



March 7, 2019

VIA EMAIL

Ms. Jennifer Caira
Chief Planner
City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Avenue
Newton, Massachusetts 02459-1449

Re: Site Plan & Open Space Review – *Response to Revision 1*
Northland Newton Development
Mixed Use Development Special Permit Site Plan Review

Dear Ms. Caira:

The Horsley Witten Group, Inc. (HW) is pleased to submit this peer review response regarding revised site plan and open space concepts for the Northland Newton Development located on Oak Street, Needham Street, and Tower Road in Newton, Massachusetts. We understand that the revised Special Permit/Site Plan Review Application includes the construction of 800 residential units, 180,000 square feet (sf) of office space, 115,000 sf of retail space and community space in 14 buildings on 22.6 acres of land.

HW provided an initial Site Plan and Open Space Review letter dated November 6, 2018. The following response documents and revised plans were provided by the Petitioner and reviewed by HW as summarized in this letter:

- Responses to the November 6, 2018 Horsley Witten Group Peer Review and Planning Staff Comments, Northland Investment Corporation, dated February 2019;
- Northland Newton Development, RKG December 2018 Peer Review Responses, Northland Investment Corporation, dated February 2019;
- Project Revisions and Response to RKG Peer Review Comments, Fiscal Impact Analysis, by Fougere Planning & Development, Inc., dated February 13, 2019;
- Response to BETA Group, Alta Planning + Design comments, The Northland Newton Development Transportation Peer Review, prepared by VHB, dated February 22, 2019;
- Site Plans for The Northland Newton Development, Needham Street/Oak Street, Newton, Massachusetts, prepared by VHB, dated August 6, 2018 last revised February 14, 2019, which includes:
 - Overall Site Plan Sheet C-4
 - Layout and Materials Plan Sheet C-6.1
 - Layout and Materials Plan Sheet C-6.2
 - Layout and Materials Plan Sheet C-6.3

We understand that the Petitioner's submittal at this time is a partial response, with more detailed plans to be submitted in the future. The following major changes have been made to the design since the original submittal reviewed by HW:

- The Mobility Hub has been relocated to the center of Building 7;
- The size of Building 4 and the surface parking lot behind Building 4 have been reduced;
- Above grade structured parking within blocks 5 and 6 has been eliminated, and Buildings 5 and 6 have been broken up into smaller buildings bisected by "residential scaled laneways";
- Parking and general vehicle access has been eliminated from the Village Green design;
- The community building and playground area have been relocated closer to the depot area of the Greenway, with the playground area expanded and labeled a "neighborhood park"; and
- A dog park is intended for the north side of the site, west of Tower Road Extension.

The above changes appear to be significant improvements to the design based on consideration of HW review elements. More information is required for detailed review of the revised design. We offer the follow preliminary comments based on our review of the updated materials, specifically responding to the "Responses to the November 6, 2018 Horsley Witten Group Peer Review and Planning Staff Comments" as numbered in that document:

Planning Department Comments:

1. Revision of Building 7 to locate the Mobility Hub at the center of the building with two end cap retail spaces should help spread activity along the length of this building rather than focus activity near Charlemont Street as previously proposed. More detailed design is necessary for review of "wide glass storefronts on both sides and inviting, well-lit, and transparent spaces" as noted in the Petitioner's response. The footprint of the building does not appear to have changed. Concern regarding a single building with dual frontage in this location remains. Location of the mobility hub in the center of the building does not necessarily improve activation of Needham Street frontage if transit operations are focused on the Unnamed Street.
2. See traffic and transportation responses.
3. See response to comment #1 above.
4. The Petitioner notes that a public pedestrian connection through the 156 Oak Street mill building is undesirable due to topography and desire to limit public parking on Oak Street, but that opportunities to strengthen the pedestrian connection from Oak Street through Oak Street Park to the Village Green is being evaluated. Additional design detail (layout, grading, etc.) is needed to review this connection.
5. Additional design detail (layout, grading, etc.) is needed to review the impact of reduction of Building 4 and the surface parking lot behind Building 4 on Oak Street Park.
6. Relocation of the community building and the neighborhood park and apparent expansion of the neighborhood park's size should have a positive impact on the ability of this space to serve community needs and better connect to the Greenway. Additional information is needed to understand the design and programming of this park.

7. Breaking up of Buildings 5 and 6 with new pedestrian connections as shown should have a very positive effect on walkability and human-scale placemaking efforts for the project. Additional information regarding parking access and circulation, loading, and laneway design is needed to review the updated design in more detail.
8. See response to #7.
9. See response to #7.
10. HW concurs with the relocation of the neighborhood park as shown. Additional information including design of the neighborhood park, parking intent for Buildings 9-11, and design of the ends of Buildings 5a and 5b is required to fully assess proposed changes to the Pettee Lane streetscape.
11. HW understands that a snow removal plan will be provided by the Petitioner in the future. The plan should be reviewed to ensure adequate provision for snow storage, snow removal, and impacts on natural resources.
12. More detailed design of park spaces as the design progresses is required to review access and amenities.
13. HW concurs with the relocation of the neighborhood park as shown. Final design of park spaces is required to review planting and sustainable design approaches.
14. Elimination of general vehicle access and parking from the Village Green loop does slightly expand the area usable for landscape and seating, but may result in less activity within the space during certain times. Additional information regarding the design, programming, and operation of the Green and adjacent buildings is necessary to evaluate programming, activation, circulation, loading, operation and management of this space during various expected conditions. HW recommends the traffic and transportation peer review consider impacts on parking supply and convenience.
15. Final design of park spaces and the playground is necessary to review noted elements. It is noted that the Petitioner has stated the intent to include a dog park and will agree to make public access to the project's parks and street system a condition of the special permit. Location of the dog park and management of pet waste must be carefully considered to minimize impacts on South Meadow Brook. This may be another environmental educational opportunity.
16. An updated design for South Meadow Brook within the development has not been provided. Intent to include wayfinding and educational signage has been noted by the Petitioner. Detailed design of sustainability elements and signage is necessary to review details.
17. No response necessary.
18. No response necessary.
19. See response to #7. In addition, more information regarding access to underground parking (vehicular and pedestrian) is necessary to review circulation, open spaces, and streetscape. What is the intent for Building K?
20. Comments regarding design of Building 3 and Mill Park still stand. Additional design detail is necessary to review.

21. The community building and playground have been relocated to a more central location which should enhance potential for partnerships with property owners and arts organizations to achieve access, gathering, and arts objectives. Additional design detail is required to evaluate access and parking.
22. No response required. Revised elevations will be reviewed when submitted.
23. See responses to comments #1, #7, and #19.
24. See response to comment #1.

HW Comments:

1. No response necessary.
2. Moving the above ground parking below grade to create greater permeability through the site is a significant improvement to address the stated concerns. Additional design detail is required to review circulation, parking, loading, and open space.
3. HW concurs that the preliminary plans do appear to shift loading and other “back” conditions to edges that least impact the public realm. Further architectural and street design detail is required to confirm loading/service and public realm details are appropriate. More details regarding loading and servicing activities should be reviewed when they are developed, in conjunction with parking management plans.
4. No response necessary.
5. No response necessary. See traffic and transportation comments for more detailed comments regarding this intersection.
6. HW concurs that further design development is required to verify the optimal bicycle connection from Needham Street to the Greenway, especially at intersections. HW recommends safety and comfort for all users be considered, including clearly addressing pedestrian and bicycle travel on Charlemont Street and Tower Road connecting to the Greenway and to the Village Green. See traffic and transportation comments for more detailed review comments.
7. This comment has not been addressed. More detailed information regarding the design of the shared use path and South Meadow Brook restoration is necessary for review.
8. Additional information regarding the design, programming, and operation of the Village Green and adjacent buildings is necessary to evaluate programming, activation, circulation, loading, operation and management of this space during various expected conditions.
9. No response required.
10. HW concurs with the overall approach. As the design progresses, review of more detailed architecture and street design will be necessary to ensure loading and service are appropriately located and designed, and agreements/plans are in place for appropriate management of loading and service activities post-construction.
11. See response to Planning Department comment #1.
12. See response to Planning Department comment #4.

13. HW concurs with the relocation of the community building and neighborhood park as shown. Additional information including design of the community building, programming intent, and neighborhood park design is necessary for full review. Where will ADA parking be provided for the community building? What is the intent for loading and trash/recycling pickup for Buildings 9-13?
14. HW concurs with the improvements to push structured parking underground and subdivide Buildings 5 and 6. More information is needed regarding the design intent for the “laneways” and parking circulation (vehicular and pedestrian) for these blocks.
15. More information is needed to determine the location of the pedestrian access from the central garage to the Mill Building. Proper signage and wayfinding throughout the project will be required and should be submitted as part of more detailed design review.
16. See traffic and transportation comments.
17. HW understands the eastern edge of Building 6 has been redesigned. Additional more detailed street and laneway design is necessary for review. For example, is a mid-block crossing of the Unnamed Road required to connect the Building 6 laneway to the relocated transportation hub?
18. More detailed street design is required for review.
19. The Newton Street Design Guide recommends 10-11 feet travel lane widths, with a maximum of 12 feet only for arterial streets. HW recommends minimizing travel lane widths to the maximum extent practicable. Additional loading detail is required. On-street loading zones should be designed to minimize encroachment into travel lanes.
20. HW understands that the width of the loop is being further evaluated. The loop drive lane width might be reduced bumping the travel way edges in while providing “pull-off” locations for parking, loading, and fire staging and/or emergency loading zones.
21. The shadow study should be submitted for review, updated per the latest building design.
22. Agreed – further review will be required as design progresses.
23. HW concurs with the general approach to the design and programming for the Village Green. Additional information is required regarding the change to limit vehicular access around the loop.
24. HW concurs with the revised community building and playground location. As previously noted, further detail is required to review both locations. Further detail is required to review the South Meadow Brook Park design, which could integrate with the multi-use trail connection from Needham Street to the Greenway.
25. No response necessary. A detailed planting plan should be provided for review as design progresses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this review for consideration by the City Council and Planning Board. We hope that you find these comments helpful in your evaluation of the site plan concept and the open space layout for this project. Please feel free to contact Jon Ford at jford@horsleywitten.com or 401-272-1717, or Janet Bernardo at jbernardo@horsleywitten.com or 857-263-8193, with any questions.

Sincerely,

Horsley Witten Group, Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jonathan Ford, P.E.
Senior Project Manager – Community Design