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April 21, 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 responses to comments and questions received from Councilors Albright, Bowman, Downs, Gentile, Greenberg, Krintzman, Laredo, Markiewicz, Norton, and Wright prepared by the development team dated April 21, 2020. This represents the fourth set of responses to comments and questions from Councilors or the Planning Department.

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
Mr. Robert Korff
Mr. Damien Chaviano
Mr. David Roache

Riverside Station

Response to Comments from Land Use Committee Public
Hearing on 4/7/2020

April 21, 2020



Response to Comments

Number	Commenter (Alphabetical Order)
A	Councilor Albright
B	Councilor Bowman
C	Councilor Downs
D	Councilor Gentile
E	Councilor Greenberg
F	Councilor Krintzman
G	Councilor Laredo
H	Councilor Markiewicz
I	Councilor Norton
J	Councilor Wright

Councilor Albright

Comment A.1

Are the overflow spaces adequate?

Response

Presently the average peak demand for parking at Riverside Station is 636 parking spaces. When complete, the project will include 1,000 spaces dedicated to the MBTA, which is 57% greater than demand. The MBTA has deemed this adequate to accommodate future increases in demand and has built in the ability to place their spaces into the shared parking pool in the event there is an excess parking supply.

Councilor Bowman

Comment B.1

There should be a daily parking rate, and no monthly discount for parking. If you have already paid for monthly parking there is more incentive to drive.

Response

While this concept makes complete sense for discouraging office users from driving, in practice it will be very difficult to implement. The types of tenants we are looking to include will draw employees from the whole region and not just locally where they would be able to bike or take public transit. For this reason, these employers will expect to compensate the employees for their parking costs. If the employees are not paying the cost of parking, the disincentive of paying daily for parking is removed. Concepts such as offering “bike to work” rewards and paying the cost of public transportation passes we believe will be more effective in reducing demand. For residents, daily parking rates will not work as any resident with a car will need to garage it at the project.

Comment B.2

Concerned about slip lanes.

Response

A detailed response has been prepared under separate cover and is included in **Attachment A**.

Councilor Downs

Comment C.1

Just to clarify, slip lane is not on the design?

Response

There are no slip lanes proposed in the current design. The 2013 Riverside project included a slip lane at the off-ramp from I-95/128 South to avoid the roundabout. This has been eliminated at the request of MassDOT. To further clarify, a response has been prepared under separate cover and is included in **Attachment A**.

Councilor Gentile

Comment D.1

One of the screens shows what the bridge area would look like – as far as a pedestrian walkway and bike lane, is that what extends on Grove Street?

Response

What is shown on the bridge is a condition that is unique to the bridge and the approaches. The existing bridge is exceptionally wide and in its current configuration provides shoulder lanes on either side that are unnecessary and wide enough to fit 4 lanes of traffic. Because of this extra space, the design can provide sidewalks and buffered bike lanes on both sides.

Comment D.2

Grove Street is 26 feet wide. What is its width after the project, and if we further reduce it because of the bike lane, what would it be?

Response

A detailed summary is included in **Attachment B**, which includes three alternatives. Alternative A (currently proposed, Alternative B (raised bike lane as requested by the Planning Department), and Alternative C (eliminating the bike lane).

Below is a summary of the alternatives in Tabular format:

	Existing	Alternative A Proposed	Alternative B Planning Preferred	Alternative C No East Bike Lane
Curb to Curb Width at Building 5	26'	28'	23'	28'
Curb to Curb Width at Building 6	26'	38'	33'	34'
Building 5 Setback from Curb	N/A	39'	38.5'	41'
Building 6 Setback from Curb	N/A	30'	29.5'	34'
Vehicular Travel Lanes	11'	11'	11'	11'
Western Bike Lane (Project)	N/A	10' (2-way)	10' (2-way)	10' (2-way)
Eastern Bike Lane (Golf Course)	N/A	5' at Street	5.5' Raised	N/A

Note the following:

- The existing section of Grove Street from the Hotel Indigo to the bridge abutment is a 50-foot right of way and the paved roadway is 26 feet wide between the curbs. This space is allocated as two 11-foot lanes and two, 2-foot shoulders when it was last striped.
- In the currently proposed condition, south of the main intersection, the roadway is 28-feet between the curbs and is allocated as follows: two 11-foot lanes, a 1-foot shoulder on the western edge and a 5-foot bike lane on the eastern edge. The travel lanes are the same as existing in width and the overall roadway is widened from existing conditions by 2-feet to accommodate the bike lane.
- If the bike lane were eliminated, the proposed condition could match the existing at 26-feet. We are currently showing it as 28' but it could be further reduced.

Councilor Greenberg

Comment E.1

(e-mail submitted April 13, 2020): Was there any discussion about there being pedestrian, bike, and/or vehicle connections between the Riverside train station and the Auburndale commuter rail stop?

Response

While an improved pedestrian and bike connection from the site to Auburndale is challenging over existing roads due to various rights of way and land control constraints, an improved connection from the development to Auburndale will be created via the improvements to Recreation Road and the link to the MWRA trail. By making this connection, one could walk or bike from Lower Falls or the Riverside development down Recreation Road to the improved bridge over the Charles River at the Lasell Boathouse. From the Lasell Boathouse, bicyclists and pedestrians can enjoy a safe walk or ride down the residential Charles Street to Auburn Street. The station is two short blocks down Auburn Street from Charles Street. In all, this route is almost entirely on protected paths or low traffic residential roads. The petitioner has included a shuttle from the development to Auburndale as a possible mitigation measure in the event trips exceed 110% of projections.

Councilor Krintzman

Comment F.1

We should look at doing what we think is most applicable regarding the warrants.

Response

As noted in the March 20, 2020 traffic signal warrant memorandum prepared by VHB and submitted to the City, the intersection of Grove Street at Woodland Road does not meet any traffic signal warrants today. In addition, projections of future conditions with the project in place were made and the signal warrants reviewed under that condition suggests that a signal is still not warranted.

Comment F.2

What is your thinking around workers who work at McDonalds and who walk to and from the T?

Response

Unfortunately, there is no great solution for the limited number of people who make that walk. In its present condition, this is a treacherous walk where these employees must walk up the narrow Grove Street sidewalk, cross Grove Street where traffic does not stop, cross the I-95/128 off ramp, walk along the side of the I-95/128 S off ramp and then cross the off ramp. Much of this does not include adequate sidewalks or crosswalks. The proposed project includes extensive pedestrian and bicycle accommodations between the station and the interchange with I-95/128 S and Quinobequin Road. The vast majority of this walk will be significantly improved with no unsafe crossings. However, creating a safe pedestrian crossing of the I-95/128 off ramp to the McDonalds is not possible due to the existing off-ramp configuration. This dangerous crossing will remain.

Comment F.3

How about spaces in the garage for The Ride?

Response

The spaces in the garage for “The Ride” are a transfer location for paratransit systems including “The Ride” allowing users of different paratransit systems to transfer from one van to another. This location in the garage has been reviewed by the MBTA and they have determined that proximity to the Green Line station for these spaces is not important. In fact, the existing location for these transfer spaces is in the southwest corner of the MBTA parking facility closest to the rear parking of the Hotel Indigo.

The transfer spaces for “The Ride” not used for picking up and discharging passengers from the Green Line station. A dedicated drop-off area in the transit loop at the station is provided for connecting “The Ride” to the station.

Comment F.4

How about a covered walkway from the garage to the T, specifically over the roadway between Building 8 and 9?

Response

The majority of this walk is covered with the exception of the short section of roadway between buildings 8 and 9. This gap is about 30-40 feet where the driveway to and from the garage and loading areas crosses the path. It should be noted that this is a major improvement over existing conditions where commuters have to walk hundreds if not over 1,000 feet without any weather protection.

Councilor Laredo

Comment G.1

Will the developer charge for Parking in the office building? How will you do this?

Response

Monthly parking for office employees will be charged directly to the employer in addition to the rent of its occupied space. Visitors to the office building will pay an hourly/daily rate and have their parking validated and paid for by the tenant.

Comment G.2

What if a tenant says it wants parking built into its lease?

Response

It can be expected that tenants will have varied demands for their allocation of parking spaces. By charging for the tenant on a per-space basis rather than building it into their lease, the tenant will be encouraged to optimize the number of spaces needed as they will have an opportunity to save costs by not using more spaces than they need. If they request parking to be built into their lease, a credit system could be implemented reducing their rent for unused spaces, effectively creating the same incentive structure.

Comment G.3

How will visitor parking be managed?

Response

All parking will be monitored using a License Plate Recognition (LPR) system. Office employees, and hotel guests will park on the upper floors of Garage 10 and MBTA customers will park on the upper floors of Garage 9. The short-term visitors will park on floors 1 and 2 of the garage. These spaces will include an hourly/daily rate structure that will allow for free stays for those who visit for 2 hours or less. Those that exceed 2 hours will pay an hourly rate that exceeds the MBTA rate as a base to discourage use of the MBTA parking area and the rate will increase with the length of the stay. Office, retail, and restaurant tenants may validate the parking of their guests through a computerized/app-based system that is connected to the LPR program. In those instances, the tenants may validate a portion of the parking costs, which will vary with the desire of the tenant. There will not be a system in place where one could validate parking at the retail space and then take the T into Boston. The validation will only cover the hourly limitations that the retail tenant is willing to pay.

Comment G.4

Need more specifics on how parking rules will be enforced and who will enforce them.

Response

As noted above, the parking will be managed using the LPR system. The way the LPR system works is the same as the existing MBTA parking. The user downloads a free app to their phone, enters their license plate and pays through the app. As is the case today, if an individual does not want to use the app or simply does not want to pay, a bill will be mailed to their registered address and they will be charged an accruing late fee if they do not pay. If they fail to pay the parking fees in the MBTA portion of the garage, the MBTA has the ability to prohibit the user from renewing their registration in state. If this occurs in the non-MBTA portion of the garage, the license plate will be listed in the system for future towing for additional offenses. Towing will be coordinated by the professional management company that will oversee the entire garage.

Comment G.5

We have traffic projections for up to 110 percent. What if traffic mitigation fails?

Response

Should the project result in traffic that exceeds the 110% of the projections that have been made, strategies to reduce traffic will be discussed with the city and ultimately implemented to create traffic conditions that are in the realm of the projections made. Some of the potential strategies that might be considered have been outlined, one of which include a potential shuttle to the Auburndale Commuter Rail Station. New technologies are constantly being advanced and all potential TDM strategies will be considered and discussed with the city to ensure compliance with the traffic cap requirement.

Comment G.6

I like the idea of a protected bike lane – protected 2 ways from Hamilton all the way to Williams. What would it cost? I'm struggling with the bike lane on the other side- whether unprotected or protected. There have to be tradeoffs. What are we giving up?

Response

In spite of what was presented by the LFIA, this proposal would be extremely expensive and have significant physical and land-control hurdles. First, space under the existing bridge does not exist for this accommodation. Second, the entire roadway in front of the Riverside Center would need to be completely reconstructed. Finally, the utility poles for the entire stretch would need to be relocated or buried under ground. The cost for this work would undoubtedly be several million dollars.

Councilor Markiewicz

Comment H.1

I still don't understand how it can be safe to bike through the roundabout. Also, by continuing the lane to Hancock Street in Auburndale – how do we finance that?

Response

A bicycle can transition through the roundabout in one of two ways. First, they could remain in traffic northbound as they would be when they approach the roundabout and then they stay in traffic and transition into the new northbound bike lane on the bridge. Second, they could stop at the roundabout and cross in the crosswalk over to the 2-way cycle track and proceed on the other side of Grove Street across the bridge. A diagram of these two options is demonstrated in [Attachment C](#).

Councilor Norton

Comment I.1

Here the petitioner is offering \$500K in subsidies for transit but it ends; I don't want it to end. I don't think we can assume people will take the Green Line.

The petitioner has offered \$750K related to ideas of what the petitioner would do if certain traffic mitigation is not met. I think we should see what they propose up front.

Response

The petitioner is not willing to have an open-ended financial commitment. If there is an interest in spreading out payments over time, versus a lump sum payment, that is something that we are more than willing to discuss. In terms of the \$750K, the petitioner has proposed using these funds for further public transit subsidy or a shuttle service to the Commuter Rail.

Councilor Wright

Comment J.1

Go Bus is way on the other side of the development. Pedestrians will cross the parking garage to get to the Go Bus. Is there a dedicated path for a person taking the Go bus?

Response

Pedestrians will be able to walk along Main Street from Riverside Station to the Go Bus waiting area. While this walk is longer than existing conditions, a significant portion of this walk is covered, surrounded by active retail, and is an overall pleasant experience. It should be noted that while some people do make that walk today, the majority of Go Bus passengers arrive by car.

Attachment A



Memorandum

To: City of Newton

Date: April 15, 2020

Project #: 10865.03

From: Randall C. Hart, Principal

Re: Riverside Redevelopment
Response to Comments
Newton, Massachusetts

Councilor Bowman: I am worried about the right-turn slip lanes at the new Grove Street signalized intersection near the location of the current Hotel Indigo. There's a potential for vehicles to speed through the slip lanes and create an unsafe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Grove Street under existing conditions is essentially a straight roadway with no stop signs or traffic signals that would slow the through eastbound and westbound movements along the roadway. The existing 85th percentile speeds on Grove Street is 32 mph in both the eastbound and westbound directions. The uncontrolled nature of Grove Street and the high speeds of the through movements is coupled with a short northbound off ramp from Route 128 and a free (straight) right turn slip lane from the Route 128 northbound off-ramp onto Grove Street eastbound that encourages vehicles to exit the interstate at high speeds and not slow down as they enter Grove Street. This creates significant issues for access and egress to the condominium complex located 100 feet east of the off-ramp slip-lane and for the crosswalk across Grove Street located another 100 feet east of the condominium driveway.

Under the proposed improvement plan, significant changes to the roadway network are being proposed that will specifically address the concerns raised above. Grove Street will no longer be linear eastbound and westbound, and controls to slow down traffic are being added along the roadway at the intersections with the Route 128 southbound ramps (roundabout), at the new Grove Street Extension (traffic signal), and at the Site Driveway (traffic signal). In addition, the right-turn slip lanes off the Route 128 northbound and southbound off-ramps are being eliminated, forcing vehicles to slow down before turning onto Grove Street. The addition of controls along the Grove Street corridor and the revised layout of the street (non-linear) will slow traffic activity over the existing conditions.

A side-by-side of the existing conditions and the proposed layout is presented below.

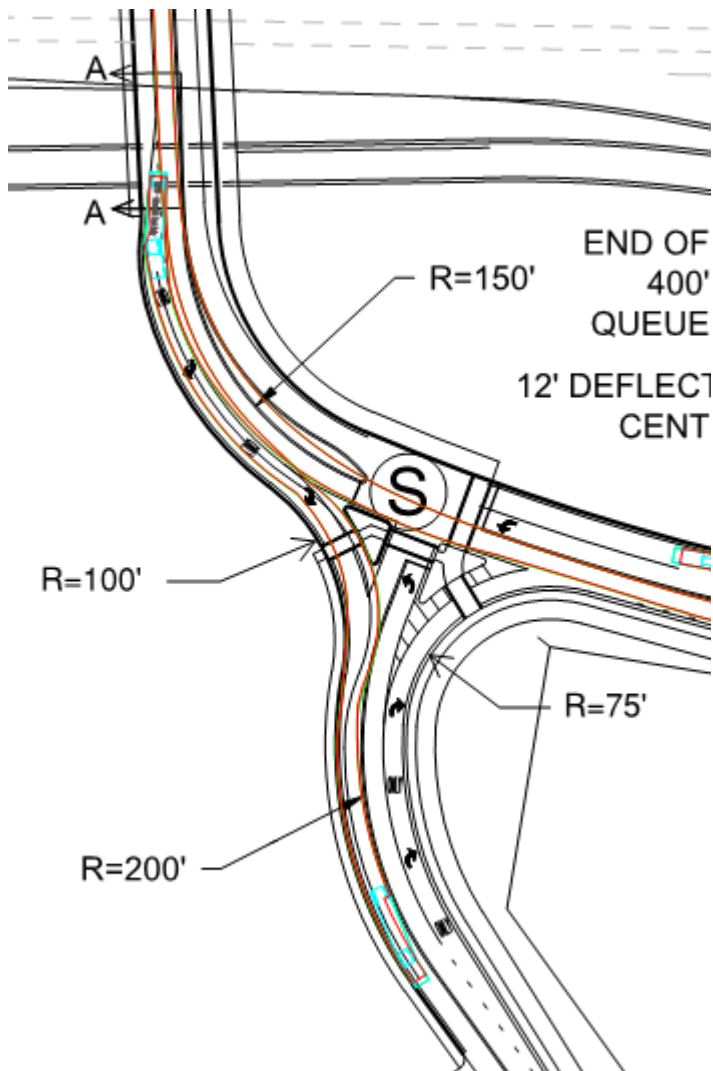


A concern has been raised about the right-turn lanes from Grove Street to Grove Street eastbound and from Grove Street westbound to Grove Street Extension northbound (connecting to the Route 128 northbound ramps and Recreation Road Extension). As demonstrated in the figure below, the right turn lanes were designed to accommodate a WB-50 Tractor trailer. As you can see in the figure, there is no opportunity to tighten the radius and still accommodate the design vehicle. Standard practice and MassDOT requirements would not allow the encroachment of a design vehicle in the oncoming lane as it would not be safe. The relatively small radii ranging from 75' to 100' can conservatively facilitate a maximum travel speed 20 mph. Vehicles will be traveling through the proposed intersection at a much lower rate of speed than they travel through Grove Street today or off the Route 128 northbound ramp today. In addition, sight lines to on-coming vehicles for motorists leaving the condominium complex and for pedestrians at the crosswalk will be significantly longer (better) than today and will exceed requirements. The triangular island that is between the right and through lane is to channelize the movement and "fill the space" and provide refuge for a pedestrian in a space that would otherwise be asphalt. Any landscaping introduced along the highway or roadway edges will be place carefully to ensure sight lines are maintained for the long term. The new right turn lanes are being designed to meet MassDOT standards and the improvements overall represent significant enhancements to safety and traffic operations.

In addition, it is expected that the right-turns will operate under signal control instead of yield control which will provide additional safety and protection for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the roadways. The signal will be red for vehicles turning right when the walk sign is on for pedestrian and bicyclists to cross. The analyses included in the submissions to the City assume the right-turns are under signal control and that is reflected in the delays and queues that have been presented to date.

Another benefit of the current design is a shorter crossing distance for pedestrians and bicyclists that may not want to cross the full intersection at one time. With the channelized right turns, pedestrians only need to cross from the curb to the islands before crossing the rest of the distance. The islands create a resting point for pedestrians and bicyclists midway through the crossing that is protected from vehicles.

Based on the safety benefits of the current design and the signalized control of the right-turn slip lanes, it is believed that the current design meeting MassDOT standards is the best design and changing this intersection to a traditional T-style intersection is not necessary or desirable.



Attachment B

LEGEND

-  10' MULTI-USE PATH TWO WAY
-  10' TWO WAY CYCLE TRACK WITH A BUFFERED SIDEWALK
-  SHARED ON ROAD BIKE ACCESS
-  5' ON ROAD BIKE LANE (BUFFERED)
-  5' ON ROAD BIKE LANE (NON-BUFFERED)
-  PEDESTRIAN SIDEWALK



BIKE/PED
CROSSING
@ SIGNAL

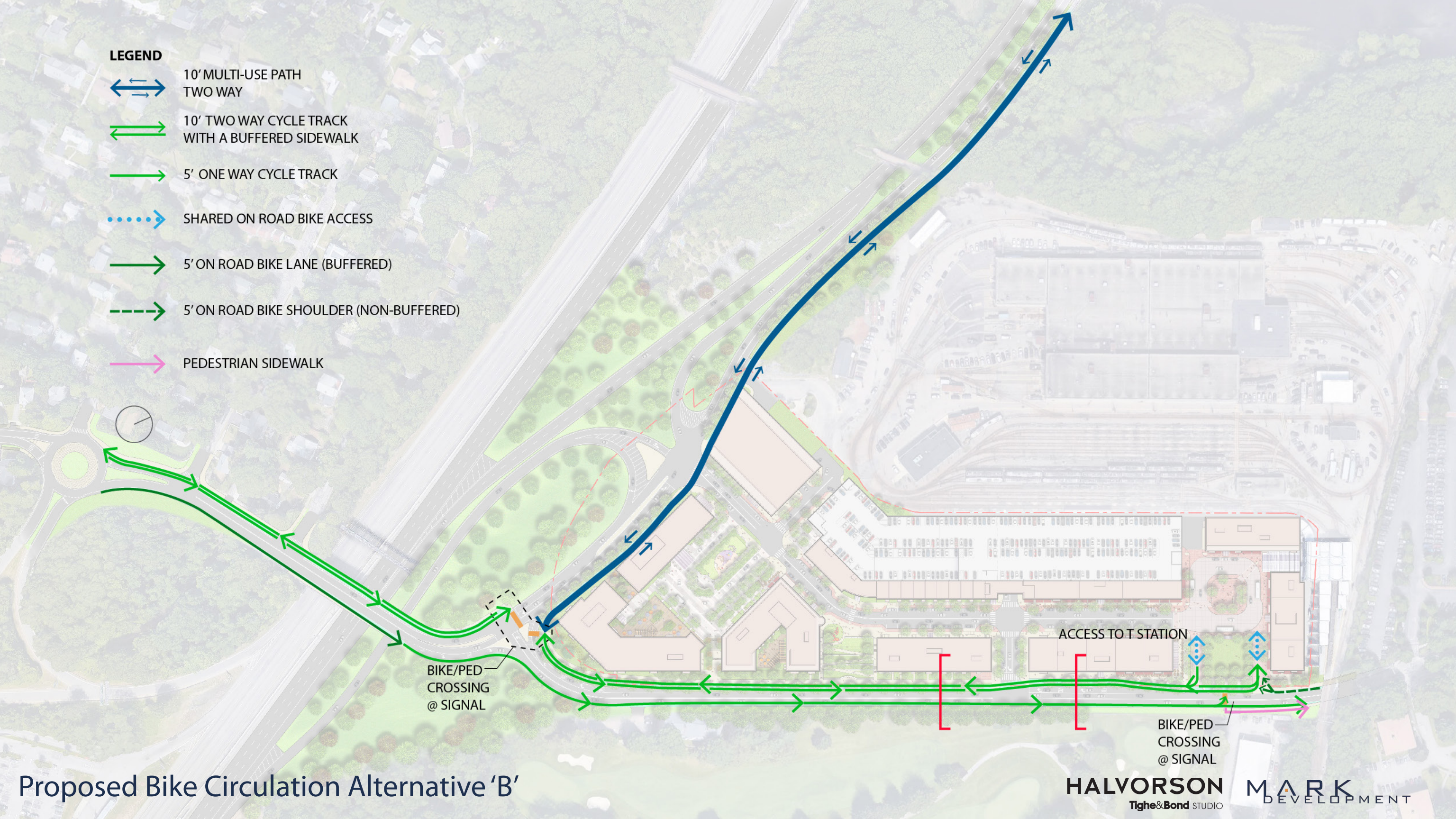
ACCESS TO T STATION

BIKE/PED
CROSSING
@ SIGNAL

Proposed Bike Circulation Alternative 'A'

LEGEND

-  10' MULTI-USE PATH TWO WAY
-  10' TWO WAY CYCLE TRACK WITH A BUFFERED SIDEWALK
-  5' ONE WAY CYCLE TRACK
-  SHARED ON ROAD BIKE ACCESS
-  5' ON ROAD BIKE LANE (BUFFERED)
-  5' ON ROAD BIKE SHOULDER (NON-BUFFERED)
-  PEDESTRIAN SIDEWALK



BIKE/PED
CROSSING
@ SIGNAL

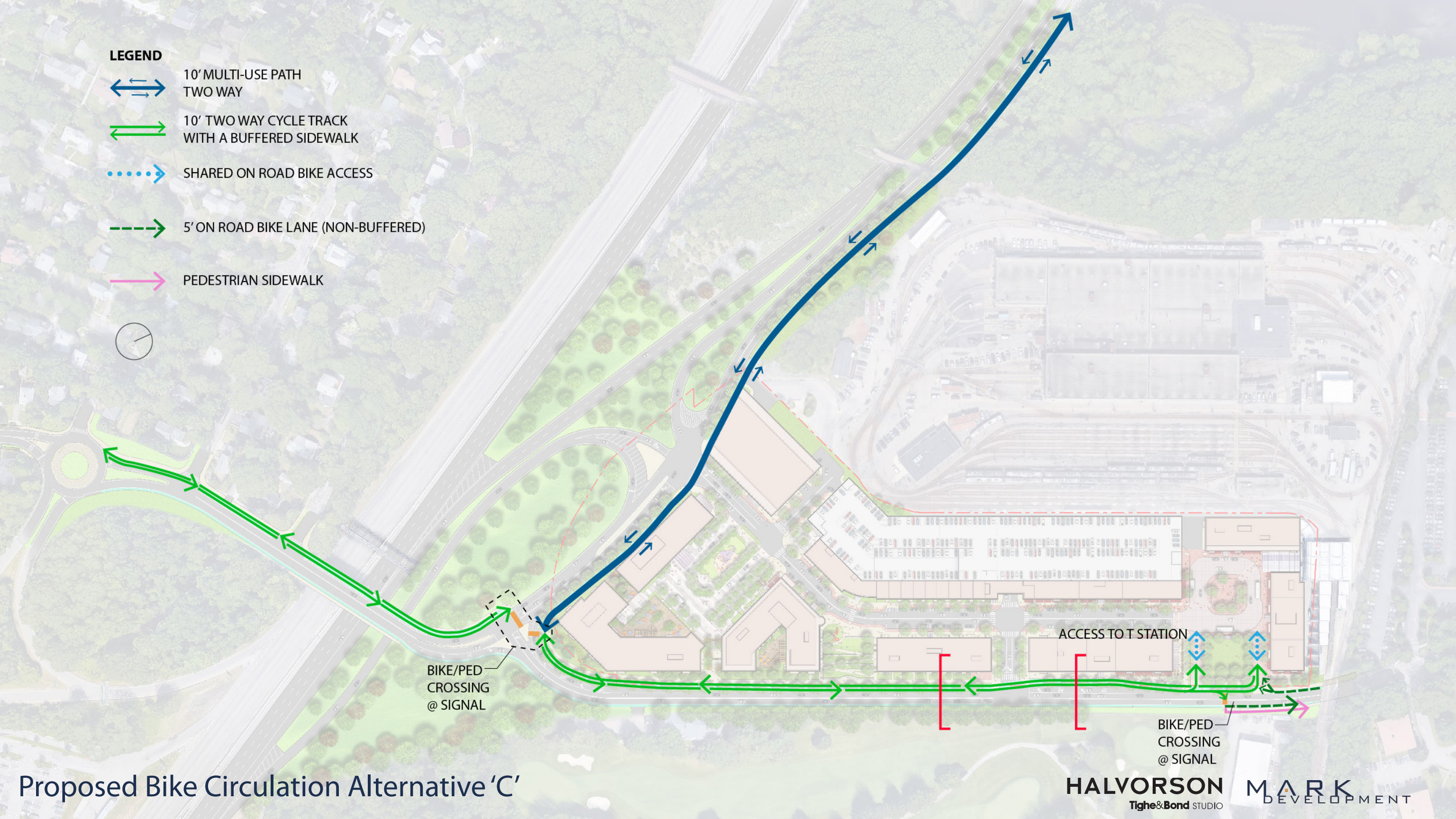
ACCESS TO T STATION

BIKE/PED
CROSSING
@ SIGNAL

Proposed Bike Circulation Alternative 'B'

LEGEND

-  10' MULTI-USE PATH TWO WAY
-  10' TWO WAY CYCLE TRACK WITH A BUFFERED SIDEWALK
-  SHARED ON ROAD BIKE ACCESS
-  5' ON ROAD BIKE LANE (NON-BUFFERED)
-  PEDESTRIAN SIDEWALK

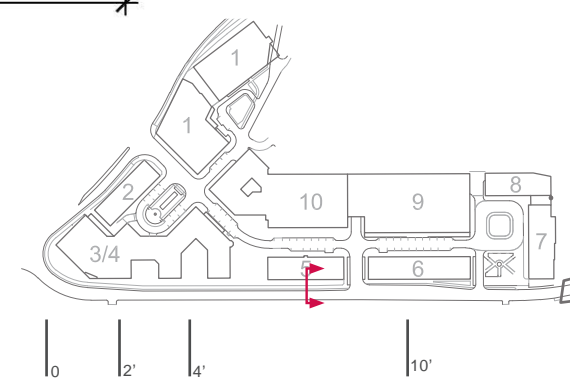
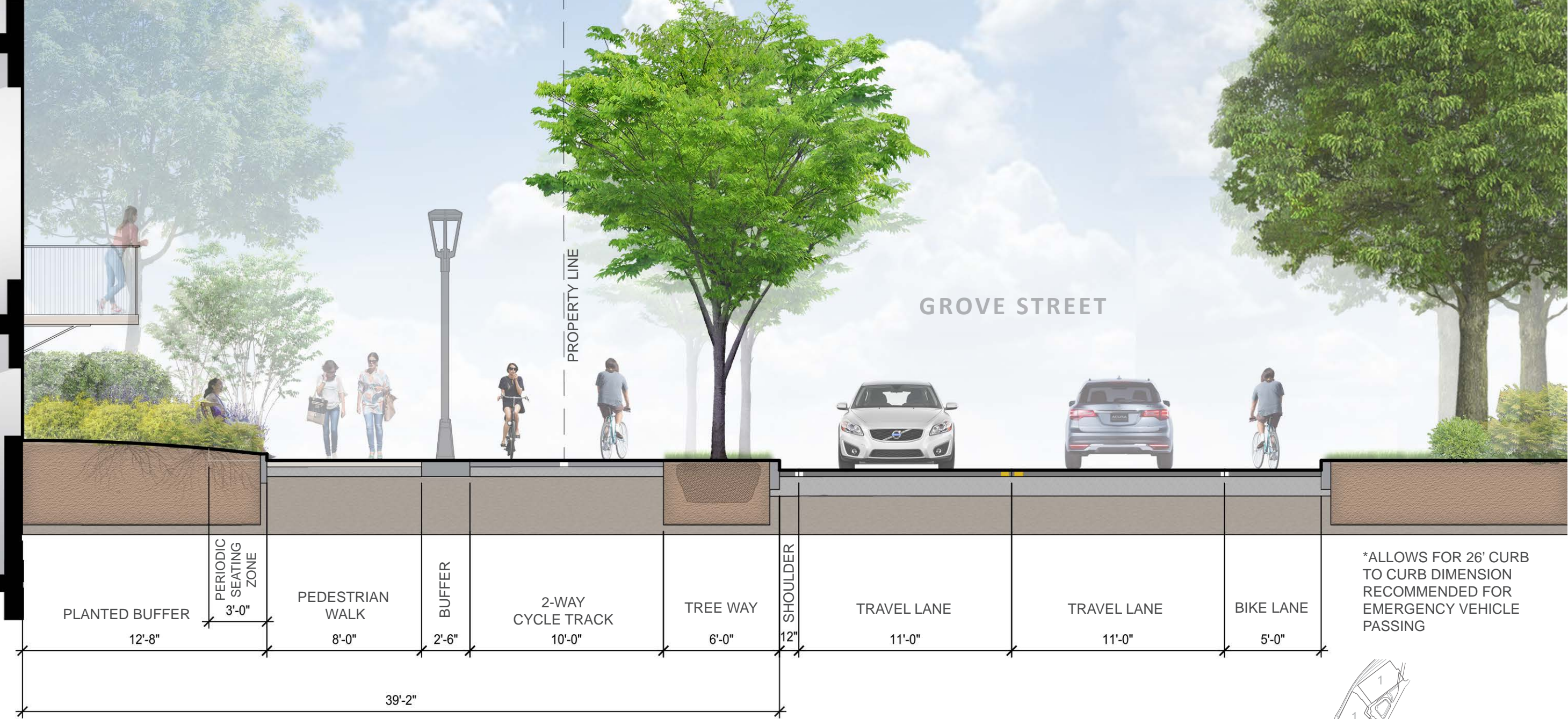


BIKE/PED
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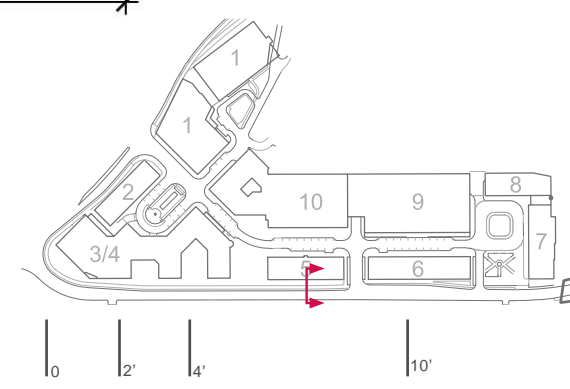
ACCESS TO T STATION

BIKE/PED
CROSSING
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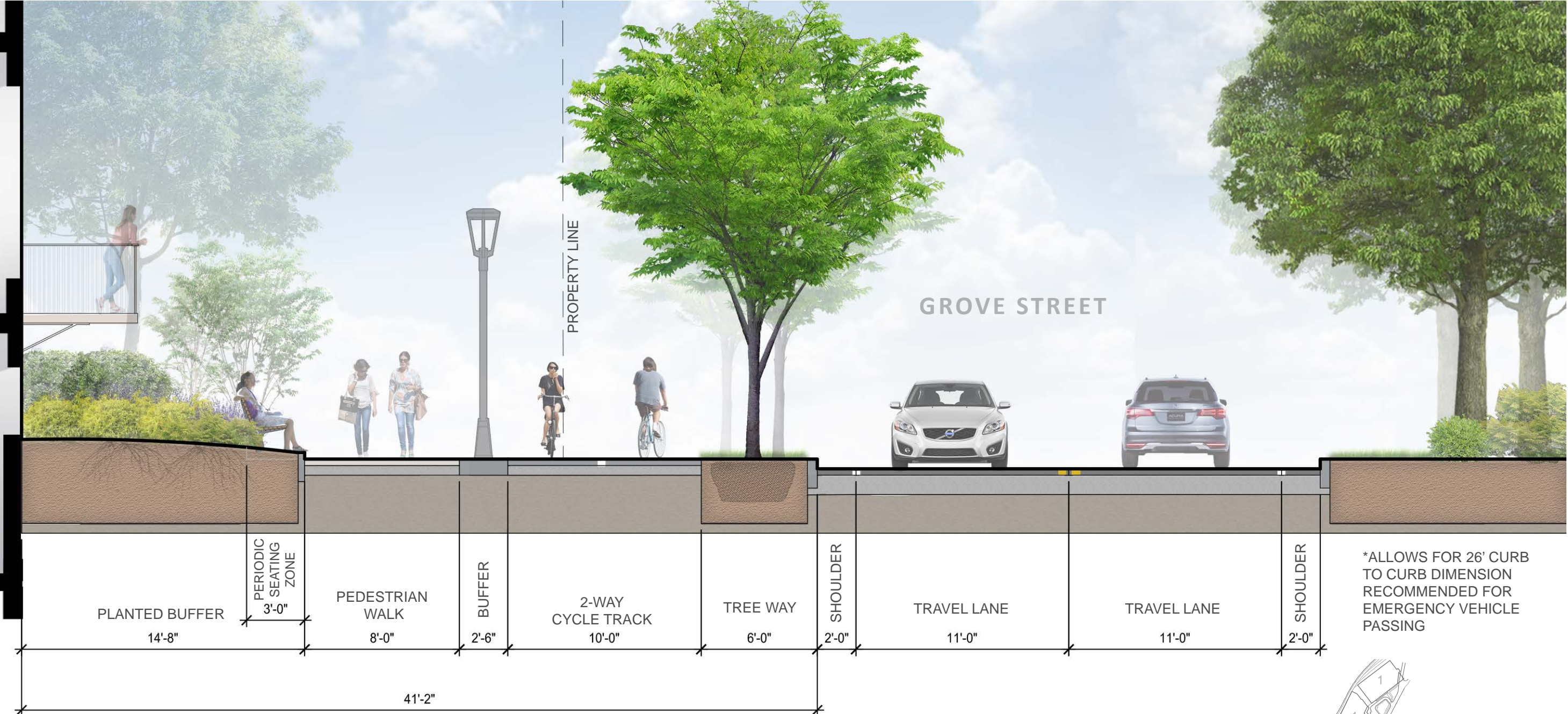
Proposed Bike Circulation Alternative 'C'



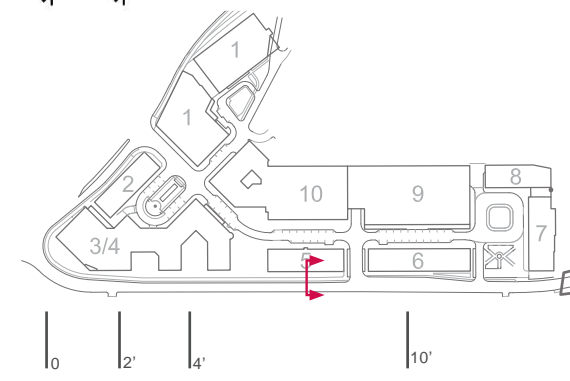
Grove Street Section - Building 5 Alternative 'A'



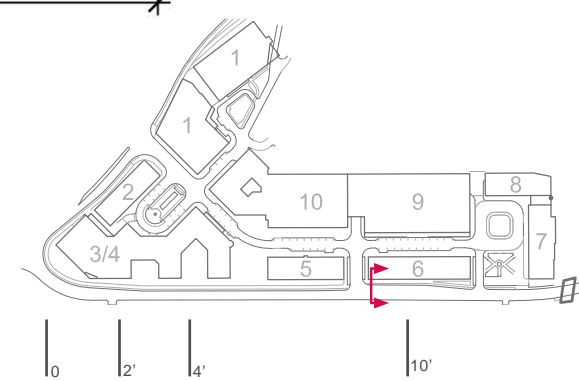
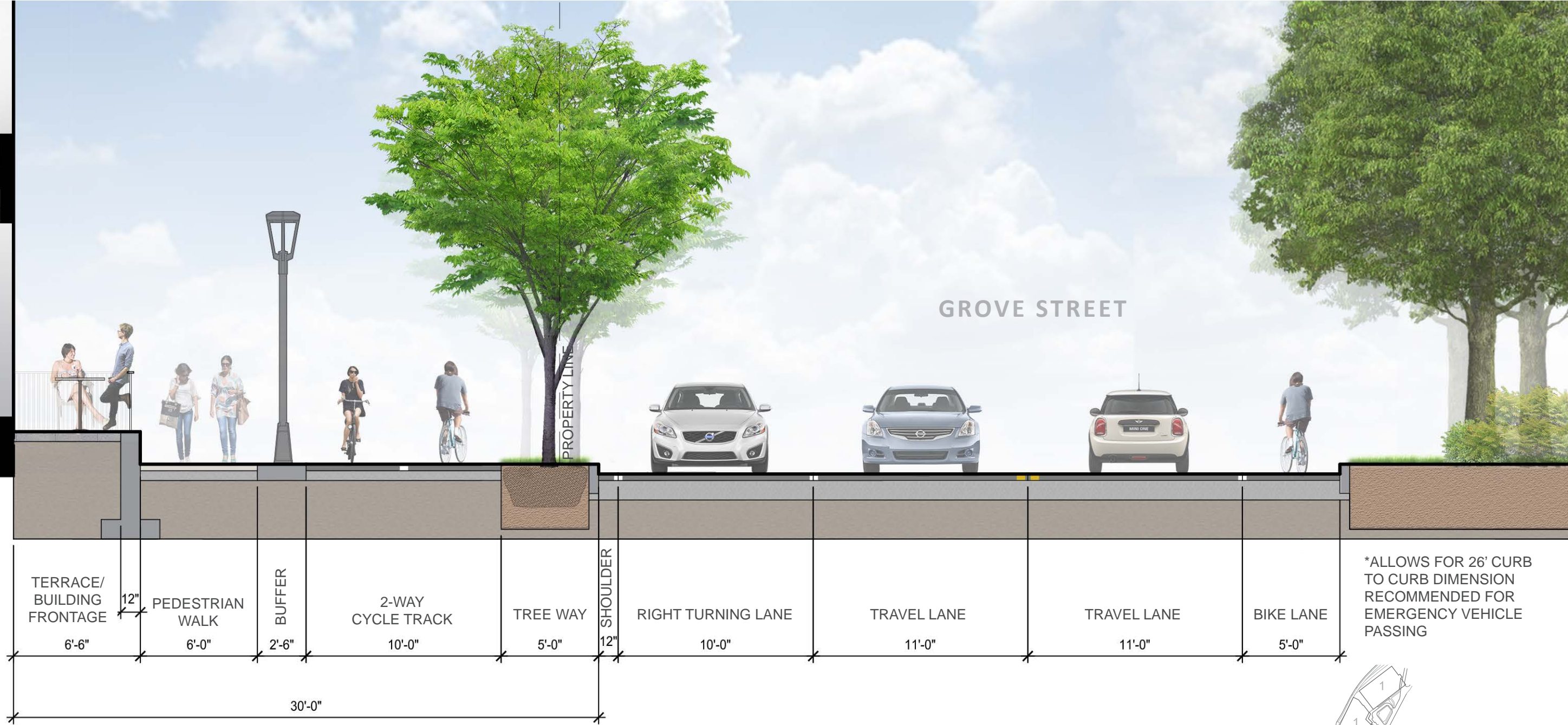
Grove Street Section - Building 5 Alternative 'B'



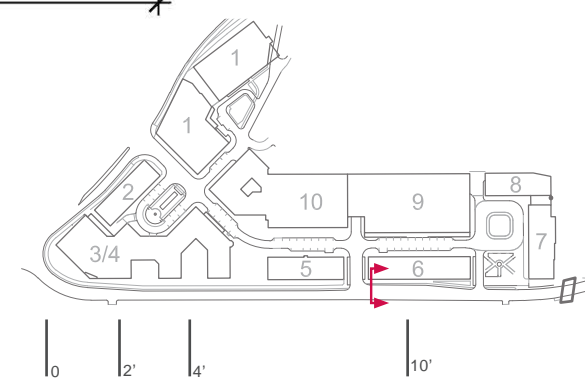
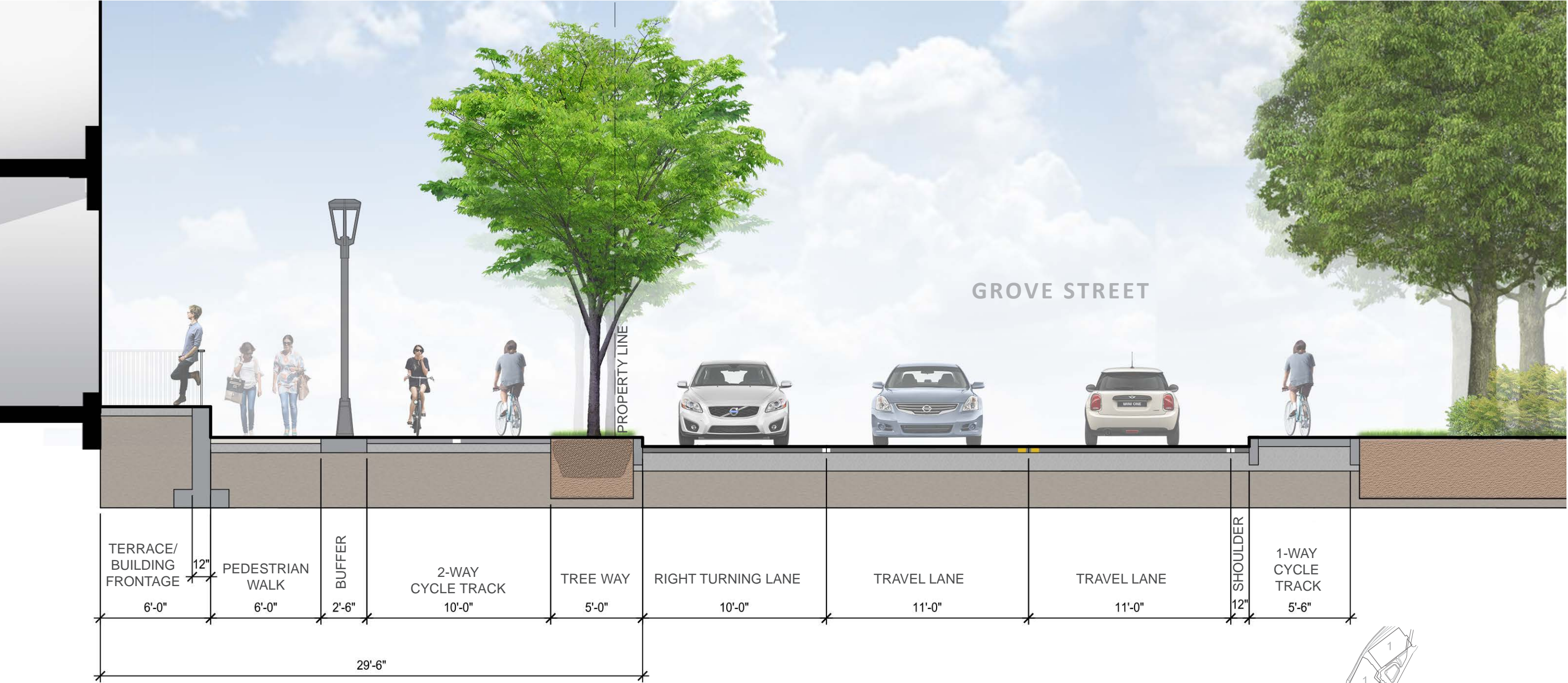
*ALLOWS FOR 26' CURB TO CURB DIMENSION RECOMMENDED FOR EMERGENCY VEHICLE PASSING



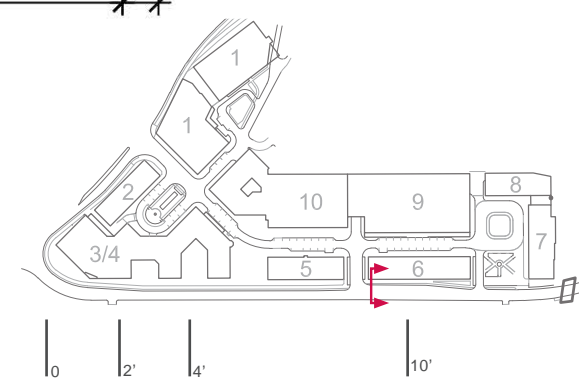
Grove Street Section - Building 5 Alternative 'C'



Grove Street Section - Building 6 Alternative 'A'

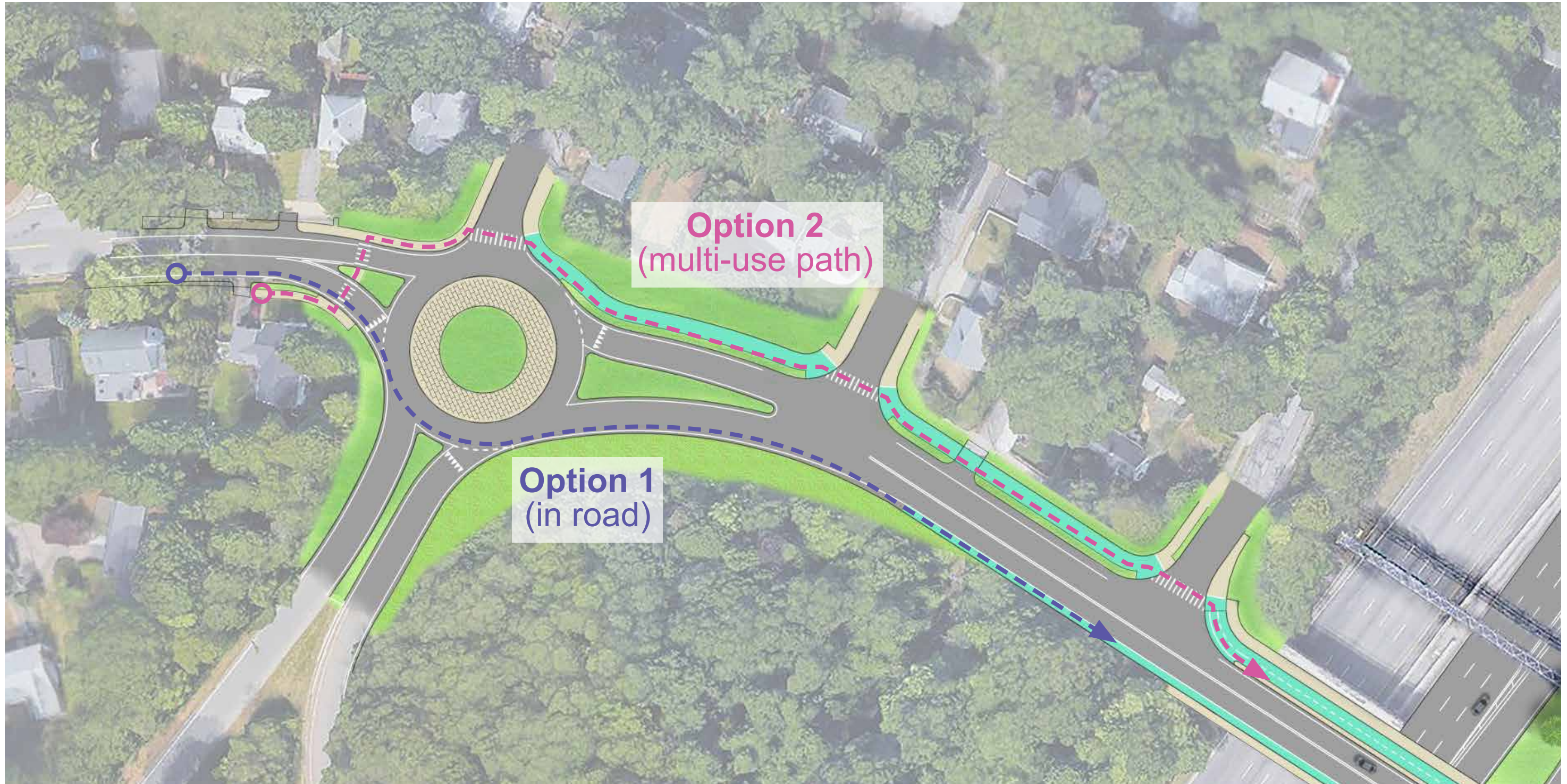


Grove Street Section - Building 6 Alternative 'B'



Grove Street Section - Building 6 Alternative 'C'

Attachment C



Option 2
(multi-use path)

Option 1
(in road)