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February 6, 2019

Gregory R. Schwartz, Chairman
Land Use Committee
City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459

Re: Northland Needham Street Petitions # 425-18 and #426-18

Dear Chairman Schwartz:

Northland is grateful to the Committee for the time and attention spent on its very important project on Needham Street. We understand as Mayor Warren originally said that this is a “generational opportunity”, so the Company intends to work to make the project the best it can be.

An important part of doing that is listening to the Committee’s comments and the comments of the peer reviewers and the community and adapting to what is heard.

We have presented to you on September 25, November 13, December 11 and January 15. Immediately after the November 13 meeting on Master Planning our architects from Cube 3 and Stantec together with Keith O’Connor of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) in New York reviewed and evaluated the comments of Horsely Witten Group and the Land Use Committee at that meeting.

After the December 13 meeting the team together with placemaking/retail consultant Streetsense, Inc. of Washington D.C. undertook a similar review of programming and in particular the commercial elements based on the site plan comments and the comments of RKG Associates and the Committee.

In both cases the team was asked to review the Northland master plan with attention to the most significant comments we heard. Our notes indicate those comments and the source of the comments were:

Site Design – November 13

- Buildings 5 and 6 frontages were long, and we should look at breaking them up to provide both E-W and N-S access (Planning, Horsely Witten,

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Urban Design (Kaufman, Doolin), Councilor Auchincloss, Councilor Lipof, Councilor Markiewicz, Councilor Crossley)

- Building 4 – not enough access to the Oak Street Park (Planning)
- Building 7 – mid-building permeability (Horsely Witten, Councilor Downs, Councilor Kelley, Chairman Schwartz, Councilor Laredo)
- Building 4 – recommended parking underground (Horsely Witten)
- Village Green – width of driveways around 4 sides (Horsely Witten, Urban Design (Dooling), Newton Highlands NAC (Lichtin), Councilor Greenberg, Councilor Downs, Chairman Schwartz)
- Location of Community Building (Planning, Horsely Witten, Newton Highlands NAC (Lichtin), Councilor Greenberg)
- Parking – both the number of parking spaces and the above ground garages in Buildings 5 and 6 were discussed (Horsely Witten, Councilor Auchincloss, Councilor Downs)

Commercial Spaces – December 11

Many of the comments at the December 11 hearing dealt with programmatic proposals including affordability, schools and the proposed tax revenues from the project rather than physical planning. However, certain comments from the City's RKG peer review, particularly comments as to programming, were also reviewed by Northland's planning and design team including retail and marketing consultant Streetsense, Inc. For example the RKG report of December 3, 2018 states on page 19:

“Nonetheless, there appears to be a mismatch between the proposed retail square footage at Northland and RKG's estimated supportable new retail square footage... It is also possible that the first floor retail space could remain vacant at Northland if sales are not high enough to support the quantity of retail proposed.”

In conclusion RKG stated also on page 19 and 20:

“RKG believes that the amount of retail proposed exceeds the spending within a reasonable drive time of the site.”

“RKG's estimate of supportable retail is substantially less than what is proposed at Northland Newton. RKG has concerns that this space may sit vacant if built or result in sales transfer from other commercial activity centers across the City.”

On review of the RKG report the Planning Department said in its December 7 memo on page 8, “...staff recommends the petitioner explore diversifying the proposed commercial space...”.

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Northland has taken each of these comments seriously as constructive and thoughtful analysis. Northland and the design team have spent the past several weeks developing a revised plan to respond directly to the comments of the Committee, Planning and the peer reviewers. An overview of the revised plan is attached as “Key Plan Refinements” contrasted with the prior plan entitled “Original Proposal”. The refinements are focused on six ideas:

- Permeability: Buildings 5 and 6 have been split into 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B and 6C with “Laneways” through Buildings 5A and 5B and 6A, 6B and 6C. Building 4 has a smaller footprint to increase permeability from the Oak Street Park to the Village Green.

Permeability of Building 7 has been enhanced by moving the Mobility Hub to the center of the building. Since the Mobility Hub will be uniquely positioned to have pedestrian traffic going through it as a public space with access on Needham Street and Unnamed Street, the Mobility Hub itself will serve as the permeability of the building.

- Parking: Parking formerly in the Building 5 and 6 structures has been placed below ground in a two level parking structure and reduced by over 20% from 1,953 spaces to approximately 1,595. Limited parking remains on the surface.
- Neighborhood Playground/Community Building: The Neighborhood Playground and the Community Building (now Building 13) have been moved from Tower Road south to a new site close to the Depot and the Greenway parking area for ease of public access.
- Village Green: Main Street has adjusted to create a more distinct entry angle and add area to the Village Green.
- Open Space: Open space is increased.
- Commercial Spaces: The retail spaces are reduced from 185,200 net to 115,000 net. The retail space is a significant factor in the traffic calculations.

The building reconfiguration has also led to a reduction of units from the previously proposed 822 units to 800 units. However, Northland has committed to maintain affordability at 123 units as previously proposed.

There is a lot of work to be done to bring all the architectural detail and civil engineering for the revisions to an appropriate level for review by Planning and the peer reviewers. It is our hope that our schedule for review can be:

- February 12 – we will present these plans with comments from Brian O’Connor from Cube 3. We understand that although Planning has seen copies of the plans attached to this letter, they

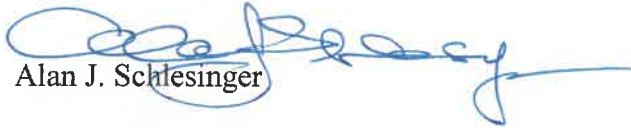
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will not have had the opportunity to review them in any meaningful way, nor will the peer reviewers have had an opportunity to review the revisions.

- By February 15 we intend to submit revised reports as to site planning, fiscal impact and traffic in form sufficient for review by the City's peer reviewers
- On March 12 at the scheduled hearing date we will present the plans in a more formal manner and we hope to be able to receive and respond to the revised peer review comments on planning, fiscal and traffic.

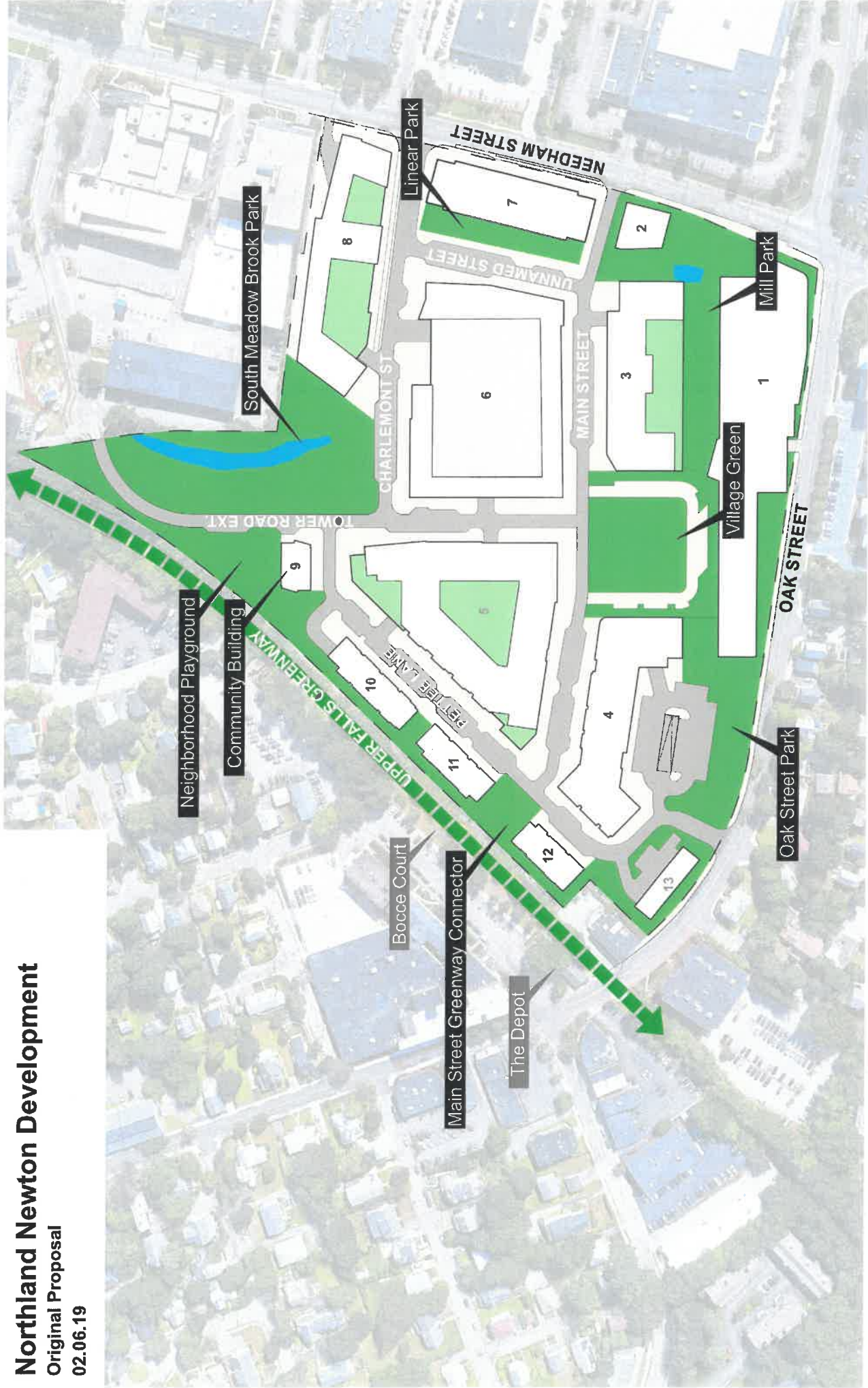
We are hopeful that on March 12 we will be able to get a sense as to whether the design changes have addressed the Committee's concerns, and we hope to be able to move from there to the discussion of sustainability and engineering, revisiting transportation to the extent necessary and moving forward with the Committee's deliberations.

Very truly yours,


Alan J. Schlesinger

cc: Land Use Committee
Planning Board
Planning Department
City Clerk

Northland Newton Development
 Original Proposal
 02.06.19



Northland Newton Development

Key Plan Refinements

02.06.19

- Eliminated above-ground structured parking
- Redesignated Blocks 5 and 6 to increase permeability and improve pedestrian circulation
- Reduced Scale
 - o Reduced retail by 70,200 NRSF
 - o Eliminated 403 parking spaces
 - o Eliminated 22 market-rate residential units while retaining 123 affordable units
- Moved playground and community building closer to the neighborhood
- Expanded the Village Green
- Increased park space near the Village Green
- Relocated Mobility Hub to improve pedestrian permeability at Building 7

