



# Finance Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Wednesday, October 26, 2020**

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Malakie, Humphrey, Kalis, Norton and Noel

Absent: Councilors Gentile and Ciccone

Also Present: Councilors Laredo and Bowman

City staff present: Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux, Comptroller Sue Dzikowski, Director of the Planning Department Barney Heath, Director of Transportation Nicole Freedman, CPA Program Manager Lara Kritzer and Assistant Superintendent of Newton Public Schools Liam Hurley

**Chairs Note:** *The Committee met jointly with the Zoning & Planning Committee to discuss the following item. The note for this item can be found on the 10/26/20 Zoning & Planning Committee Report.*

### Referred to Zoning & Planning and Finance Committees

**#419-20** **Authorization to enter into an intergovernmental service agreement**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to enter into an intergovernmental service agreement (the "Global Participation Agreement") for the purpose of joining MassDocs.  
**Zoning & Planning approved 8-0 on 10/26/2020**  
**Action:** **Finance Approved 6-0**

### Referred to Public Facilities and Finance Committees

**#422-20** **CPC Recommendation to allocate \$390,000 of CPA funding**  
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE recommending the allocation of three hundred and ninety thousand dollars (\$390,000) in Community Preservation Act Recreation funding to complete the 100% design of the Commonwealth Avenue Carriage Redesign.  
**Public Facilities Approved 7-0 on 10/21/20**  
**Action:** **Finance Approved 6-0**

**Note:** Lara Kritzer, CPA Program Manager presented the request to allocate \$390,000 in CPA Recreation funding to complete the 100% design of the Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign. Ms. Kritzer's presentation is attached to this report.

Ms. Kritzer explained that this project runs from Lyons Field to the Marriott Hotel. The goal is to redesign the northern carriageway to include bike and pedestrian pathways. The project has received over \$5 million from MassDOT's bicycle and pedestrian program to fund the construction.

Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation, explained that the construction should begin in 2025, which will be paid for by the MassDOT program. The Carriageway project will connect the area with bike and pedestrian pathways from Lyons Field to the Marriott, and with a MassDOT project that crosses the Charles River Bridge to make the area safer for bicyclist and pedestrians. Weston is also working on a project that would create a path all the way to Natick.

Committee members asked the following questions:

Q: Will the areas that vehicles can drive through on the carriageway have an elevated bike path, in addition to the green markings, to alert vehicles traveling that section?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that she does not know if the area would be elevated, but the green paint should be sufficient.

Q: Is the State funding confirmed regardless of the effect the pandemic may have on the State's budget?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that currently these funds are secured because Newton's project is connected to a MassDOT project that needs to be completed.

Q: Are there extensive tree plantings included in what will be funded by the State?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that the landscape architecture has not been completed but there is a team in place to investigate this.

Q: Are the utility lines going to be undergrounded?

A: Ms. Freedman explained that the utility lines are not going to be undergrounded because the cost of undergrounding the lines would be approximately \$1.8 million. The utility poles will not be moved.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

**#418-20 Approval of Sewer Assessments**

COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS requesting approval of the following Order and Schedule of Sewer Assessments for completed Common Sewer Extensions in Staniford Ave:

Name	Address	Book/Page	Estimate
Sandip V and Vibha S Patel	39 Staniford St	037165/0228	\$11,052.00
James P and Dianne M Barberio	49 Staniford St	000883/0144	\$11,052.00

Elizabeth Grieco	50 Staniford St	065299/0315	\$11,052.00
Narayan Kadambi	55 Staniford St	001350/0040	\$11,052.00
Alan H and Holli G Roth	56 Staniford St	028914/0383	\$11,052.00
Paul D Wilson	62 Staniford St	021380/0115	\$11,052.00
Charles L West	65 Staniford St	001443/0086	\$11,052.00
Katherine Decelles	68 Staniford St	061908/0221	\$11,052.00

**Action:** **Finance Approved 6-0**

**Note:** Jim McGonagle, Commissioner of Public Works presented the request to approve the above Order and Schedule of Sewer Assessments for completed Common Sewer Extensions in Staniford Ave. Commissioner McGonagle explained that there was a total cost of \$176,830; 50% will be covered by the City and the other 50% is paid by the homeowners.

Commissioner McGonagle explained that these properties previously had septic systems and the City wants to encourage residents to connect to the sewer system because it goes through the MWRA and is then treated properly.

Committee members asked the following questions:

Q: Have the homeowners been notified?

A: Commissioner McGonagle explained that the homeowners agreed to this before the department requested approval from the City Council.

Q: How long do homeowners have to pay?

A: Commissioner McGonagle explained that they have 20 years. Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer, noted that if the resident sells their home then they must pay off what they owe.

Councilor Kalis motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

**#417-20** **Authorization to expend a MassDOT'S Shared Streets and Spaces Program Grant**  
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend one hundred fifty-three thousand one hundred fourteen dollar and ninety cent (\$153,114.90) in grant funding from MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Program for the purchase and installation of two Blue Bikes stations and two Park & Pedal stations.

**Action:** **Finance Approved 6-0**

**Note:** Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation presented the request to accept and expend \$153,114.90 in grant funding from MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Program for the purchase and installation of two Blue Bikes stations and two Park & Pedal stations. Ms. Freedman explained that the department has installed three of the four stations and the fourth station will be installed soon. The two Blue Bike stations were installed at West Newton Square and the Armory. One Park & Pedal station has been installed at the War Memorial and the other station will be installed at Forte Park.

Councilor Norton motioned to approve which passed unanimously.

**#423-20** **Appropriate \$23,458 for McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation**  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE requesting that the City Council approve authorizing the Mayor to appropriate the state reimbursement of twenty-three thousand four hundred and fifty-eight dollars (\$23,458) for McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation from ~~general fund~~ Free Cash to the School Department.

**Action:** **Finance Approved 6-0**

**Note:** Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent for the Newton Public Schools presented the request to authorize the Mayor to appropriate the state reimbursement of \$23,458 for McKinney-Vento Homeless Student Transportation to the School Department. Mr. Hurley explained that the School Committee requests this every year and does track what it costs to transport students that are deemed homeless to Newton and other communities. If the student does need to be bussed to another community then that cost is split with the community. Mr. Hurley noted that this is a trailing reimbursement, and this amount could decrease for the next fiscal year.

Sue Dzikowski, Comptroller noted that these funds will need to be transferred from Free Cash.

The Committee voted to move this money from Free Cash to the School Department, which passed unanimously.

**#395-20** **Request for updates on budget and possible reimbursements at Newton Public Schools**  
The President of the Council, on behalf of the City Council, requesting updates to the Finance Committee from the Chief Financial Officer regarding budget expenditures and possible reimbursements related to school reopening at each meeting this fall.

**Finance Held 5-0 on 10/14/20**

**Action:** **Finance Held 6-0**

**Note:** Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent of Newton Public Schools explained that the School Department's first Fiscal and Operations report is due November 16<sup>th</sup>, which is when he will have more information available for the City Council.

Mr. Hurley explained that at the end of the last school year, the School Department did not renew the contract of 125 aides within the City but have started to hire some of those aides back.

The three major grants that the School Department has received are a Competitive Technology Grant for \$97,000 that went towards Chromebooks, an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) grant for \$745,000, and a COVID Relief Fund grant which is approximately \$2.9 million. The ESSER grant does need to be shared with the private schools in Newton. Mr. Hurley explained that the COVID Relief Fund is separate from any funds the City will be receiving through the CARES Act. Additionally, Mr. Hurley noted that the School Department will need to prove that the reimbursements that they are applying for were expenditures made as a result of the pandemic. The School Department also carried over \$4.4 million in their circuit breaker account from the last fiscal year.

The major costs that the School Department will be applying for include the large tents, stipends for employees and remote learning technology. Mr. Hurley explained that the meals being provided to students will continue to be reimbursed. The HVAC improvement project is also underway, and the School Committee is receiving an update on the project on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. This project is estimated to cost \$1.4 million which should be covered by the CARES Act. Mr. Hurley noted that he has been working with Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer to make sure all eligible costs are being reimbursed.

Ms. Lemieux noted that the City did apply to be reimbursed for the PPE spending in the School Department through FEMA. If it is not covered by FEMA, the City will then apply for reimbursement through the CARES Act.

Mr. Hurley explained that changing the learning model during this time has been complex and the department is doing their best to plan. The safety of the staff and students is the department's priority. One of the greatest barriers right now to having the schools open is staffing. The goal is to have the middle schools back to in-person learning by mid-November. The timing for when the high schools will be back in session has not been determined. Mr. Hurley noted that the issue with getting kids back in the classroom is not financial, but rather a staffing issue.

Councilors asked the following questions:

Q: The memorandum of agreement (MOA) that the School Committee is voting on has numerous large expenses including childcare for staff. Are any of these expenses reimbursable?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that if the City can prove that these expenses were a result of the pandemic they should be covered. There are staff members that are sending their children to the YMCA and the School Department is paying \$30 per child which would be reimbursable. Mr. Hurley noted that they have also had cost savings in other areas that can help fund some costs. The MOA has also not been finalized.

Q: Is the School Department continuing to operate under the assumption that the budget NPS was allocated are the only funds that are available to them?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that they have a large budget of approximately \$200 million. Before coming to the City Council for more funds, they would make sure that they are only spending funds on the essentials. But the School Department is nowhere near having to ask the City for financial assistance.

Mr. Hurley explained that because of the unfilled positions from last year, there are some current cost savings. Ms. Lemieux noted that she will be coming to the City Council after the first of year to transfer some funds back to the school department based on what is reimbursed. Any school department item for which the City receives reimbursement will need to be given back to them once the City has received the funds.

Q: Is there a sources and uses document that could be provided to the City Council?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that the document will be submitted on November 16<sup>th</sup>. The School Department will also be submitting their year-end report.

Q: With regard to the staffing issues, has the department tried to offer more money to help with hiring?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that he believes that increasing the stipends will not necessarily bring the staff back. But they have been working with staff to figure out what it will take to get children back in the classrooms. Mr. Hurley noted that they are also improving the HVAC system which is an approximately \$1.4 million project to make it safer for the staff and students to enter the building.

Q: Has the department discussed how to implement outdoor learning?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that the tents will be gone by the end of December. The department is discussing getting the tents back but that would be a large number of tents for even one school. Also, technology will be an issue. There are plans to get children outside more often during the day. The School Department will continue to investigate this issue.

Q: Has the School Department considered modular units or other temporary structures?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that he isn't sure how that would work with a large school. Modulares would still be considered indoors so ventilation would still be an issue. He noted that this will still be investigated.

Q: What cost analysis has been done about the cost of the MOA that the School Department will be voting on?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that there has been a preliminary cost analysis and that can be available with permission from the School Committee.

Q: Have the aides been hired to get the middle schools opened on November 16<sup>th</sup>?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that they have hired 8 aids and have about 25 to go.

Q: What is stopping the School Department from hiring more aides and how much is the School Department offering the applicants?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that the market has been an issue. They are offering a range of salaries depending on the applicants' step grades. The range is between \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year. The department has reached out to some of the 125 aides who were not renewed last year.

Q: What is preventing the elementary schools from moving to full days?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that they are looking for monitors and have put out a communication to families for upwards of 70 monitors. There have only been 4 to 5 responses. The department is offering an hourly rate of approximately \$20 per hour.

Q: Why isn't the department raising the rate to incentivize applicants, and has the department investigated hiring recent college grads?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that they have done some outreach but have not been able to fill the positions.

Q: Have there been any cost savings with the 20% decrease in kindergarten enrollment?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that savings have not been realized because of the staffing that is still needed. The fiscal report that will be submitted should be able to help answer this question.

Q: Have there been any of cost savings in bussing?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that they have had some savings in this area. The savings are less than last year when the schools were fully remote.

Q: Will the cost of the MOA be public before the School Committee votes?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that he does not believe this information is usually made public before the vote. The School Committee would need to agree to allow this information to be made public.

Q: When the HVAC upgrade is complete, will that be sufficient to allow full capacity?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that yes, this will be sufficient. The consulting engineer will run tests to ensure that. The schools have a combination of different mechanical HVAC systems. Mr. Hurley noted that the school is limited to 25 students on a bus, but many families are opting to getting their children to school themselves.

Q: Why weren't students back in the classroom September 1<sup>st</sup>?

A: Mr. Hurley explained that they were following the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, who urged the district to use this time to plan and deal with staffing issues.

Councilors made the following comments:

The Council should be aware of the spending of the School Department so that they can be prepared if the City will be asked to provide funds to help with bringing the students back into the schools safely.

If the School Department has the funds, they should be using those funds as an incentive to get staff back in the classroom.

By the spring, there should be a plan to be able to have the children learning outside.

The Council should know how much money is being spent on the MOA. The cost should also be publicly discussed at the next School Committee meeting.

The School Department should contact the 125 aides that were not renewed last year to help with the staffing issue. The Mayor's newsletter should also be utilized to advertise the open positions.

It is concerning that positions are not being filled and the Committee should continue to be updated on this issue.

There should be a one-page spreadsheet that shows NPS's savings realized and costs incurred as a result of the pandemic.

Regarding the previous comment, Mr. Hurley explained that they are in the process of developing a number of financial documents and may not be able to create one document that shows all the cost-savings and expenditures. Mr. Hurley explained that he can submit certain documents by November 16<sup>th</sup> and can continue to answer questions from the Council. But there are a lot of unknowns right now, and he will need time to put this information together. Ms. Lemieux noted that they will continue to make financial documents that can be shared with the Council. She also explained that she can make more specific documents depending on what the Council wants to see.

There have been psychological impacts on students that have been participating in remote learning which the School Department needs to consider when deciding when the children will be coming back to in-person learning.

The fact that the COVID cases are raising in Massachusetts needs to be considered and the School Department does need to work on remote learning in case there continues to be a need for it.

Mr. Hurley noted that the health and safety of their staff and students are their first priority. There are several sanitizing procedures in place including hand sanitizer stations around the school.

If a meaningful barrier to getting kids back in our school buildings concerns the collective bargaining agreement, that should be known. There is also concern about the MOA currently under consideration.



If the health experts say that in-person learning is safe with certain safeguards in Newton, then students should be in school because it can help with student's mental health.

Committee members thanked Mr. Hurley for his work during this time.

Councilor Norton motioned to hold which passed unanimously.

**Chairs Note:** *Chief Financial Officer Maureen Lemieux provided an update on the expenditure of funds for COVID-19 as related to item #239-20.*

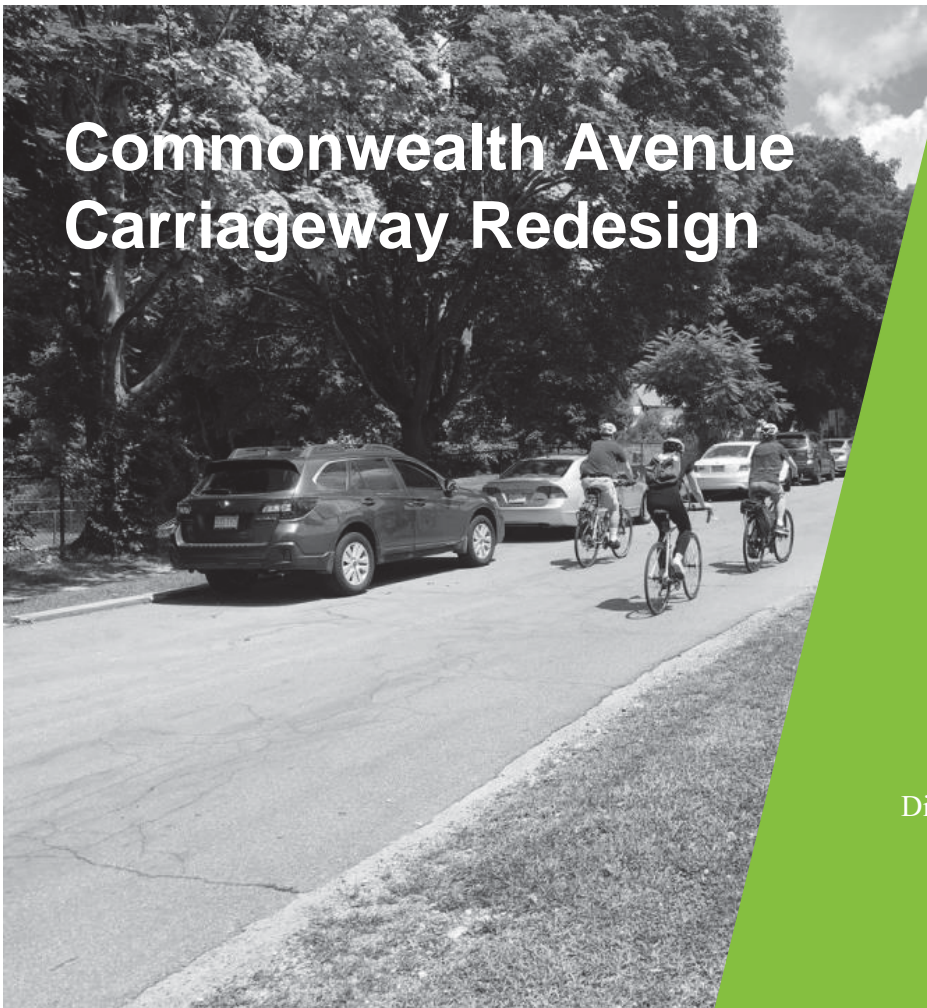
**Note:** Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer, explained that she has no further updates at this time.

The Committee adjourned at 10:03 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Rebecca Walker Grossman, Chair**

# Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign



Nicole Freedman  
City of Newton  
Director of Transportation Planning  
[Nfreedman@newtonma.gov](mailto:Nfreedman@newtonma.gov)  
617-879-8148

## Summary

- **Reconstruct Carriageway**
  - Lyons Field to E of Auburn Street/ Marriott Driveway
  - Eliminate excess roadway
  - Create separate space for people and bikes
  - Move vehicles to Commonwealth Ave
  - Enhance crossings
- **Links together trail network**
  - Connects to ongoing MassDOT, DCR and local trail projects
- **Leverages \$5+ million MassDOT funds**
  - MassDOT has committed \$5.9M to construction, FY25
- **Request \$390,000 for final design**

# Partners

## ■ Riverside Greenway Working Group

Vision: create a seamless biking and walking connection between Newton, Weston, and Wellesley increasing access to greenspace, trails, and other recreation opportunities



## ■ Solomon Foundation

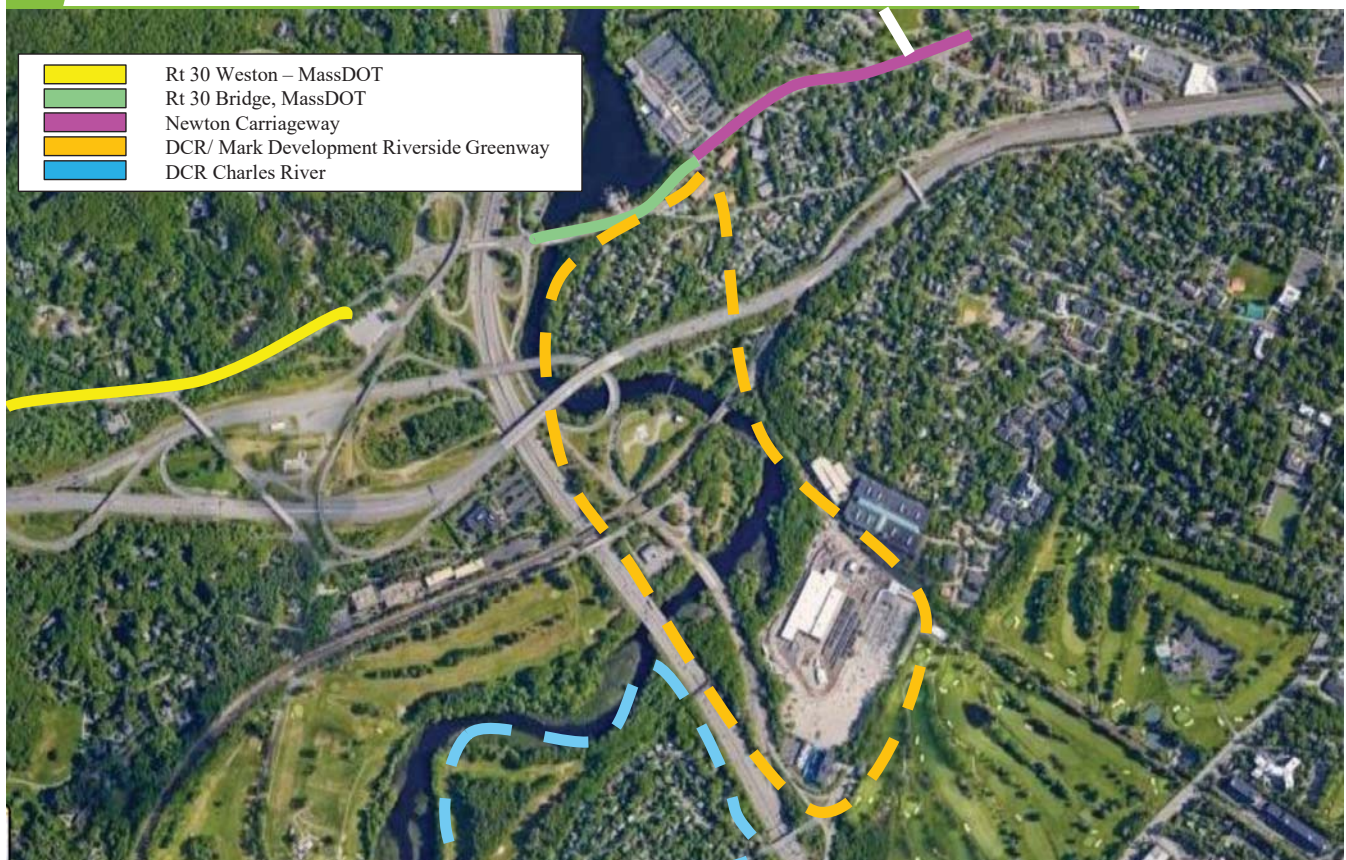
## ■ MassDOT

- Route 30 bridge project
- Weston Route 30 reconstruction
- Laselle boathouse bridge reconstruction

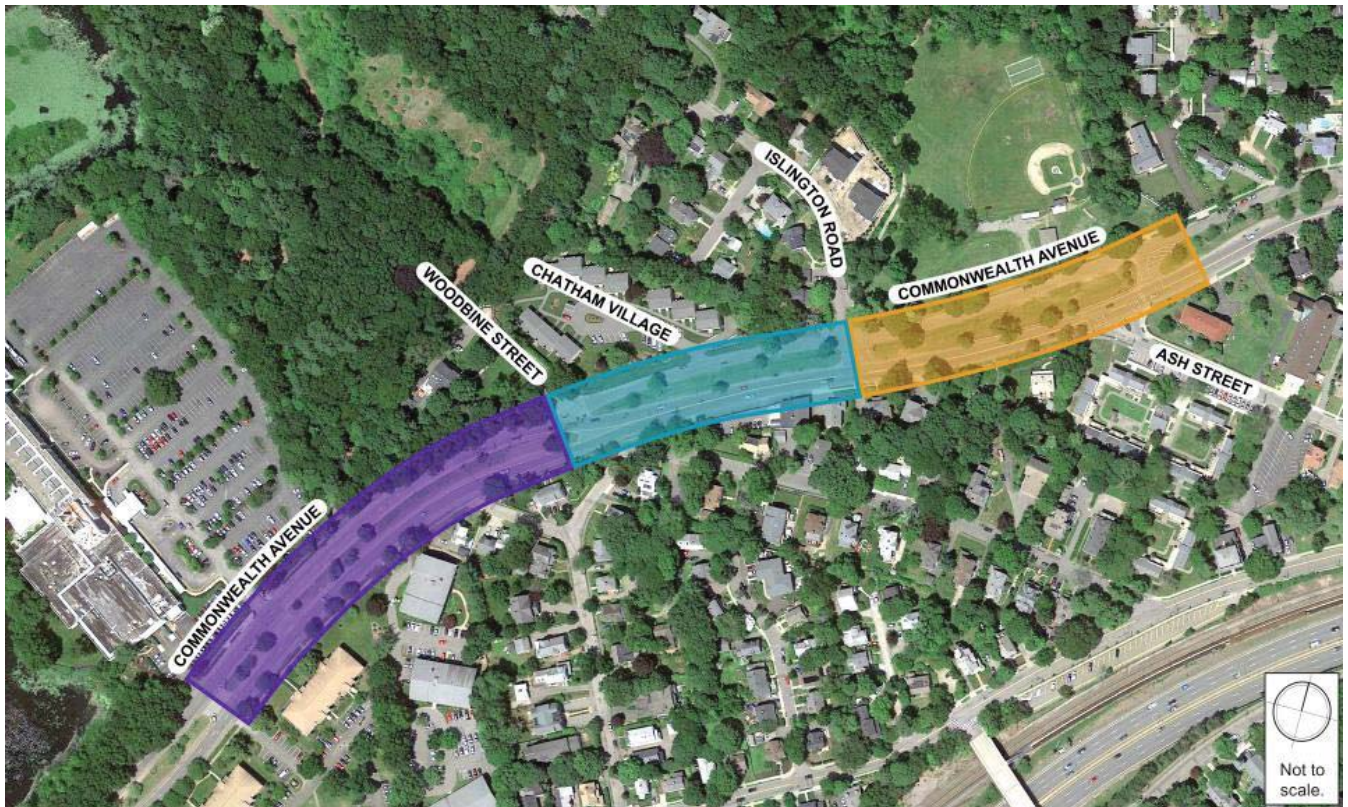
## ■ DCR



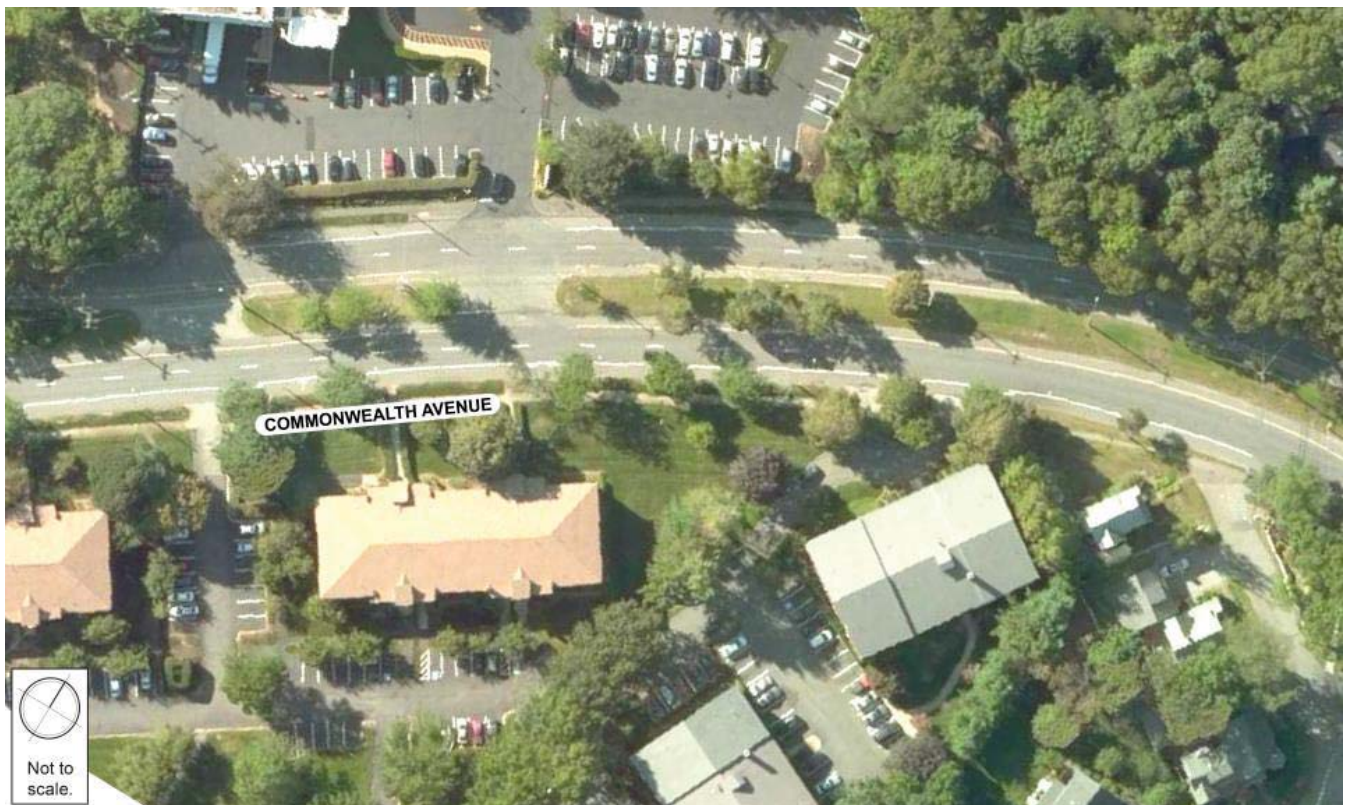
# Related Projects



# Project Area



# Existing Conditions Marriott to Woodbine Street

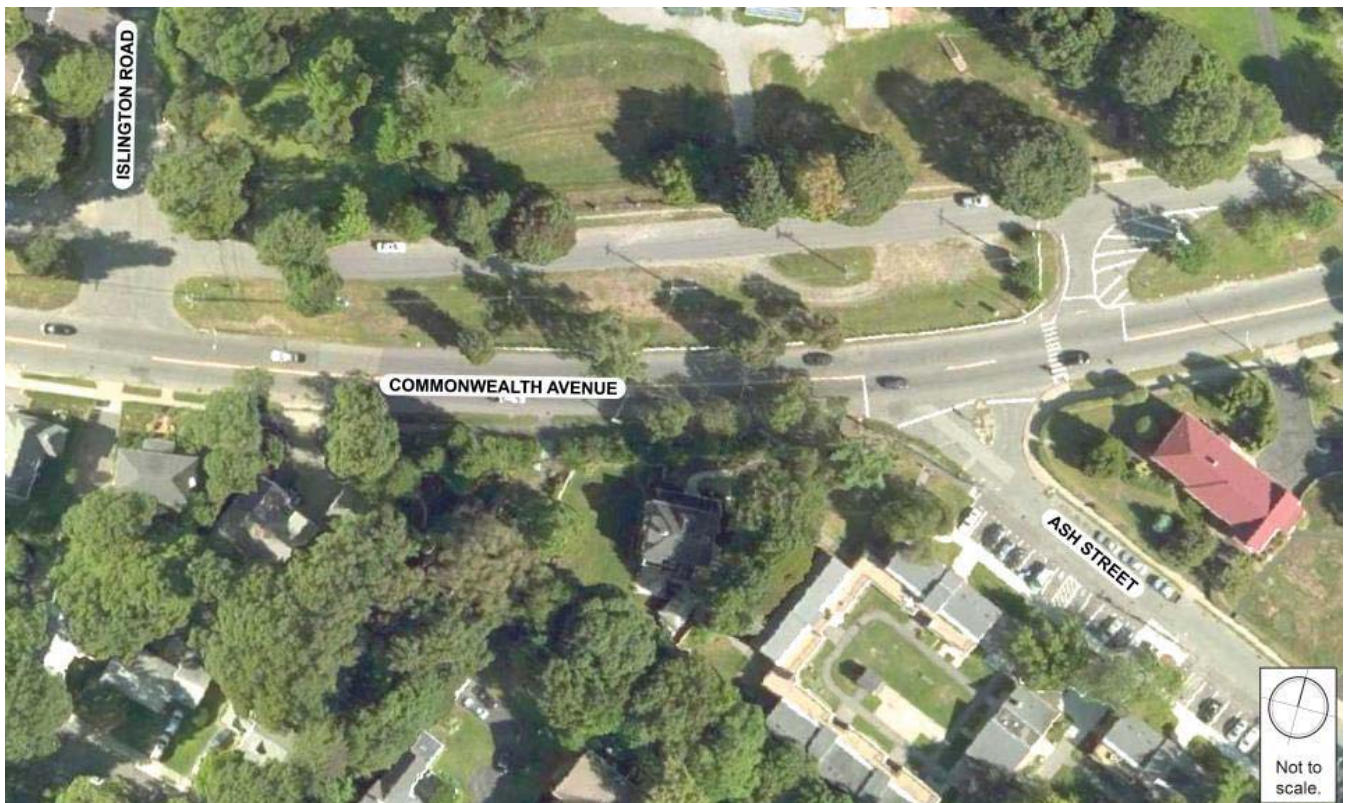


# Existing Conditions Woodbine Street to Islington Road

422-20



# Existing Conditions Islington Road to Ash Street



# Concept Marriott to Woodbine Street

422-20

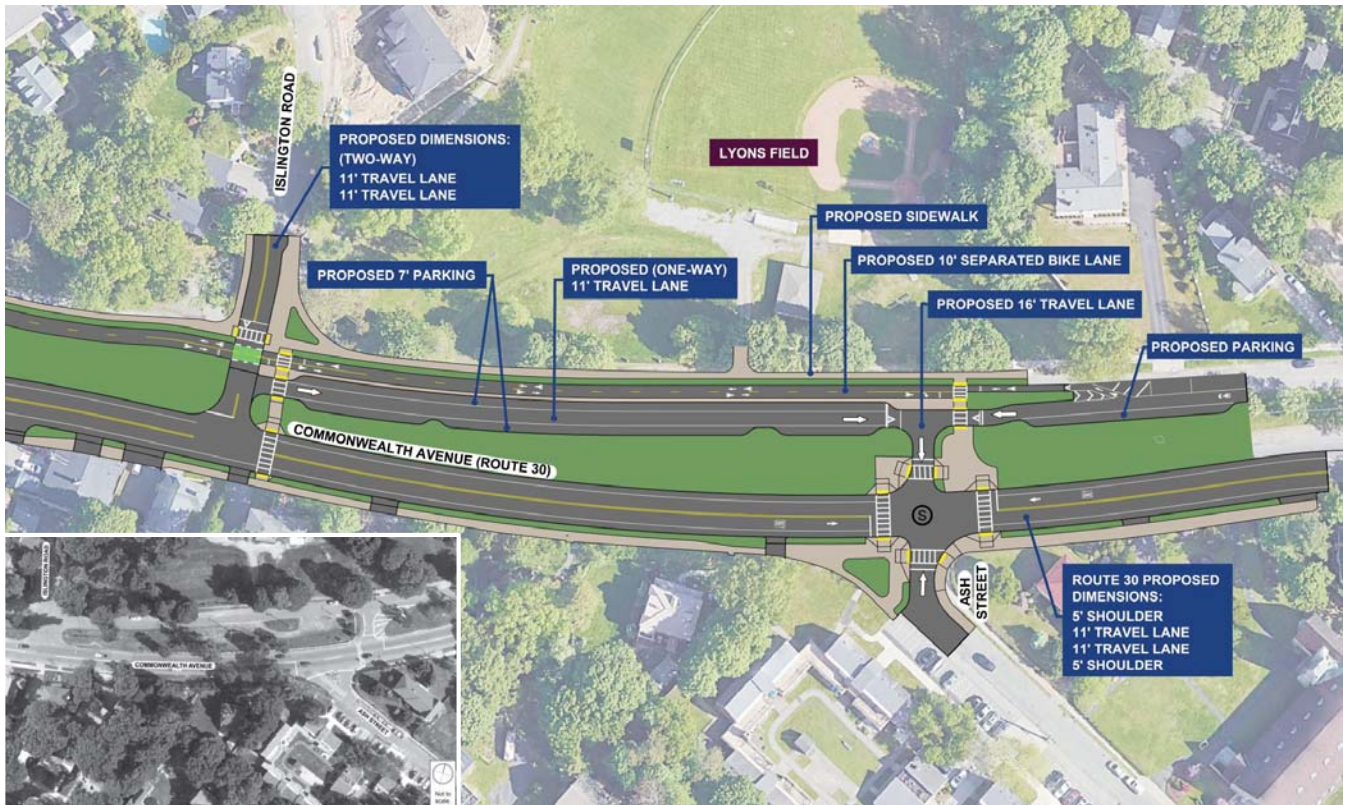


# Concept Woodbine Street to Islington Road



# Concept Islington Road to Ash Street

422-20



# Existing Conditions Islington Road to Ash Street



# Proposed Concept #1 Islington Road to Ash Street

422-20



## Timeline and Next Steps

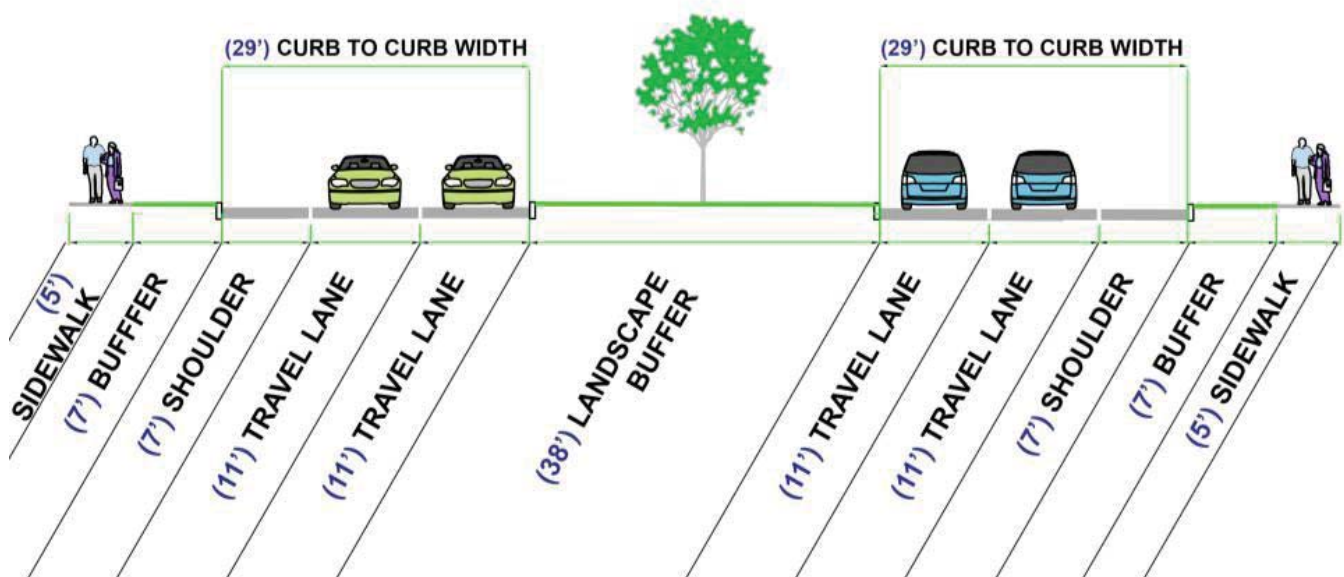
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| ■ Concept Design | Complete  |
| ■ 25% design     | Fall 2020 |
| ■ Final Design   | 2023      |
| ■ Construction   | 2025      |



# Questions?

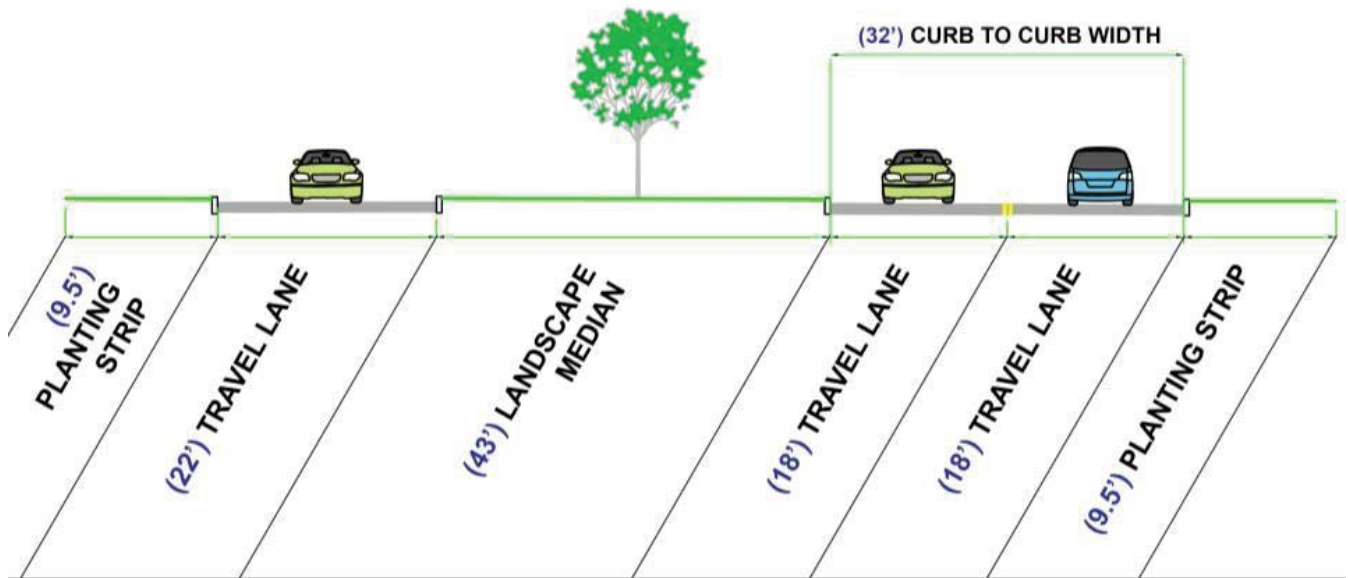
Nicole Freedman  
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 Director of Transportation Planning  
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 617-879-8148

## Existing Conditions Marriott to Woodbine Street

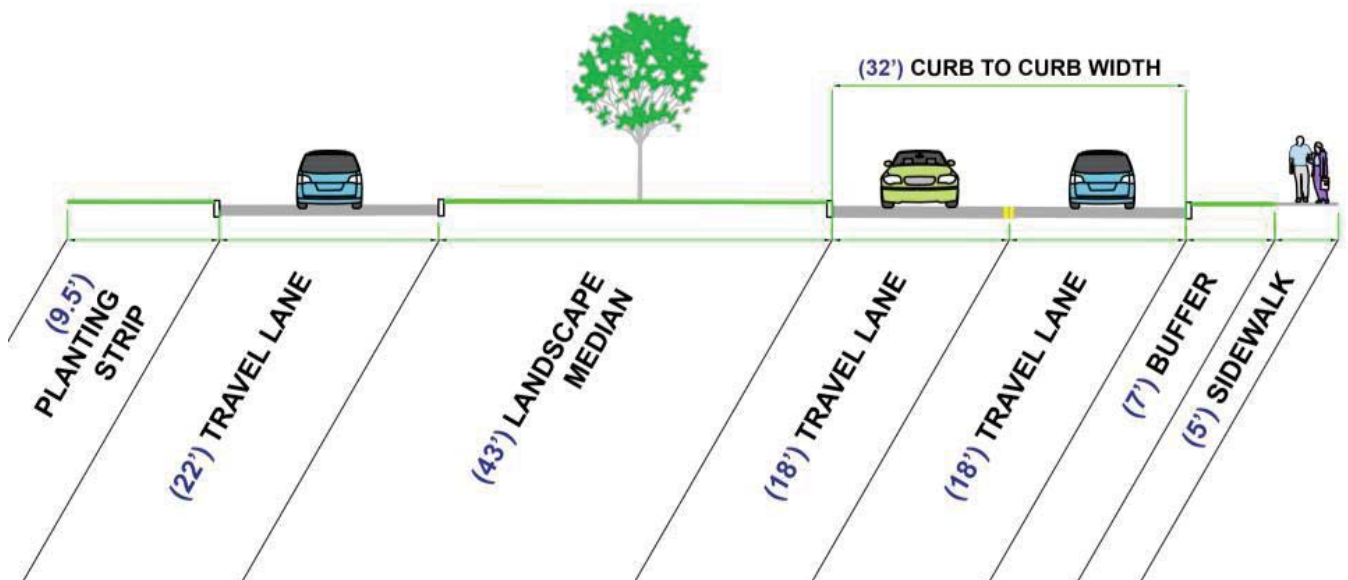


# Existing Conditions Woodbine Street to Islington Road

422-20

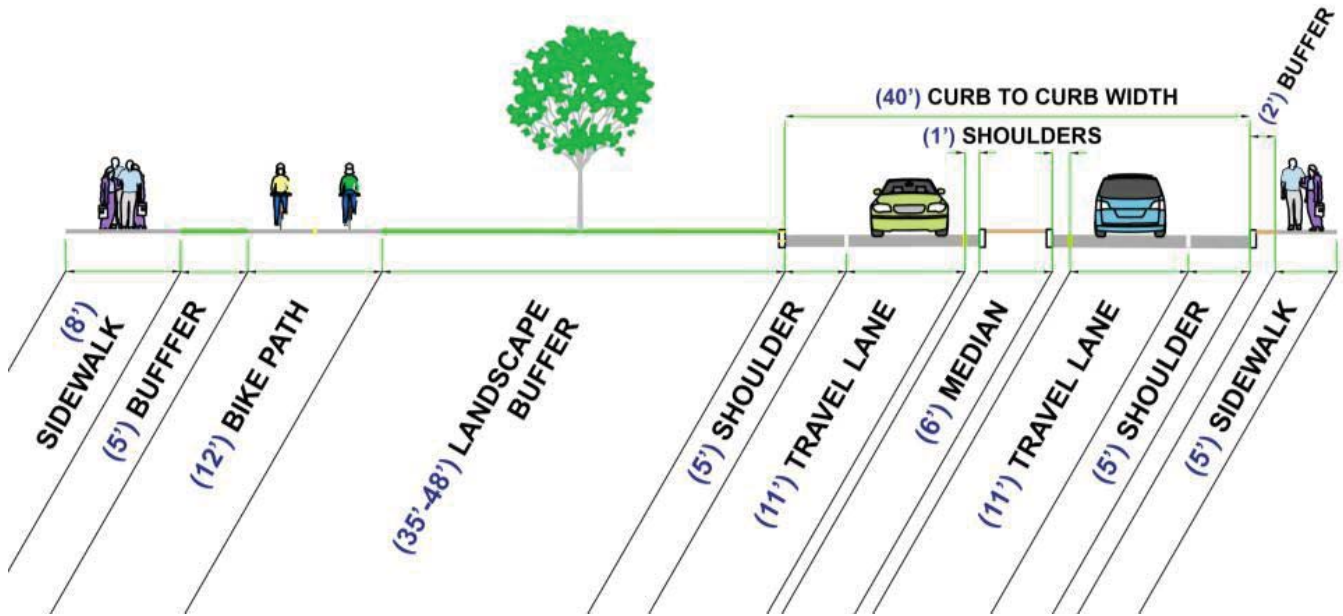


# Existing Conditions Islington Road to Ash Street

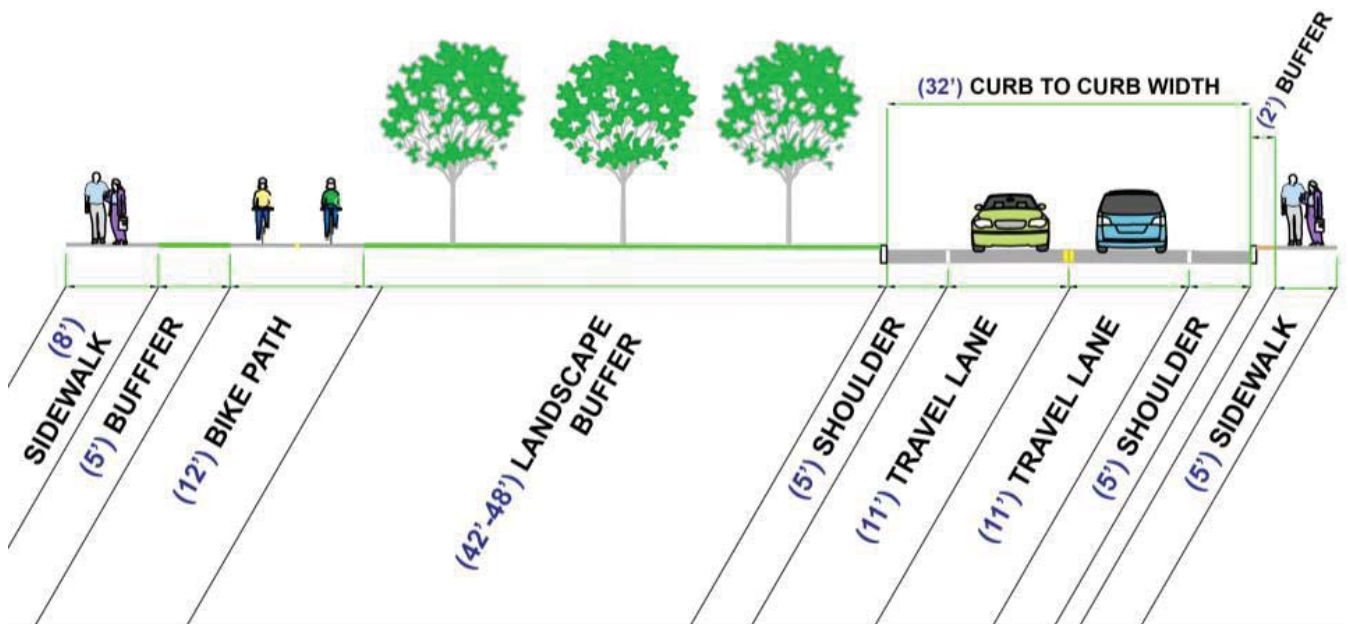


# Proposed Concept Marriott to Woodbine Street

422-20

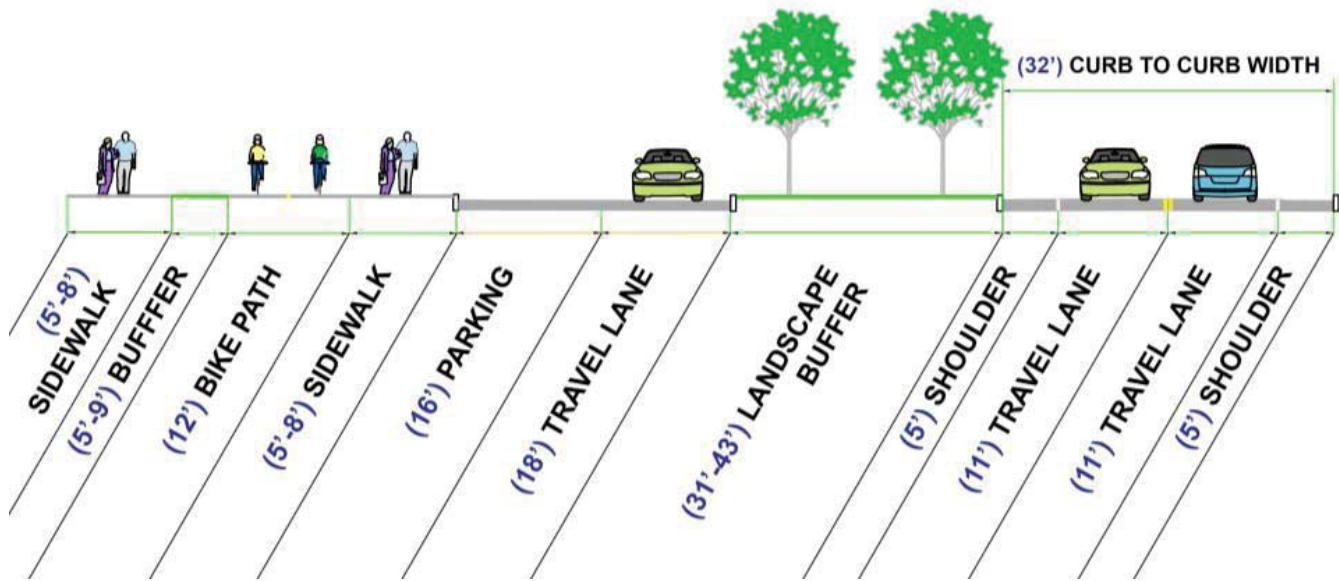


# Proposed Concept Woodbine Street to Islington Road



# Proposed Concept #1 Islington Road to Ash Street

422-20



# Proposed Concept Marriott to Woodbine Street

422-20

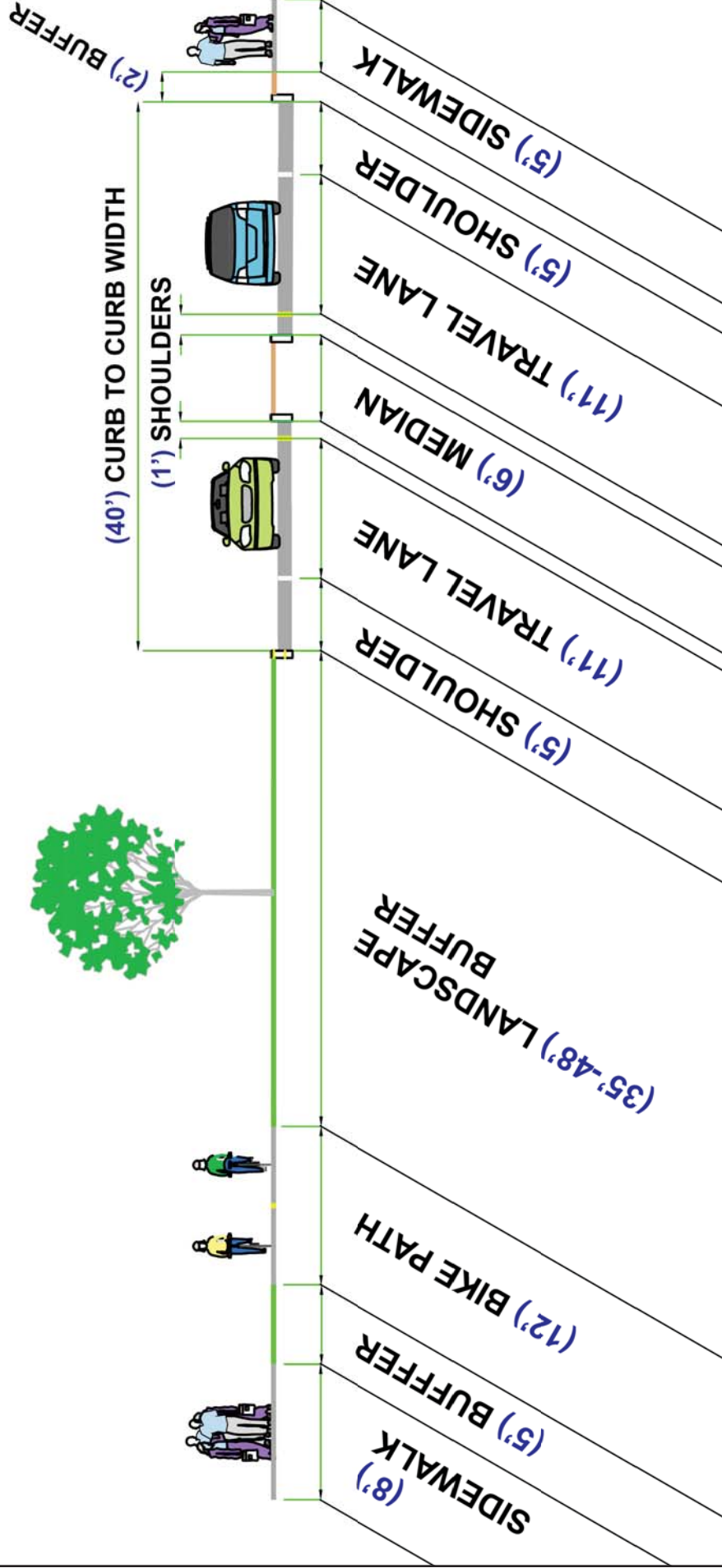
Engineers + Planners



# Proposed Concept Marriott to Woodbine Street

422-20

Engineers + Planners



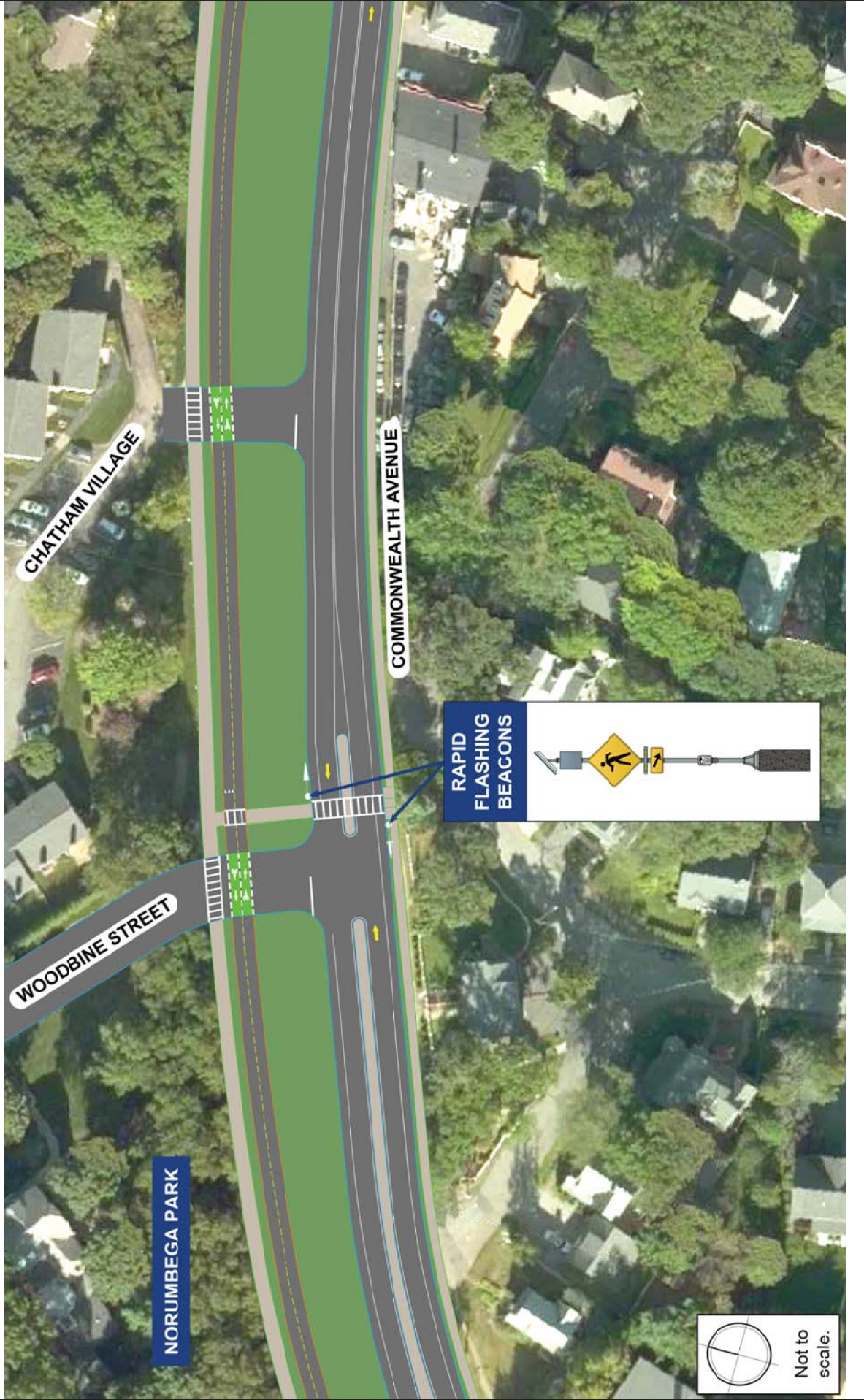
HOWARD STEIN HUDSON

# Proposed Concept

## Woodbine Street to Islington Road

422-20

Engineers + Planners

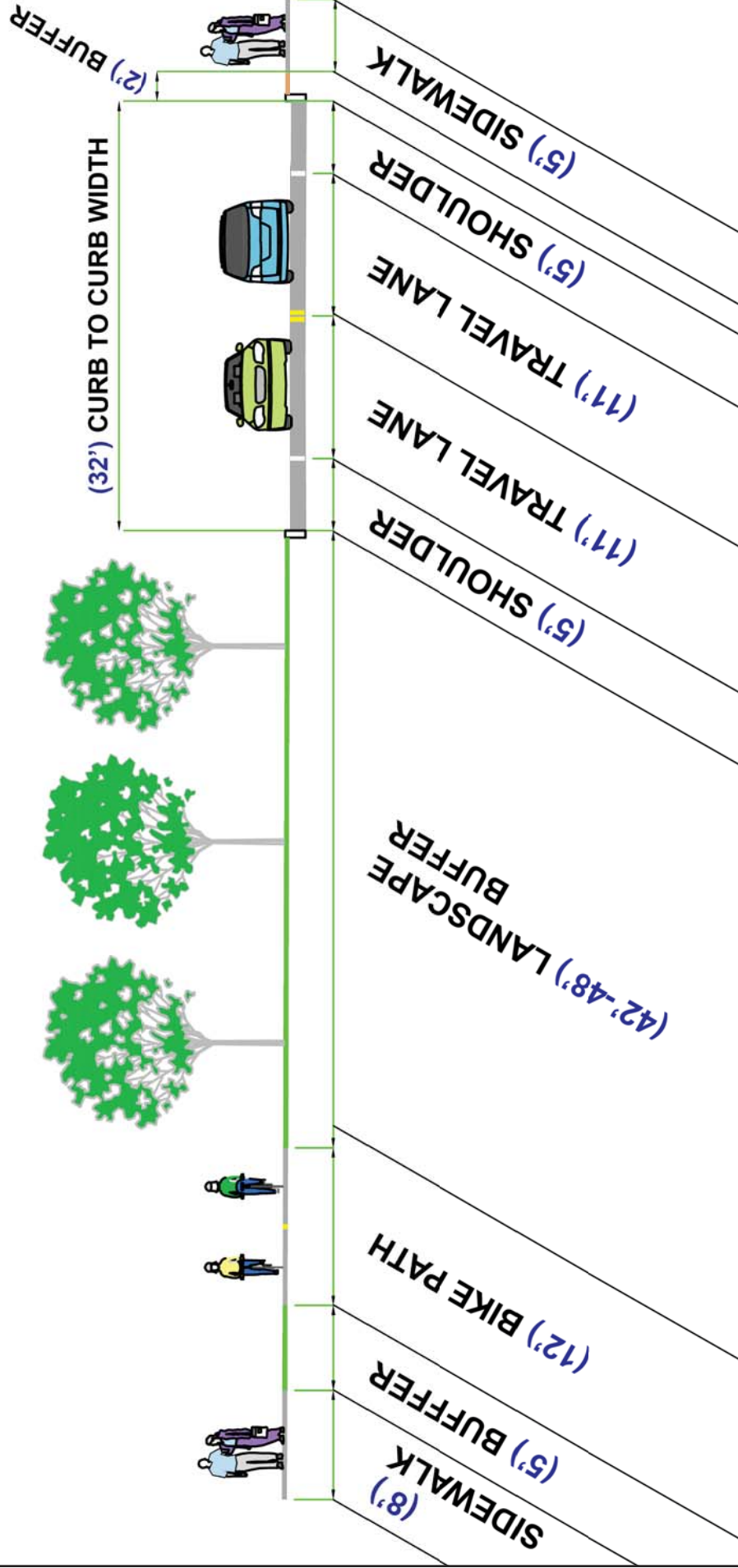


# Proposed Concept

## Woodbine Street to Islington Road

422-20

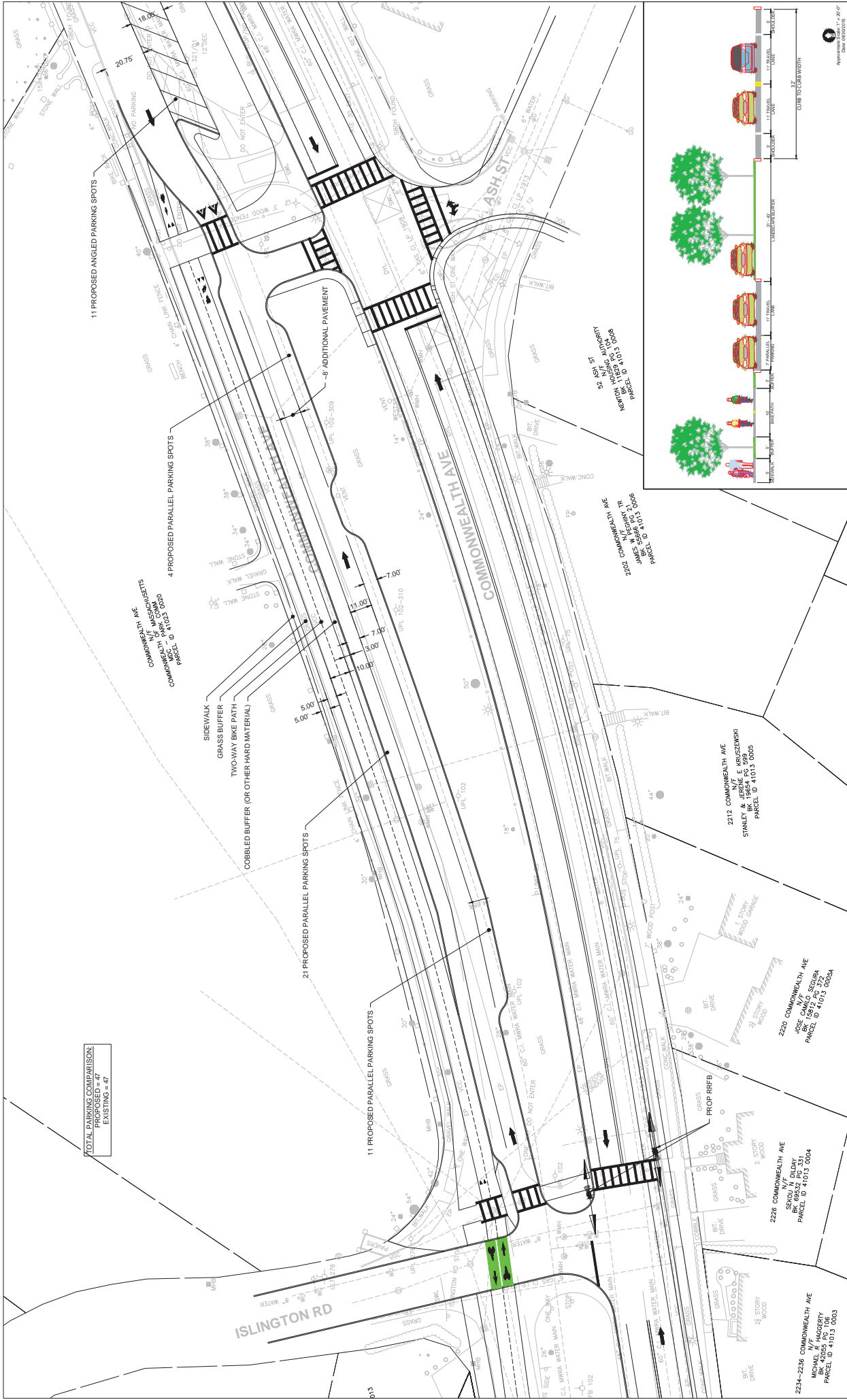
Engineers + Planners



HOWARD STEIN HUDSON



Figure 1. CONCEPT: RETAIN PARALLEL PARKING, SEPARATED BICYCLE & PED FACILITIES, RECONSTRUCT INTERSECTION AT ASH STREET



TOTAL PARKING COMPARISON:  
PROPOSED = 47  
EXISTING = 47

