



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** City of Newton Planning & Development  
**From:** Peer Review Consultant Team  
(Form + Place, Horsley Witten Group, Inc., Utile)  
**Date:** January 23, 2020  
**Re:** Riverside Station, Newton, Massachusetts  
Site Design, Open Space, and Grove Street Review Summary

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### SUMMARY

The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize peer review input regarding urban design, site design, open space, and Grove Street elements of the most recently updated Riverside Station design. The following documents were the focus of this review:

- Site Plans, Riverside Station, Grove Street, Newton, Massachusetts (23 sheets, prepared by VHB, dated December 9, 2019)
- Architectural Plans, Riverside Master Plan, Newton, Massachusetts (28 sheets, prepared by VHB & David M Schwarz Architects, dated December 3, 2019)
- Landscape Plans, Riverside Station, Newton, Massachusetts (2 sheets, dated December 9, 2019)
- Design Guidelines and Architectural Controls, Riverside Station Redevelopment (92 sheets, prepared by Speck & Associates & Stantec, dated January, 2020)

Our commentary is divided into sections, reflecting the main streets and public spaces that the Peer Review Team has focused on as well as the overall Site Design strategy and other related issues. In general, the proponent has continued to make favorable improvements to the site design and open space network.

Comments listed in this memorandum are taken directly from review memoranda prepared by Form + Place and Utile as noted below. A meeting with the City, the Peer Review Team, and the Proponent's team was held on January 10, 2020 to discuss the latest peer review comments. Summary notes from this January 10 meeting are provided in **bold text** below the peer review comments where necessary to provide clarifications or updates.

#### Comment legend:

- (F+P) Form + Place Peer review comments dated January 3, 2020  
(U) Utile design review comments dated December 6, 2019  
(HW) Horsley Witten January 10, 2020 meeting summary notes

## A. OVERVIEW: THE REVISED PLAN

### General Comments

1. (U) In response to community feedback, the petitioner shifted the buildings with frontage on Grove Street back approximately 10-12 feet, resulting in a setback of approximately 25.6-27.5 feet. This was achieved by moving the proposed Main Street farther west toward the railyard, and reconfiguring the garage into a longer and narrower structure. Importantly, all of the parking that was formerly in garages associated with the hotel and office building has been consolidated into a single structure (see comments about the revised/consolidated parking structure below). In addition, one of the two office buildings was eliminated, helping to reduce peak hour traffic demand.
2. (F+P) Despite the considerable downsizing of the project – both programmatically and architecturally - the overall urban design intent has been maintained, including a quality Main Street corridor that ties together a network of open spaces, and the purposeful siting and scaling of buildings at the perimeter of the development so as to appropriately integrate with the surrounding context [including along Grove Street].
3. (F+P) The high-quality of site/landscape design in the major public spaces - which evolved through extensive feedback from the peer review team in 2019 - has remained largely intact, yielding an appropriate variety of well-appointed places for active and passive recreation.
4. (F+P) Even with the loss of 300,000 sf of office space, 20,000 sf of retail and 75 dwelling units, the project still has a reasonably balanced mix of uses that will support an active neighborhood environment. The resulting consolidation of parking into one central garage with multiple vehicular access points, combined with a residential / mixed-use liner that architecturally screens the full length of the garage along Main Street, reduces the impacts of parking on the pedestrian environment.
5. (F+P) Further refinement of building facades, especially at the ground floor level, will be a key aspect of the successful activation of the streetscapes and open spaces on which they front.
6. **(HW) The peer review team recommends additional consideration be given to requirements for the level of quality of the implementation of the project. Renderings submitted to date communicate a high level of quality (high percentage of brick, deep windows, balconies, special building and open space features, site materials, etc.). Required elements and features should be specifically determined before approval of the project, rather than providing open-ended language, diagrams, and guidelines. 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.**
7. **(HW) An updated Beneficial Open Space Plan dated December 9, 2019 was provided demonstrating an increase in beneficial open space from 17.2% to 17.5% compared to the previous September 9, 2019 plan. It should be noted that 65.1% of the beneficial open space provided is labeled as “open to the public” on the plan. Updates to the design of the open spaces listed below have increased their value as beneficial elements of the public realm. More detailed review of this plan will be required as part of the discussion of open spaces.**

## Parking Structure

8. (U) A consolidated parking structure is a positive development from a parking utilization standpoint, because parking can be shared between a wide variety of users. It will also allow any dedicated allocation of spaces to particular users to be adjusted over time if needs change.

**(HW) Parking utilization and allocation will be reviewed in more detail by Green International as part of their upcoming review.**

9. (U) The consolidation of parking in a single structure may cause congestion at the entrances at peak demand times, but the two entrances/exits shown in the plan will help distribute the traffic. Peak traffic in and out of the parking garage will occur as office employees are combining with MBTA commuters; the removal of one of the previously proposed office buildings will mitigate this issue.

**(HW) Parking access will be reviewed in more detail by Green International as part of their upcoming review.**

10. (U) The new site plan configuration means that there is a minimal setback between the west side of the garage and the parcel line. This new setback will need to be reviewed by the MBTA from an emergency access standpoint.

**(HW) The Proponent noted that the setback condition has been reviewed in detail with the MBTA relative to the stated concerns, and has been found to be acceptable. HW recommends written verification be provided.**

11. (F+P) The north side of the Main Street corridor, just to the west of Transit Square, has changed significantly with the redesign of the central garage, housed in Buildings 9 and 10. The previous submission proposed a garage that was three bays wide and extended over a ground floor pedestrian arcade. The architectural quality of this mixed-use building in the previous submission was somewhat challenged by the fact that the street-front façade was masking a multi-level garage use. The revised submission now proposes a garage that is only two bays wide and is entirely lined by a single-loaded residential or mixed-use building. Building 9's ground level, which offers the two largest retail spaces, should help provide a very active streetscape as the development's open space network transitions from Transit Square to Main Street.

## B. BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCOMMODATIONS

12. (U) 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. See attached diagram.

**(HW) The Proponent indicated that these connections will be made, but have not yet been fully designed or added to the plan. Additional information should be provided for review as soon as it is available.**

13. (U) 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. See attached diagram.

14. (U) We are pleased with the significant investments being made to provide high-quality bicycle infrastructure. However, we have a few comments to make the bicycle facilities safer and more user-friendly.
- a. 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.
  - b. 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. See attached diagram.
  - c. 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.
  - d. 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. See attached diagram.
  - e. 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. See attached diagram.

**(HW) The Proponent indicated that the connections and details noted in comments a-e above will be addressed, but have not yet been fully designed or added to the plan. Additional information should be provided for review as soon as it is available.**

15. (U) Bike parking:
- a. Building 1 has no in-building bike room. This will encourage workers to drive to work, exacerbating traffic concerns.
  - b. Building 2 (Hotel) has no bike parking. While guests may be unlikely to bring bicycles, many hotel workers may arrive by bike.
  - c. Building 4 exterior access to bike room is from the middle of a long staircase/middle of the Amphitheater switchbacks.

- d. Buildings 5 + 6 bike rooms have been improved by making them larger and more directly accessible from street level.
- e. Building 7 + 8 bike room could be more accessible from Transit Square.
- f. 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.

**(HW) The bike parking concerns were discussed. The Proponent indicated additional information will be provided for review.**

## C. PUBLIC SPACES

### Hotel Square

16. (F+P) The design of Hotel Square has not changed significantly and in some instances, the quality of the public realm has improved, due to the subtle reconfiguring of buildings. The omission of lower level parking from Building 3 will reduce vehicular traffic in the square and allow for a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The following comments regarding specific buildings on the square describe how their relationship to the public realm has evolved and what impact this will likely have on the quality of the open space:

#### Building 1

- 17. (F+P) The design of Building 1 – both in height and footprint configuration – has changed notably, including its relationship to Main Street and Hotel Square. Presumably, this is due to the downsizing of the overall development and the reshaping of the project boundary in the northwest corner of the site, which has eliminated a free-standing parking structure and a proposed public open space.
- 18. (F+P) 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.
- 19. (F+P) The office building now fronts directly on Main Street in an area that had previously been occupied by open space and was an extension of Hotel Square across Main Street

#### Building 10

- 20. (F+P) 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.

21. (F+P) 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.

### Building 2

22. (F+P) The relationship of Building 2 [the hotel] to Hotel Square has not changed significantly since the previous submission.
23. (F+P) The placement of the breakfast room and lounge on the ground floor at the Main Street end of the building will help enliven these streetscapes.

### Building 3

24. (U) 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.
25. (F+P) The design of Building 3, its use - residential instead of office and parking - and its relationship to the Hotel Square, has changed significantly since the previous submission.
26. (F+P) A tower element is proposed in the southeast corner of the square – an evolution from the symmetrical disposition the office building previously presented. If developed thoughtfully, the tower can visually anchor the occupiable open space in front of Building 4 and become a landmark element that works in conjunction with the grand stair connecting down from Grove Street.
27. (F+P) The introduction of a lower, two-story section of building fronting on the park, provides the opportunity for outdoor amenity / green space on the low roof overlooking the square and reduces the potential shadow impacts on the pedestrian area [and residential entry] adjacent to the hotel building.
28. (F+P) The omission of parking from the three lower levels of Building 3, in favor of residential uses, should provide a more pleasant facade to serve as a wrapper at the head of the square.
29. (F+P) Architecturally, the two-story façade might want to be developed in a way that addresses its prominent location [i.e. a bay, or other feature, centered on the green space in the middle of the square].
30. (F+P) 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.
31. (F+P) In addition, with the garage entry omitted, pedestrian / vehicular interfaces in the square should be simplified.
32. **(HW) 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.**

33. **(HW) 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?**
34. **(HW) 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.**
35. **(HW) What is the intent for ADA access from Grove Street to the Hotel Square via the stair between Buildings 3 and 4?**

#### Building 4

36. (F+P) Building 4 is similar in scale and articulation to the design included in the previous submission, with the exception that the geometry of the footprint on the south side of the building has been adjusted to better align with the Grove Street frontage
37. (F+P) The resulting realignment of the grand stair to be perpendicular to Grove Street should improve visual connections and enhance the arrival experience of pedestrians entering the square.
38. (F+P) 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.
39. (F+P) 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.**
40. (F+P) 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.

41. (U) 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.**

42. (U) 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. See attached diagram.

**(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.**

43. (U) 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.**

### **Amphitheater Green**

44. (F+P) The design of Amphitheatre Green has remained essentially unchanged from the previous submission. In reviewing the revised landscape plans and renderings, it is a little unclear whether the "Jack and Jill" hill is still incorporated into the design. Regardless, the sloping green remains a very desirable, and accessible, place that can be used to enjoy both contemplative moments and intimate performances. The mix of shaded and open lawn areas feels appropriate for the surrounding residential uses and will be one of many unique open spaces that provide visual connectivity to [and from] Grove Street. The green also functions like an urban pocket park, providing visual relief to the street wall at a key location where the geometry shifts along the development's Main Street corridor.
45. (U) Please clarify whether the knoll is proposed to be on the west or east side of the Amphitheater (shown both ways in different drawings).

### **Transit Square & Green**

46. (F+P) The evolution of the open space design of Transit Square & Green during peer review discussions of the previous submission were transformative, and it appears as though the best qualities of these spaces have been maintained or enhanced. The addition of an open one-story loggia element and a landscaped terrace on the east end of Building 6 should help create a very positive synergy with Transit Green. One of the largest ground floor retail spaces is provided in



this location and would be ideal for a restaurant use with outdoor dining overlooking the green. In addition to the flexible green space provided by Transit Green, Transit Square has been further articulated through the integration of additional street [and plaza] trees and specialty paving. Attention to better defining bicycle and pedestrian access to the center of Transit Square should be given as the landscape plans continue to develop. The variety of ground floor retail spaces provided in Buildings 6, 7, 8 and 9 surrounding the square should make for a very lively pedestrian environment, as residents, employees and commuters interface with the MBTA station.

47. (U) 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. See attached diagram.

## **D. ADDITIONAL BUILDING REVIEW**

### **General Scale and Character**

48. (U) The scale, massing, and articulation of the buildings feels more comfortable and less repetitive.
49. (U) The reduction in building heights has resulted in a more varied set of forms that better respond to variations in the terrain, creating a pleasantly gradual rise from low buildings in the project's northeast corner to higher ones in the southwest.
50. (U) The replacement of the proposed arcade with a more typical street condition will create more open and accessible retail and residential access, and a better lit public realm.

### **Building 6**

51. (U) Addition of retail to the ground floor of Building 6 at Transit Square is a positive development because it will activate the public realm on Grove Street at an important gateway.
52. (U) 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.

## **E. MAIN STREET CORRIDOR**

53. (F+P) Building 6, on the south side of Main Street across from Building 9, accommodates active ground floor uses as well – retail space and residential amenity space – and should complete the experience of a double-loaded shopping street. The integration of canopies, balconies, signage and a high

degree of storefront transparency, as well as other architectural elements should provide a nicely articulated pedestrian experience.

54. (F+P) Further down the corridor to the west, Main Street transitions to a more residential feel, with Buildings 5 and 10 incorporating stoops and individual porticos that provide direct access to ground floor units. Although Building 10, in particular, is rendered to appear like row houses, this building, as well as the other multi-family structures, consists largely of flats that are accessed by elevator cores and corridors.

## **F. GROVE STREET**

55. (F+P) The continued evolution of the design of the Grove Street frontage, both in terms of the scale of buildings and the integration of open spaces that provide visual connectivity into the development, indicates that the petitioner is intent on providing a context-appropriate design for the most public frontage of the project. Buildings along Grove Street are lower in scale than elsewhere in the project and step appropriately to follow the sloping topography. They are also sited relative to Grove Street in such a way as to provide strong definition to the street edge, while allowing adequate space for the accommodation of pedestrian and bicycle movements. As with the Main Street corridor side, the buildings engage the ground plane by incorporating stoops and terraces for point access to residential units and retail space.
56. (F+P) While the Grove Street renderings show a degree of architectural articulation provided by elements such as balconies [i.e. Building 5], the design of these buildings should continue to be refined to incorporate larger organizational strategies such as a well-defined a base, middle and top, or other similar devices that provide an appropriate scale and degree of articulation. The City of Newton's Design Guidelines should help clarify a range of acceptable approaches.
57. (F+P) The experience of walking along Grove Street at the edge of the development should be quite enjoyable, with numerous opportunities to engage in thoughtfully designed public open spaces and amenities.
58. (U) 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. See attached diagram.

II.A) Continue shared path to Recreation Road

II.B) Reduce width of curb cut, improving bike/ped safety.

Suggested GO Bus site access

III.C) Suggested alternative GO Bus stop location.

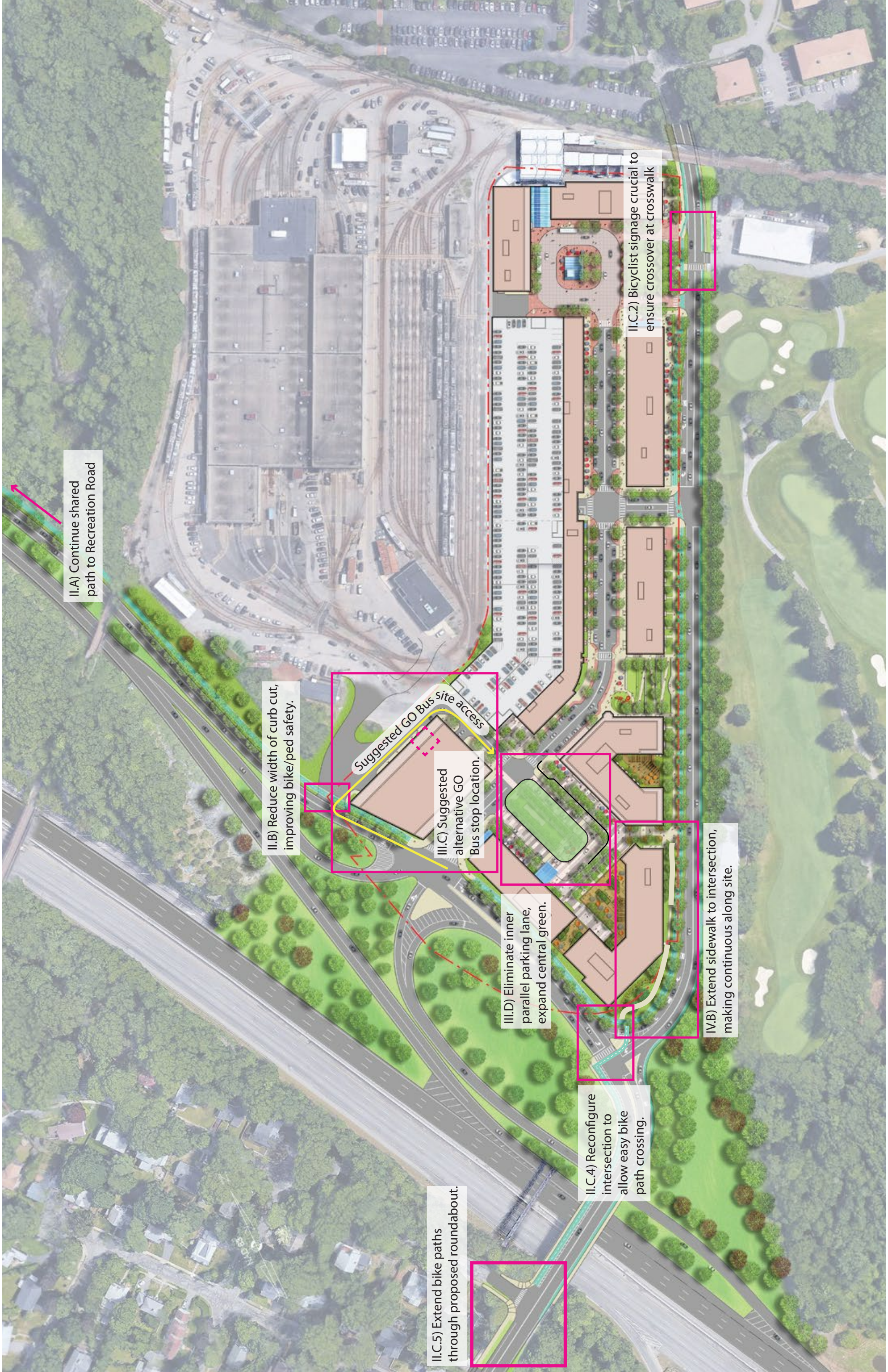
III.D) Eliminate inner parallel parking lane, expand central green.

IV.B) Extend sidewalk to intersection, making continuous along site.

II.C.4) Reconfigure intersection to allow easy bike path crossing.

II.C.5) Extend bike paths through proposed roundabout.

II.C.2) Bicyclist signage crucial to ensure crossover at crosswalk



2.a) Suggested Recreation Road Access

