to him.

Fourth, such a notice is unacceptable for proposals that will impact, perhaps, greatly, the actual lives and neighborhoods of people and families living in the overlay areas.

Fifth, if that is the law and the town's policy, it needs to be changed immediately. It may be too late for this particular proposal, but this is not the way the town should inform its citizenry about such critical proposals moving forward.

Sixth, it creates a power differential that leads to "Haves versus the Have Nots," based on information and knowledge, which as you all know — is Power. Such a differential will lead to greater divisions within the neighborhoods and within the town itself. It will lead to a lack of trust of citizens, for town managers, department heads, and even elected officials. Even little conspiracy theories can rise due to such actions, no matter the intent or competency.

Seventh, it is not fair to the citizens impacted, and it is not fair to the precinct members who are representing those citizens. This is one of the most important proposals in Arlington, in a decade or more, yet citizens, most impacted by its potential effects, are not adequately informed, or only informed when the train is already leaving the station!

Eighth, Such notices hide as much as they reveal, and whether intended or not, limit participation rather than encouraging it.

This is never the way a town should treat neighbors, its citizens or its elected representatives, who are elected to represent them.

Moving forward into an unknown future, for all of us, including the town, the world and nation, it is vital that we adhere to one of the most basic principles of democracy, and we might add, also out of kindness and compassion for our neighbors.

That is:

That we speak truth to one another, whether the news is good or bad, communicate wisely and empathetically with one another. This cannot be done, if the very intent, whether informed or through negligence, attempts to withhold key information that will affect clear decision-making and informed discussion and representation.

This was actually a big error in judgment and communication. It leads to both disempowerment and rage. The town of Arlington should fix this as we move forward as a concerned and informed citizenry.

Thank you very much for listening and your work and service on behalf of the citizens of Arlington.

With high regards,  
Geoffrey Brahmer, 30-32 Newman Way  
Amy Duke, 33 Newman Way