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April 1, 2020

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

Ms. Nadia Khan
Committee Clerk
Land Use Committee
Newton City Council
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, MA 02459-1449

Re: Riverside Station/355 Grove Street and 399 Grove Street / #26-20 and #27-20

Dear Nadia,

I am forwarding herewith answers to questions and comments received from the Planning Department and Councilors through March 19, 2020 relative to the above matter prepared by Mark Development dated April 1, 2020.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Stephen J. Buchbinder/mer
Stephen J. Buchbinder

SJB/mer
Attachment

cc: (By Email w/attachment)
Mr. Neil Cronin

Riverside Station

Response to Planning
Comments Received through
03/19/20

April 1, 2020



Response to Comments

Number	Commenter (Alphabetical Order)
A	Planning Department Report 1/24
B	Planning Department Report 2/7
C	Planning Department Report 2/28
D	Neil Cronin e-mail 2/14
E	Planning Department Oral Councilor Questions 1/28 Hearing

Planning Department Report 1/24

Comment A.1

Along with these outside public spaces, the Planning Department recommends providing some interior public space related to the transit station. Such space could be used as a waiting area for either buses or trains with up to date transit information, arrival times and a public restroom, which would benefit commuters and residents.

Do you have an update on the MBTA space?

Response

Adjacent to the transit station entry, there will be two station-related components. To the left in Building 8 will be the MBTA station operations space, which includes a space for obtaining information and ticket vending. This space will ultimately be programmed by the MBTA, presumably the MBTA could post transit information, including arrival times, in this location. A public restroom could be included within the space, subject to approval by the MBTA. To the right in Building 7, there will be an enclosed bicycle storage area. By flanking the station entry with these two MBTA-related public uses, the entry will gain a feeling of activity and integration with the project and transit square.

Comment A.2

Further information regarding the management and programming of the open spaces is necessary to understand their impact with respect to placemaking.

Response

The management of the overall property will be handled by a 3rd party management company. The proponent will provide more information on programming and activation at the April 28th hearing

Comment A.3

The plans also indicate that bicycle facilities will extend across Interstate 95 to the proposed roundabout at the intersection of Grove Street, Asheville Road, and Quinobequin Road, but the plans do not state what type of infrastructure, i.e. bike lane, protected bike lane, or sharrow that these connections will take.

We received these graphics from Randy in a file entitled "19.11.04 Grove Street Sections (2)". I assume these will be finalized when the Grove Street bike lane is finalized.

Response

The proposed shared-use path will be provided along the entire site frontage, the Grove Street bridge, and extend to the roundabout/Asheville Road. The bike lane will be separated from the travel lanes along the site frontage and on the bridge, and be at the road's edge between the bridge and roundabout.

Comment A.4

The Planning Department recommends that the petitioner consider locations for incorporating art and incorporating the transit station into a placemaking strategy. More information is also needed to understand the flexibility regarding short-term and long-term approaches to retail.

Response

The proponent will consider locations for art as part of the programming and landscape design. The Transit Station is a significant destination. Its location at the northernmost portion of the site, separated from the parking, retail, office, residential, and hotel uses, will encourage foot traffic through the open spaces in the site and along Main Street. Perhaps the most important feature of placemaking is people. Presently, pedestrians make the daily trek up the poorly maintained and uninviting Grove Street sidewalk to make their way from the transit station to the existing Hotel Indigo. One could imagine that this existing foot traffic will increase substantially with the significant increase in destinations to the south and the addition of open spaces and wide, inviting sidewalks.

In terms of retail, this is an evolving discussion based on market conditions. We have complete flexibility from a design perspective to accommodate short-term users as well as long-term users but we are not in a position, especially in the current environment, to provide any further commitments.

Comment A.5

The petitioner should explore whether there is a need for community space and what sort of space would be complementary to nearby community spaces. The petitioner should also provide information as to the management and oversight the public spaces.

Response

In discussions with community members, there was a greater desire to focus mitigation funds from the project on a robust trail and park network as we have proposed. If that desire has changed the proponent is willing to revisit the conversation. As one would expect for a project of this scale, there will be on-site property management staff tasked with a variety of responsibilities including the management and oversight of public spaces. The proponent intends to manage these spaces to keep them clean, safe and well maintained. Additionally, the proponent has brought a consultant on to the project team to develop a plan to keep these spaces activated. The activation of these spaces will be executed collaboratively by the consultant's planning efforts and the proponent and the property management team.

Comment A.6

The petitioner should also consider including seating in the more active spaces for caregivers.

Response

It is the intent of the open space and landscape design to create a variety of seating options to encourage people to rest and stay within the open spaces.

Comment A.7

As such, the petitioner should withdraw the relief to reduce the front setback along Grove Street.

Response

The plan currently does not require this relief and it will be withdrawn as part of the Board Order.

Comment A.8

The Planning Department, however, recommends the petitioner make a significant effort to highlight the MBTA station and incorporate the station in the placemaking of the Project.

Response

The Riverside Station redevelopment has been planned and designed around the premise of the MBTA Station as the primary destination. As discussed in Comment A.4, its location will encourage pedestrians, bicyclists and others to traverse through the site to reach the destination. The station will be highlighted in several ways. First, a comprehensive wayfinding program will include clear direction to the MBTA parking and MBTA station through a series of vehicular-scale and pedestrian-scale signs. Second, by virtue of its linear spine orientation, Main Street terminates in the transit loop at the station. Even those who may not follow the signage in the site would most likely end up at the station by default. Finally, the station entry itself will be prominent and visible from Main Street and Grove Street. The wide entry to the station will include a noticeable canopy element that projects beyond building 7 over the sidewalk. This signage will be visible from Grove Street as well as from the northern segment of Main Street as it approaches the Plaza. It is worth pointing out that this is a top priority for the MBTA, which has design approval over the MBTA components. The MBTA has been clear that signage into the station and garage needs to be unmistakable.

Comment A.9

Has the NHC approved the demolition of the hotel?

Response

The demolition was approved by the NHC on 2/27/2020.

Comment A.10

Petitioner should appear before the Fair Housing Committee and reappear before UDC and the Commission on Disability

Response

The proponent reappeared before UDC on 3/11/2020 and will be going back to the UDC to review Design Guidelines and signage on 4/15/2020. The proponent is also scheduled to meet with Fair Housing Committee on April 1st. The proponent will schedule a follow-up meeting with the Commission on Disability once the Proponent and the MBTA have agreed on an accessible design for the station entrance.

Comment A.11

The peer review team suggests the Proponent provide more detail for review, prioritizing "required" elements in the overall context of the proposed project design and budget.

Response

This comment requires further context and clarification. The development team will reach out to the peer review team.

Comment A.12

The proposed shared-use path should be extended to Recreation Road, rather than ending at the bridge over the Charles River as currently proposed. We recommend a 14'-wide shared bicycle/pedestrian path on the northeast side of the road in order to provide two-way access for all users while ensuring separation from vehicular traffic entering and exiting the highway. This would still maintain sufficient right-of-way on the existing bridge structure for two 11' vehicular lanes.

Response

It is the intent of the design to extend the multi-use path beyond the Charles River all the way to Riverside Park. The revised design will eliminate the existing short hairpin onramp to I-95N/I-90, creating a 3-way T intersection with the MWRA facility access drive. The proponent is collaborating with DCR to extend a multi-use path along the MWRA driveway to connect to the Lasell Boathouse bridge. This will complete an important link of the Riverside Greenway, connecting the portions of Auburndale adjacent to the Boathouse to Riverside Park in Weston and subsequently to Lower Falls.

Comment A.13

The curb cut behind Building 1 that leads to the MBTA rail yard should be narrowed to improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians using the shared-use path.

Response

This curbcut width proposed is necessary for the occasional delivery and removal of new trains to the yard. Although the wide curbcut is not ideal, it is a compromise to keep these deliveries from utilizing the roads in the development. If the deliveries were to occur through the development, the roads would need to be widened significantly and significant portions of landscaping would need to be removed. The proponent will work with MassDOT through design approval to explore any further roadway geometric changes to reduce the width of this curb cut.

Comment A.14

A two-way bike path is proposed on the west side of Grove Street, which transitions to standard one-way on-street bike lanes near the northern limits of the project. It is also unclear how the bike path connects to Riverside Center. The petitioner should provide more detailed information on the cross-section of Grove Street at this location, and how the bike lanes will transition to the existing condition north of the rail bridge.

Response

The northbound lane of the two-way bike path is intended to serve as convenient access to the MBTA station from Lower Falls and Recreation Road. It terminates at the transit green, where northbound bicyclists can then enter the site towards the MBTA station and other destinations within the development. Bicyclists traveling through to Auburndale will be directed to the one-way bike lane on the eastern side of Grove Street through wayfinding at the intersection of Grove Street and the Recreation

Road Extension. Both the southbound bike lane on the west side of Grove Street and the north bound lane on the east side of Grove Street transition to mixed traffic at the bridge and through the existing boulevard at Riverside Center.

Comment A.15

For northbound bicyclists using the two-way, off-street bicycle path on the west side of Grove Street, clear signage will be necessary at the curb cut between Building 6 and Building 7 to ensure that north-bound cyclists use the crosswalk to cross Grove St. and continue northbound in the on-street bicycle lane.

Response

Wayfinding signage will be located both at the intersection between buildings 6 and 7 as well as the intersection of Grove Street and Recreation Road to identify that the lane on the east side of Grove Street is the route for destinations north of the site. There will be a Rapid Reflectorized Flashing Beacon (RRFB) introduced at the proposed crosswalk north of the Grove Street site driveway providing connection between bicycle facilities on the east and west sides of Grove Street.

Comment A.16

For northbound bicyclists using the on-street bike lane, clear signage should be provided at the new signalized intersection on Grove Street to instruct bicyclists accessing the station to make a left turn at the signalized intersection, rather than the unsignalized crosswalk further north on Grove Street. If space allows, a left turn box for bicyclists should be provided at the signalized intersection to provide a safe space for cyclists to wait for an opportunity to make the left turn and improve visibility between turning cyclists and northbound through traffic.

Response

These comments will be considered and incorporated into the design to the extent allowed by MassDOT.

Comment A.17

At the intersection of Grove St. and the I-95 exit ramp, a pedestrian crosswalk is proposed, but the two-way bicycle path does not have a dedicated space for crossing. In order to provide safe and adequate space for both bicyclists and pedestrians, the bike path should continue across both the exit ramp and the right turn lane from Grove Street parallel to the pedestrian crosswalk, with sufficient space in the refuge island for both bicyclists and pedestrians making the two-stage crossing.

Response

These comments will be considered and incorporated into the design to the extent allowed by MassDOT.

Comment A.18

The two-way bicycle path on the northwest side of Grove Street is shown as continuing south/southwest over the bridge over I-95, but it terminates just on the far side of the bridge. The two-way bike path on the northwest side of Grove St. should be extended through the proposed roundabout at the Grove St./Quinobequin Rd. intersection, creating a safer connection to and from Lower Falls.

Response

This change will be incorporated in the design.

Comment A.19

Building 1 has no in-building bike room. This will encourage workers to drive to work, exacerbating traffic concerns.

Response

Bicycle facilities are a typically required amenity for all office and laboratory-use tenants. Building 1 is currently designed as a shell building and will ultimately be fit-out and configured for the tenants that lease the building. Depending on the user, its number of employees and its preferred location the bicycle storage room and any associated lockers and showers will be designed and located as part of the tenant fit-out. Additionally, there is a bike room in garage 10 that is not allocated to any specific use. It is expected that this could be used to accommodate a variety of users including visitors to Building 1.

Comment A.20

Building 2 (Hotel) has no bike parking. While guests may be unlikely to bring bicycles, many hotel workers may arrive by bike.

Response

Bike accommodations for hotel employees have been provided across the street in Building #10.

Comment A.21

Building 4 exterior access to bike room is from the middle of a long staircase/middle of the Amphitheater switchbacks.

Response

The access is from the amphitheater side and via the ramp system. This is considered by the proponent as preferable to the alternative of no direct exterior access.

Comment A.22

Building 7 + 8 bike room could be more accessible from Transit Square.

Response

This is a tradeoff for these buildings' retail and activation focus. The proponent prefers to prioritize sidewalk activation over accessibility to the bike room.

Comment A.23

Building 10 has two separate bike rooms. If one is intended to serve Building 9, please provide a diagram showing how to move from the bike room to the Building 9 residential lobby. In our opinion, this distance is too great and an additional bike room with a direct connection to the residential lobby of Building 9 should

be added underneath the parking garage speed ramp, which travels up to the second level adjacent to the back of Building 9.

Response

The proponent agrees that ideally the bike parking will be located in the building 9 lobby. For this reason, a bike room has been added to the revised plans, which will be submitted soon.

Comment A.24

The omission of a retail/restaurant space in Building 1 leaves only one ground floor retail space in Hotel Square. The architectural qualities / transparency of the office lobby in Building 1 will be important for creating an engaging pedestrian environment.

Response

Comment noted. The proponent agrees and will focus on the transparency and engagement of the ground floor of Building 1 during design.

Comment A.25

With the omission of the open space in front of Building 1, the small plaza remaining on the northeast corner of Road A and Main Street outside Building 10 now has an asymmetrical relationship to Hotel Square to the south. This small open space should be thoughtfully designed to complement the larger square and accommodate pedestrian traffic to/from a primary lobby for the central garage.

Response

Comment noted.

Comment A.26

The rendering looking east on Main Street at the corner of Building 10 shows some of the architectural challenges that this building must address at the ground level in order to contribute to a well-articulated pedestrian environment at this prominent location.

Response

Comment noted.

Comment A.27

Adding exterior entrances to the ground floor units in Building 3 will help to further activate the Hotel Green, improve the quality of the units themselves, and improve the pedestrian experience and sense of community.

Response

The proponent agrees that unit entries around the Hotel Green will create further activation and engage the landscape. For this reason, the plan has been revised to include 6 units with direct entries in Building 3 and an additional 4 units with direct entries in Building 4.

Comment A.28

Special design consideration – architectural detail, lighting, site elements, etc. – should be incorporated into the pedestrian mews between Buildings 2 and 3 in order to make this a pleasant space.

Response

Comment Noted.

Comment A.29

Building 3's architecture was discussed at length, including the above comments. The Proponent agreed to study alternative approaches to resolve the geometry of the tower element, two-story section of the Building fronting the hotel green, and 8-story residential massing.

Response

The resolution of the tower geometry will be part of the final building design.

Comment A.30

HW recommends additional clarification be provided regarding loading requirements for Buildings 2, 3, and 4. The intent for service and passenger loading appears to be from loading zones marked on-street within Hotel Square. Will additional provision for service loading be required, especially for the hotel (i.e. larger trucks, varying time of day, etc.) so as to not disrupt the character of Hotel Square?

Response

The on-street curb use in front of Buildings 2 and 3 are strictly loading and valet. The hotel does not include a large dining component and has on-site laundry, so it does not typically require large delivery vehicles.

Comment A.31

Safe pedestrian crossing from the center of Hotel Square to the north side of Main Street in front of Building 1 should be reviewed in conjunction with pedestrian desire lines and vehicle queuing from the intersection of Recreation Road and Main Street. A crosswalk from the green to the Building 1 corner and/or special paving or striping of the entire intersection of Main Street with Hotel Square may help vehicular and pedestrian circulation as well as help define sense of place at the west end of the site.

Response

The traffic signal at Main Street will be owned and operated by MassDOT. This portion of Main Street is part of the approach to that signal and will be subject to the final review and approval of MassDOT. To the extent MassDOT does not take issue with this proposed crossing during their design review, it will be added to the plan.

Comment A.32

What is the intent for ADA access from Grove Street to the Hotel Square via the stair between Buildings 3 and 4?

Response

A single-stop elevator will be included in Building 3, immediately adjacent to the stair. This elevator will provide an equally accessible route from Grove Street to the Hotel Green.

Comment A.33

The lower level ground floor of Building 4 contains the one remaining retail/restaurant space fronting on Hotel Square, and it is positioned well to enliven the expanded open space on the east side of the square with outdoor dining or activities. The rendering provided in this submission package does not depict the ground floor of Building 4 as having active, transparent storefronts and should be updated to reflect the revised plans.

Response

The Proponent agrees that the rendering does not accurately reflect the intent of the ground floor of Building 4. The commercial space was added to this corner to increase the activity of this corner and create a visual terminus for those entering the site from the main intersection. It is expected that this corner will have a storefront-style façade at the ground level, similar to the other buildings with retail space.

Comment A.34

The integration of a Go Bus lease on the ground floor plan raises the question as to whether regional buses are planned to be incorporated into the square, which would not seemingly be complimentary to the proposed outdoor dining and amenity space.

(HW) The Proponent clarified that Go Bus loading will take place within the Building 10 garage.

Response

The Go Bus space has been relocated to Building 10, opposite Building 1 on Road A. This was previously occupied by inactive space and will create a new pedestrian destination and activity on this sidewalk. The buses will berth inside the garage of Building 10 with convenient weather-protected access from the Go Bus space.

Comment A.35

While the three-level loggia element on the Main Street façade does provide some visual interest for the streetscape, pinching down the street section before opening it back up into Hotel Square, it does have the impact of screening sight lines to the retail space. Perhaps signage and lighting can be integrated into the loggia to help with visibility.

Response

Though the rendering shows a heavier, more opaque loggia structure, the current intent is to build something lightweight and transparent. To the extent that retail space is located within, it is expected that signage will be tastefully integrated into the loggia.

Comment A.36

Hotel Green appears to be designed to accommodate turning radius of GO Buses. This will make the space more vehicular-oriented and less pedestrian friendly.

(HW) The Proponent clarified that Go Bus loading will take place within the Building 10 garage. The Site Layout and Materials Plan and the Building 4 Level 1 Plan should be revised accordingly.

Response

The turning radius of the hotel green has been designed to accommodate box truck deliveries and emergency vehicles/fire apparatus.

Comment A.37

Remove the parallel parking wrapping Hotel Green, thus creating a larger and more inviting open space that can be shared by residents, hotel guests, and office workers. On-street parking is appropriate along the building edges, but the spaces along the open space in the center will be less heavily used and will therefore serve only to make the vehicle travel lanes seem wider and occupy space that could otherwise be devoted to usable open space.

(HW) The Proponent agreed to study removal of the parallel parking from the center of Hotel Square in order to widen the usable public space.

Response

This parking has been removed as noted and will be reflected in future plan revisions.

Comment A.38

Moving the GO Bus station to Hotel Green will make the service inconvenient for transit connections and could limit the use of the space and have a detrimental effect on its character (see above). If it must stay, the sidewalk area there seems insufficient and poorly designed for inter-city bus loading and unloading.

(HW) The Proponent clarified that Go Bus loading will take place within the Building 10 garage. The Site Layout and Materials Plan and the Building 4 Level 1 Plan should be revised accordingly.

Response

The Go Bus space has been relocated as noted and will be reflected in future plan revisions.

Comment A.39

Please clarify whether the knoll is proposed to be on the west or east side of the Amphitheater (shown both ways in different drawings).

Response

The knoll will be located on the west side of the loggia as originally planned.

Comment A.40

The Transit Square is the most appropriate location for the GO Bus station. If this is impossible, consider placing the GO Bus station in Building 1. Buses could enter the site by traveling north on the on-ramp and using the curb cut for the MBTA railyard, thus avoiding the need to turn around within the site. There is a proposed amenity space on the ground floor of Building 1 adjacent to the proposed MBTA office space, this could be repurposed as the GO Bus stop.

Response

The Go Bus station and bus berthing has all been relocated into Building 10. This is a similar location to the proposed Building 1 location but creates fewer conflicts and eases maneuvering.

Comment A.41

Consider swapping the position of the residential amenity and three residential units on the ground floor of Building 6 and providing these units with direct entries from the exterior. Currently these units are the only ground floor units facing Grove St. on this half of the site. As a result, they feel isolated.

Response

The proponent is considering direct entries for these units to create more Grove Street activity. While they may feel isolated in the context of buildings 6 and 7, they are a continuation of the on-street units in buildings 3, 4 and 5.

Comment A.42

The sidewalk along Grove St. should be made continuous along the site's frontage. The proposed small segment of sidewalk along Building 3 should be extended to connect with the rest of the sidewalk along this half of the site, and with the nearby reconfigured intersection.

Response

A sidewalk extends along the entirety of the project frontage from the newly configured intersection at Building 3 all the way to the northernmost limits of the project adjacent to Building 7.

Comment A.43

Seeks more information on the planting and hardscaping strategy of the public spaces

Response

Our strategy re: planting has a couple of objectives:

1. To create a robust planting plan that provides texture and color throughout the seasons.
2. To use a palette that is comprised of native and/or low water demand plants.
3. Is durable – plants that will thrive rather than just survive.
4. Creates a robust shade canopy.
5. Allow for clear sight lines not only between cars and people but also within the space itself to provide a feeling of safety.

In respects to the hardscape, the primary pedestrian circulation corridors will have a smooth cast in place concrete sidewalk with permeable ‘furnishing’ zone along the back of curb to collect rainwater, organize signs, light posts, and street furniture. In addition, café zones along buildings will receive a pedestrian scale unit paver to designate areas of congregation outside of the primary circulation zone. Other plazas and gathering areas will receive a combination of concrete paving and pedestrian unit pavers to give a rich texture and human scale to the open spaces. The unit pavers will be set on a stable base material and consists of smaller unit sizes such as 4”x8” with tight fitting joints (permeable pavers will have wider joints) to provide a small walking surface.

Comment A.44

Seeks more information on connections to off-site open spaces (i.e. a narrative or plans that show which connections will be made and what types of infrastructure is necessary to make the connections)

Response

The project is providing two groups/types of off-site connections. The first group consist of improvement along Recreation Road and Grove St. The first is a primary connection along Recreation Road as part of the main project. This connection will consist of a 10-12’ wide multiuse path completely separated from vehicular traffic (except potentially the bridge across the Charles). This multiuse path will provide connections to the MWRA site (which will link to other trail networks), Riverside Park, and the currently proposed Pony Truss Trail work along the Charles River. Grove Street connections will receive improved pedestrian and bicycle connections (final design to be determined with City of Newton) which connect to the Recreation Road improvements, the proposed rotary and community beyond.

For the second group of improvements, the proponent is working with local stakeholders to provide additional off site connections which include design and construction of the Depot Tunnel and small portion of Pony Truss Trail, improved connection from Riverside Park to MWRA site, and a connection from Rec Road to the end of the existing abandoned railroad bridge. The project is also anticipating providing design documents for the accommodation of a multiuse path on the two railroad bridges which span I95. See attached plan.

Planning Department Report 2/7

Comment B.1

Suggests incorporating "pop-up" space in the project.

Response

Yes, this is something we intend to do.

Comment B.2

Consider reserving space to Newton-based businesses

Response

The development team will reach out to the planning department to get a clearer understanding of its thoughts on this matter.

Planning Department Report 2/28

Comment C.1

Suggests that Petitioner provide LEED checklist for review by Peer Reviewer

Response

The petitioner has prepared LEED checklists and they will be submitted for review.

Comment C.2

Suggests roof of the garage should be a candidate for solar installation

Response

This is something we are exploring; however, we do not own the garage and therefore the decision will ultimately be with the MBTA as to whether or not they would like to include solar panels. It is expected that regardless of the MBTA's decision to include solar at the time of initial construction, the garage will be designed and engineered to accommodate solar panels.

Comment C.3

Suggests MBTA consider allowing solar installations on its portion of the garage

Response

See above.

Comment C.4

Peer Reviewer suggests additional soil testing in the exact locations of the proposed infiltration chambers

Response

Additional soil testing has been completed in the exact location of the infiltration chambers to confirm infiltration and permeability rates.

Comment C.5

Peer Reviewer suggests petitioner consider implementing green infrastructure and Planning Department suggests revised plans showing type and location of this infrastructure

Response

VHB has described more fully these proposed measures in the March 5th hearing and its most recent response to the peer reviewer.

Comment C.6

Planning Department suggests the Release Abatement Measure Plan be included in the revised construction management plan

Response

The RAM plan will be filed shortly before the start of construction. The MCP requires response actions outlined in the RAM plan to be initiated within one year of filing the RAM [310 CMR 40.0443(5)].

The Release Abatement Measures (RAM) Plan is a document prepared in accordance with the MCP [310 CMR 0.0440] outlining the additional response actions supporting redevelopment at the site associated with RTN 3-10565 which has achieved a Permanent Solution. The RAM plan will be filed with DEP prior to the start of construction once the design has been completed. As part of preparing the RAM plan an evaluation per 310 CMR 40.0442(3) will be completed to ensure that the new structures would not prevent or impede the implementation of other potential future response actions which will include a site assessment, risk characterization and feasibility evaluation.

Comment C.7

Seeks more information on connections to Charles River and trail networks including draft scopes of work, estimated costs, timelines, and wayfinding program

Response

We are actively working with Greenway Trail Network, DCR and the MBTA to further define the scope in order to refine our pricing and better understand the timing of events. As information becomes available, we will share that with the City.

Neil Cronin email 2/14

Comment D.1

Would like to see a graphic representation of how Grove Street will be divided (similar to as is shown on Sheet C-7.1 of the submitted plans) that stretches from the roundabout to the signalized intersection in front of Building 3.

Response

The team is working with the City staff to finalize the design and we will provide those drawings once clear direction has been agreed upon.

Comment D.2

Do you have a solid waste master plan?

Response

A solid waste master plan was included in the special permit filing. It has been updated for the revised plans and is attached.

Planning Department – Oral Councilor Questions from 1/28 Hearing

President Albright

Comment E.1

President Albright: How will pedestrians get through the transit plaza?

Response

The transit plaza includes continuous sidewalks on all 4 sides. Additionally, following the desire line from Main Street to the MBTA station, two crosswalks have been added to create a safe and clear route through the central plaza from Main Street to the MBTA Station.

Comment E.2

President Albright: Are you trying to replicate a different transit plaza? If so, what is it?

Response

The transit plaza is based on traditional paved squares that can be found across many urban cultures, most notably Italian and Hispanic. It is designed for versatility; the MBTA is given a clear path to move its buses, and the remainder is paved to accommodate a wide range of uses, with trees overhead to provide shade.

Comment E.3

President Albright: How will Buildings 5 and 6 present to Grove Street?

Response

Building 5's first-floor units will meet the Grove Street sidewalk with "front doors" and stoops to create a friendly, welcoming edge and opportunities for interaction between residents and passers-by. Because Grove Street slopes downward to the north, these stoops will vary in height to meet the grade of Grove Street.

Building 6, for its southern half, will have three residential units facing the sidewalk. At or near center, the main residential lobby will have a service entrance on the Grove Street side. Towards the north, the ground floor contains retail space intended for restaurant or café use. As the building approaches the Transit Square, a change in grade results in a split double sidewalk, the upper level of which is spill-out area for the retail space. This upper area, bounded by a balustrade, turns the corner to place a deep dining patio against the Transit Square.

Comment E.4

President Albright: Label the shadow study more clearly, the Councilor did not know which buildings were which.

Response

The Shadow Study will be revised for clarification.

Comment E.5

President Albright: How big is the hotel green? Can it be bigger?

Response

The Hotel Square is a very large space that reaches approximately 172 feet from building face to building face and it extends 215 from the edge of Main Street to Building 3. This space includes textured pavers, providing a woonerf condition for its low-speed drop-off loop. This loop surrounds a green area that has been widened by 16 feet over the previous version by eliminating the parallel parking on the inner edge of the loop road. This green area is now approximately 64 feet by 164 feet, for an area of over 10,000 square feet, ideal for including a good sized play area. The play area will receive a low wrought-iron-style fence to keep children from wandering across the woonerf.

Comment E.6

President Albright: Is there a stage in the amphitheater? If so, will it be wired for sound?

Response

The amphitheater does not include a stage. Although it takes on an amphitheater-like arrangement in shape, performances are not the primary purpose of this space and could take place on the wide sidewalk at its base. Provisions for power will be provided in all public gathering spaces to allow the use of amplification. This will be provided to allow their flexibility of use.

Comment E.7

President Albright: How does the plan align with the Washington Street vision regarding building length?

Response

The Washington Street vision does not specifically address total building lengths. It only suggests that blocks should be less than ¼ mile in length.

The development team has designed the Riverside buildings to be a variety of lengths, actual and perceived. The longer buildings are demised in a variety of ways, so that some are broken up into what appear to be smaller buildings.

Comment E.8

President Albright: What are the ground floor uses along Grove Street?

Response

The ground floor uses along Grove Street will be residential in buildings 3, 4, 5 and portions of Building 6. The remainder of Building 6 and Building 7 will include retail.

Councilor Downs**Comment E.9**

Councilor Downs: Concerning the hotel green, how useful is it to have parks surrounded by pavement?

Would it be more useful to have a one-way in, one-way out and shift the green space to abut sidewalk?

Response

The hotel green will have woonerf-style vehicular areas. The material will be unit pavers and the vehicular paths will be separated from the pedestrian and green areas by bollards and low fences, creating the feel of a continuous pedestrian environment and clear indication that cars are not the priority. In the current plan, there is no parking structure or other significant vehicular destination along this loop, so traffic volumes will be light. Because there is no terminal destination for vehicles, there is no possibility of a one-way pair as described; the vehicular path has to loop. The alternative, a single street with a cul-de-sac turnaround, is a suburban auto-era street type that is not in keeping with the goal of creating a walkable community.

Comment E.10

Councilor Downs: How far is the knoll from parked-or moving-cars?

How useful is this space since it is close to cars and their exhaust?

Response

The knoll is over 25 feet from cars. Cars will not be idling adjacent to the knoll so vehicular exhaust is not expected to be a major concern with its location.

Comment E.11

Councilor Downs: How will the transit plaza function for pedestrians and bicyclists?

Response

The transit plaza includes continuous sidewalks on all 4 sides. Additionally, following the desire line from Main Street to the MBTA station, two crosswalks have been added to create a safe and clear route through the central square from Main Street to the MBTA Station for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Comment E.12

Councilor Downs: How do you mix shuttles and private vehicles within the transit plaza?

Response

Shuttles will be routed through the garage and will only use the southern curb of the transit square for boarding and alighting. Private vehicles will be allowed to drop passengers at the western curb of the transit square; however, short-term parking will be provided in the garage at ground level for picking up and dropping off passengers. The other two curbs will be dedicated to the infrequent MBTA bus arrival. Because of this arrangement, it is expected that vehicular traffic in the square will be relatively light.

It is important to note that, while higher frequency bus service is certainly hoped for in the future, an MBTA bus typically arrives once every hour and ten minutes during peak periods. Even a doubling of service would still mean that you are far more likely to see a transit square that is free of buses than to see a bus picking up or discharging passengers.

Comment E.13

Councilor Downs: Last sentence of Planning memo, there is a word missing. It should read: "The Planning Department finds the Project to comply with this criterion".

Response

Response not required.

Comment E.14

Councilor Downs: Is there a direct connection to the Two Bridges trail from the site?

Response

Because the site does not directly abut the Two Bridges, a direct connection from the site through the MBTA property is not possible. However, an approach ramp parallel to Recreation Road is proposed as part of the proposed partnership arrangement with the DCR. The proponent will continue to work with the MBTA and DCR to obtain any necessary approvals or easements to allow for this approach to be as flat as possible and eliminate the need for significant switchbacks.

Comment E.15

Councilor Downs: Will there be street trees on both sides of Recreation Road?

Response

Street trees are currently proposed on Recreation Road separating the multi-use path from the vehicular roadway. They will also provide a visual cue that this is a route with a destination. Because Recreation Road and the space along its southern edge is in MassDOT right-of-way, it is unlikely that additional trees in this space will be allowed.

Comment E.16

Councilor Downs: Seating areas should be provided throughout the site.

Response

The Project team concurs that seating areas are important and vital to the success of the open spaces and will include benches and seat-walls as well as other furniture where appropriate to encourage users to linger.

Councilor Gentile**Comment E.17**

Councilor Gentile: Can the Planning Department provide a chart detailing the height of Buildings 3-7 and their setback from Grove Street?

Response

Planning Department to respond.

Comment E.18

Councilor Gentile: What are the Planning Department recommendations regarding building height along Grove Street concerning the relationship to building height to street width?

Response

Planning Department to respond.

Comment E.19

Councilor Gentile: The bike lane on the eastern side of Grove Street should be removed to allow for an improved setback along the western side.

Response

The proponent has provided the Planning Department with several potential options and arrangements for the bike lanes and it is the Planning Department's position that any viable option must include a bike lane on the eastern side for bicycles traveling from Lower Falls to Auburndale.

Comment E.20

Councilor Gentile: Can the southbound right turn only lane be removed in favor of a larger setback.

Response

The southbound right turn lane must remain to prevent the possibility of long queues backing up traffic towards the bridge and Riverside Center where there are insufficient sight lines.

Comment E.21

Councilor Gentile: What is required to allow the bike lane on the eastern side of Grove? How does the bike lane affect the west side of Grove Street?

Response

If the bike lane on the eastern side were to be deleted, the western curbline could shift up to 3 feet further from the buildings. The shift is not the full width of the bike lane as MassDOT will require that a 2' shoulder be maintained on the eastern side if there is not a bike lane.

Comment E.22

Councilor Gentile: Will the buildings be broken down with demise lines?

Response

Yes, as noted in the Demise Line drawing in the Proponent's proposed Design Guidelines.

Comment E.23

Councilor Gentile: What does the term rowhouse mean?

Response

Rowhouses, sometimes called townhouses or brownstones, are buildings that look to be made up of an accretion of single-family houses connected by common sidewalls, similar to what can be found on Beacon Hill or in the Back Bay. In the context of this project, the term Rowhouse is used to describe a long façade that has been demised to create the appearance of such individual homes, breaking down its length and scale.

Councilor Bowman

Comment E.24

Councilor Bowman: Can the plan include a more desirable area for parents and children, safely separated from moving vehicles? The playground should also accommodate those with disabilities.

Response

A play space will be the central feature of the Hotel Green. Surrounded by a slow-speed, low volume, woonerf-type street, and further enclosed by a low wrought-iron-style fence, this playground will be exceptionally safe.

Comment E.25

Councilor Bowman: Will Building 1 be the tallest building in Newton?

Response

In terms of stories, Chestnut Hill Towers are the tallest in Newton at 16 stories. The buildings are 165 feet tall at their face including penthouse. When measured from Route 9, they are 180 feet tall. Although Building 1 includes far fewer stories than Chestnut Hill Towers, because there is a potential for lab use in the building, high floor-to-floor heights and a tall mechanical space is required to accommodate the mechanical systems for this use. As a result, it is slightly taller than Chestnut Hill Towers by 5 feet at 170 feet tall.

Comment E.26

Councilor Bowman: What is the required setback from Grove Street and what are the setbacks of the buildings along Grove Street?

Response

The required Grove Street setback is 25 feet. The building setbacks as proposed vary from 25.6 feet 27.5 feet.

Comment E.27

Councilor Bowman: Why is the southbound right turn only lane necessary?

Response

The southbound right turn lane must remain to prevent the possibility of long queues backing up traffic towards the bridge and Riverside Center where there are insufficient site lines.

Comment E.28

Councilor Bowman: concerned with pedestrian and bicycle access into the site. Someone needs to walk her through the plan.

Response

The pedestrian and bicycle access have been detailed as part of the Transportation-focused hearing and can be further described in the April Transportation-focused hearing.

Comment E.29

Councilor Bowman: The bike lane on the eastern side of Grove Street should be protected.

Response

An option for providing a protected lane on the eastern side has been created and will be presented. This option will require reducing the two-way path along the frontage of Building 6 to a one-way path.

Comment E.30

Councilor Bowman: Can the proponent construct the Two Bridges Trail?

Response

No, but the proponent is committed to funding the costs of the 100% design for improvements to the bridges and funding the construction of the access route on the northern approach.

Councilor Leary**Comment E.31**

Councilor Leary: The bike lane on the eastern side of Grove Street should be protected.

Response

An option for providing a protected lane on the eastern side has been created and will be presented. This option will require reducing the two-way path along the frontage of Building 6 to become a one-way path.

Comment E.32

Councilor Leary: Can the hotel green be improved? Can it be pedestrian only or partially pedestrian only?

Response

Vehicular access through the hotel green is required for deliveries, move-ins, drop-offs, valet and most importantly ADA-accessibility so the vehicular access cannot be removed. Through the implementation of a woonerf-style curbless design, the space will clearly prioritize pedestrians and signal to vehicles that the primary purpose of the space is pedestrian use. The revised plan removes the parallel parking along the green.

Comment E.33

Councilor Leary: Are there other options for the transit plaza? It seems chaotic.

Response

The design of the transit plaza has been thoughtfully planned and coordinated in great detail with the MBTA. The proponent has advocated for this space to be as inviting as possible to people. Shuttles will be routed through the garage and will only use the southern curb of the transit square for boarding and alighting. Private vehicles will be allowed to drop passengers at the western curb of the transit square, however short-term parking will be provided in the garage at ground level for picking up and dropping off passengers. The other two curbs will be dedicated to the infrequent MBTA bus arrival. Because of this arrangement, it is expected that vehicular traffic in the square will be relatively light.

Comment E.34

Councilor Leary: Please provide more information on the northbound bike lane on the eastern side of Grove? Is it redundant, and if not, does it need to be protected?

Response

An option for providing a protected lane on the eastern side has been created and will be presented. This option will require reducing the two-way path along the frontage of Building 6 to a one-way path.

Comment E.35

Councilor Leary: The MBTA should state whether this petition prohibits future transit operations on site.

Response

The MBTA attended the Land Use hearing on February 25th and confirmed that the current plan does not prohibit future operations on the site. Furthermore, the plan has already considered potential operational improvements that can be made down the road such as additional bus accommodations and train storage.

Comment E.36

Councilor Leary: Have we considered retractable bollards for locations where we do not want vehicular access into the site?

Response

Retractable bollards are only appropriate for use in areas that generally prohibit vehicular traffic but frequently allow specific vehicles access. The function more like a mechanical access gate. There are not locations in the site where these will be appropriate. For the emergency access to Grove Street, removable not retractable bollards will be used. These bollards are removed by staff on the development as part of traffic diversions for shifts in MBTA operations. It is anticipated that police officer control of this intersection would be in place when emergency operations were in place at this driveway.

Comment E.37

Councilor Leary: Has the roof of the garage been considered for solar?

Response

Yes, we are discussing solar on the roof of the garage with the MBTA who will retain ownership of the entire garage once it is built.

Councilor Markiewicz**Comment E.38**

Councilor Markiewicz: We need to understand more about the transit plaza.

Response

The design of the transit plaza has been thoughtfully planned and coordinated in great detail with the MBTA. The proponent has advocated for this space to be as inviting as possible to people. Shuttles will

be routed through the garage and will only use the southern curb of the transit square for boarding. Private vehicles will be allowed to drop passengers at the western curb of the transit square, however short-term parking will be provided in the garage at ground level for picking up and dropping off passengers. The other two curbs will be dedicated to the infrequent MBTA bus arrival. Because of this arrangement, it is expected that vehicular traffic in the square will be relatively light.

Comment E.39

Councilor Markiewicz: Do we need on-street parking along Main Street?

Response

Curbside parking along both flanks is a key feature of almost every successful main street in the US. There are many reasons for this fact, including the way that it benefits businesses, calms traffic, and protects the sidewalk, but it is more useful to stress that this project has been designed with a strategy of emulating successful places and not taking undue risks with unproven configurations.

Comment E.40

Councilor Markiewicz: What type of bollards will be installed at the emergency access driveways?

Response

Removable bollards will be used. These bollards are removed by staff on the development team as part of traffic diversions for shifts in MBTA operations.

Comment E.41

Councilor Markiewicz: Is the crosswalk on Grove Street safe?

Response

The crosswalk at the northern end of Grove Street has been added to the plan at the direction of the City's Public Works Transportation Department. This crossing will include an actuated Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) to signal to vehicles that a pedestrian or bicyclist intends to cross at this location. In addition, signage that is interactive and connected to the RRFB will be placed on the north side of the train trestle to allow advanced warning of a potential stop required ahead.

Comment E.42

Councilor Markiewicz: Can the petitioner construct all commitments rather than providing design funds for bike and pedestrian improvements?

Response

The petitioner has committed to fund all improvements which are either in its sole control or can be approved as part of the City Council process. The petitioner will use best efforts to construct the Charles

River Park Improvements but has come to an agreement with the Greenway Trails Group that if not, these funds will be made available.

Councilor Norton

Comment E.43

Councilor Norton: Was there consideration for community gardens in the plan?

Response

Community gardens are relatively land-intensive and were not considered as part of the open space uses.

Comment E.44

Councilor Norton: Could trees be installed to block noise and reduce air pollution?

Response

Frequently-spaced trees are proposed throughout all of the open spaces on site.

Councilor Krintzman

Comment E.45

Councilor Krintzman: Is there an alternate way to buffer the pedestrians along Main Street rather than two eight-foot wide parking lanes?

Response

As already stated, curbside parking along both flanks is a key feature of almost every successful main street in the US. There are many reasons for this fact, including the way that it benefits businesses, calms traffic, and protects the sidewalk, but it is more useful to stress that this project has been designed with a strategy of emulating successful places and not taking undue risks with unproven configurations.

Comment E.46

Councilor Krintzman: Protected path of travel from the garage to the awnings along Building 8.

Response

Awnings will be included along the frontage of building 8 to provide a weather-protected path for the majority of the route from the garage to the station

Councilor Kelley

Comment E.47

Councilor Kelley: How will the open spaces work?

Response

The open spaces are intended to work as a series of complementary ‘moments’ within the project. Each space shall serve multiple uses and each is slightly different depending on the date, time and location within the site and the adjacent building/transportation program. The Transit Square and Green complement one another: The Transit square is a commuting hub with public access to various modes of transportation and commuter interactions as its primary focus, while the Transit green provides a primarily softscape passive counterpoint. The amphitheater provides both spaces for quiet contemplation during the majority of the days, while also accommodating larger planned events for special use. The hotel green also acts as a dual use space. It is a plaza which supports the active use of the hotel and retail while providing a community open space/playspace at its center.

Comment E.48

Councilor Kelley: What are the connections to the River and what are their extents?

Response

The proponent will extend a two-way extension of Recreation Road and a multi-use path to Riverside Park. This park connects to the River through an existing network of trails and bridges. Additional expansions of this trail network are proposed including the improvement and reopening of the “Depot Tunnel” connection to Charles Street, the final link to the MWRA trail and Lasell Boathouse Bridge and the design of the improvement of the Two Bridges over 128.

Comment E.49

Councilor Kelley: Has the petitioner considered vertical green gardens? Rooftop gardens or rooftop solar?

Response

Vertical gardens/green walls tend to be difficult to create successfully outdoors in our climate. Generally, because the upper partial floors have been eliminated from the residential buildings, there is no rooftop access for residents to provide rooftop gardens. The roofs will be solar ready and we are discussing solar panels on top of the garage with the MBTA.

Comment E.50

Councilor Kelley: How will the pedestrian and bicyclist circulation work?

Response

The pedestrian and bicycle access will be addressed at the April 7th hearing, which will be focused on transportation.

Comment E.51

Councilor Kelley: How can the plan highlight the transit station?

Response

The Riverside Station redevelopment has been planned and designed around the premise of the MBTA Station as the primary destination. As discussed in Comment A.4, its location will encourage pedestrians, bicyclists and others to traverse through the site to reach the destination. The station will be highlighted in several ways. First, a comprehensive wayfinding program will include clear direction to the MBTA parking and MBTA station through a series of vehicular-scale and pedestrian-scale signage. Its location will not be a secret. Second, by virtue of its linear spine orientation, Main Street terminates in the transit loop at the station. Even those who may not follow the signage in the site would most likely end up at the station by default. Finally, the station entry itself will be prominent and visible from Main Street and Grove Street. The wide entry to the station will include a noticeable canopy element that projects beyond building 7 over the sidewalk. This canopy will include signage/identification that will be coordinated with the MBTA to ensure its location is unmistakable.

Councilor Wright**Comment E.52**

Councilor Wright: What percent of the beneficial open space is softscape versus hardscape?

Response

The percentage of soft vs hardscape varies within each of the open spaces, but as an average the ratio is approximately 50% hardscape and 50% softscape. The streetscapes with primary pedestrian sidewalks, street trees, permeable paving, benches, and planting beds will be predominantly hardscape with attention given to accommodating proper street tree soil volume through the use of raised tree beds and structural soil below the permeable pavers. Other spaces such as the amphitheater and transit green will be up to 66% percent softscape to accommodate a more passive use in these locations.

Comment E.53

Councilor Wright: Can the hotel green be shifted towards Building 4?

Response

The arrangement of the Hotel Green has been thoughtfully planned and located. The deep sidewalks between the vehicular lane and Building 4 are an important pedestrian space to preserve.

Comment E.54

Councilor Wright: The transit square needs to be looked at.

Response

The design of the transit plaza has been thoughtfully planned and coordinated in great detail with the MBTA. Although this is an ongoing discussion, the MBTA feels very comfortable with where we have landed at this point in the design. The proponent has advocated for this space to be as inviting as possible to people.

Councilor Greenberg

Comment E.55

Councilor Greenberg: Safety of green spaces surrounded by traffic.

Response

While there are vehicular lanes around the hotel green, as has been described, the priority of this space is pedestrian, and the vehicular use of this area would not be accurately described as traffic. The other green spaces are primarily bounded by buildings or pedestrian sidewalks.

Comment E.56

Councilor Greenberg: Can there be a safe space for kids?

Response

A play space will be the centerpiece of the hotel green.

Comment E.57

Councilor Greenberg: Can there be pedestrian only areas? Bike only areas?

Response

The areas that include vehicular access are necessary.