



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

#425-18 & #426-18

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Barney Heath
Director

PUBLIC HEARING/WORKING SESSION IV MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 8, 2019
MEETING DATE: February 12, 2019
TO: Land Use Committee of the City Council
FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Jennifer Caira, Chief Planner for Current Planning
Michael Gleba, Senior Planner
CC: Petitioner

In response to questions raised at the City Council public hearing, the Planning Department is providing the following information for the upcoming public hearing/working session. This information is supplemental to staff analysis previously provided at the Land Use Committee public hearing.

PETITIONS #425-18 & #426-18 **156 Oak St., 275-281 Needham St. &, 55 Tower Rd.**

Petition #425-18- for a change of zone to BUSINESS USE 4 for land located at 156 Oak Street (Section 51 Block 28 Lot 5A), 275-281 Needham Street (Section 51, Block 28, Lot 6) and 55 Tower Road (Section 51 Block 28 Lot 5), currently zoned MU1

Petition #426-18- for SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to allow a mixed-use development greater than 20,000 sq. ft. with building heights of up to 96' consisting of 822 residential units, with ground floor residential units, with restaurants with more than 50 seats, for-profit schools and educational uses, stand-alone ATMs drive-in businesses, open air businesses, hotels, accessory multi-level parking facilities, non-accessory single-level parking facilities, non-accessory multi-level parking facilities, places of amusement, radio or TV broadcasting studios, and lab and research facilities, to allow a waiver of 1,600 parking stalls, to allow a reduction in the overall parking requirement to not less than 1900 stalls, to waive dimensional requirements for parking stalls, to waive end stall maneuvering requirements, to allow driveway entrances and exits in excess of 25', to waive perimeter landscaping requirements, to waive interior landscaping requirements, to waive lighting requirements for parking lots, to waive general lighting, surfacing and maintenance requirements, to waive off-street loading facilities requirements, to waive sign requirements relative to number, size, location or design, to waive the number of signs allowed.

The Land Use Committee (the “Committee”) held a public hearing on September 25, 2018 and working sessions on November 13, 2018, December 11, 2018, and January 15, 2019 on these petitions. This memo reflects additional information received by the Planning Department as of February 8, 2019. A revised schedule of meetings is also attached (**Attachment A**).

Project Update

This memorandum is focused on the project update provided by the petitioner dated February 6, 2019 in a letter addressed to the Chairman of the Land Use Committee (**Attachment B**). The letter identifies preliminary responses to comments received at the November 13, 2018 meeting regarding Site Design and Open Space and the December 11, 2018 meeting regarding Housing and Economic Impacts. The letter primarily responds to comments raised regarding the massing of Buildings 5 and 6, the amount and location of open space, the location of the community building and playground, and the amount of proposed retail space. The petitioner has provided a revised conceptual site plan and the following overview of revisions:

- Parking for Buildings 5 and 6, formerly above grade, has been pushed below grade allowing the massing of these two buildings to be broken down into smaller, individual buildings above grade. This change also creates additional open space within these blocks and opportunities for circulation.
- The mobility hub has been relocated to the center of Building 7.
- The number of parking spaces has been reduced from 1,953 to 1,595.
- The community building and playground have been relocated adjacent to the Greenway near the intersection of Pettee Lane and Main Street.
- The Village Green has increased in size.
- The retail space has been reduced from 185,200 net square feet to 115,000 net square feet.
- The number of units has been reduced from 822 to 800.

While the petitioner will be providing an update and preview of these changes at the February 12th meeting, all revisions will be discussed in more depth during future meetings devoted to Site Design and Open Space, Housing and Economic Impacts, and Transportation. The petitioner will be submitting further refined plans and updated studies for the Planning Department and peer reviewers to analyze prior to these meetings, currently scheduled for March and April as shown in the attached schedule. In response to the revised conceptual site plan and proposed revisions the Planning Department offers the following preliminary comments:

Site Design and Open Space

The proposal to locate the parking in Buildings 5 and 6 entirely underground results in a dramatic improvement to the massing and permeability of these buildings and presents exciting opportunities for additional open spaces. This change also improves circulation and helps solve the problem of locating typical back of house uses (trash, loading, garage entrances, etc.) in buildings that previously had no back side. The revised location of the mobility hub also helps mitigate the concerns that Building 7 would be oriented more towards the interior of the site, ignoring Needham Street. The increase in

open space and relocation of the community building and playground also appear to be positive changes. Additional details are necessary to fully assess the revisions and the Planning Department looks forward to reviewing the plans as they are further refined. The Planning Department recommends the petitioner focus on details such as pedestrian circulation through the site and between the parking garage and the rest of the site and the design and intended use of the open spaces and community space.

Housing and Economic Impacts

At the meeting on December 11th, the Planning Department and their peer reviewer, RKG, expressed concerns at the amount of proposed retail space and its future viability. The Planning Department recommends the petitioner explore options to replace the reduced retail space with other commercial uses such as small and medium office spaces, lab space, coworking space, arts/theater/entertainment uses, and boutique hotel uses. Every effort should be made to continue to provide active uses at the ground floor of buildings. Additionally, the petitioner should provide information regarding any changes to the residential unit mix or affordability levels.

Transportation

With the reduction in onsite parking spaces, the Planning Department recommends the petitioner provide details of how the shared parking will operate and be managed. The Planning Department also looks forward to continuing to work with the petitioner regarding plans to provide viable alternatives to driving for residents and tenants.

As identified in the attached schedule for the Land Use Committee's review of the rezoning and special permit petitions, the next public hearing session is scheduled for March 12, 2019 and will be focused on revisions and responses to comments on the Site Design and Open Space and Housing and Economic Impacts.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A	Revised schedule for Land Use Committee public hearings
Attachment B	Petitioner project update letter, February 6, 2019

Attachment A

TENTATIVE LAND USE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Updated February 8, 2019

NORTHLAND NEEDHAM STREET/OAK STREET

Special Permit # 426-18 and Request to Rezone #425-18

Land Use Committee Date	Topic	Description
9/25/2018	Project Overview	Applicant to introduce project and committee to discuss schedule.
11/13/2018	Site Design and Open Space	Review of site plan, including placement of buildings, roads and open space as well as sight lines and shadows.
12/11/2018	Housing and Economic Impacts	Review of proposed residential and commercial program, including: analysis of the number of housing units, including affordability levels; the commercial mix; and the overall fiscal and economic impacts of the proposed project.
1/15/2019	Transportation	Review of the proposed internal street network and circulation including bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and analysis of the traffic impacts, shared parking proposal, and transportation demand management strategy.
2/12/2019	Project Update	Preview of project revisions and discussion of schedule.
3/12/2019	Site Design and Open Space/ Housing and Economic Impacts	Review of revisions and responses to comments regarding Site Design and Open Space and Housing and Economic Impacts.
4/9/2019	Transportation	Review of revisions and responses to comments.
5/14/2019	Architecture and Design Guidelines and Sustainability and Stormwater	Review of design guidelines that will regulate future detailed architectural design of the proposed buildings; review of the sustainability report and stormwater mitigations.
6/11/2019	Mitigations and Conditions	Discussion of necessary mitigation measures and proposed conditions.

STEPHEN J. BUCHBINDER
ALAN J. SCHLESINGER
LEONARD M. DAVIDSON
A. MIRIAM JAFFE
SHERMAN H. STARR, JR.
JUDITH L. MELIDEO-PREBLE
BARBARA D. DALLIS
PAUL N. BELL
KATHERINE BRAUCHER ADAMS
FRANKLIN J. SCHWARZER
RACHAEL C. CARVER
ADAM M. SCHECTER

1200 WALNUT STREET
NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02461-1267
TELEPHONE (617) 965-3500
www.sab-law.com

aschlesinger@sab-law.com

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

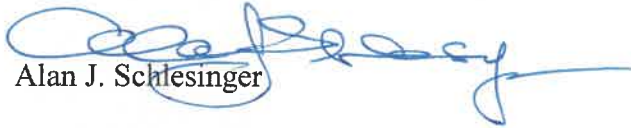
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February 6, 2019

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.

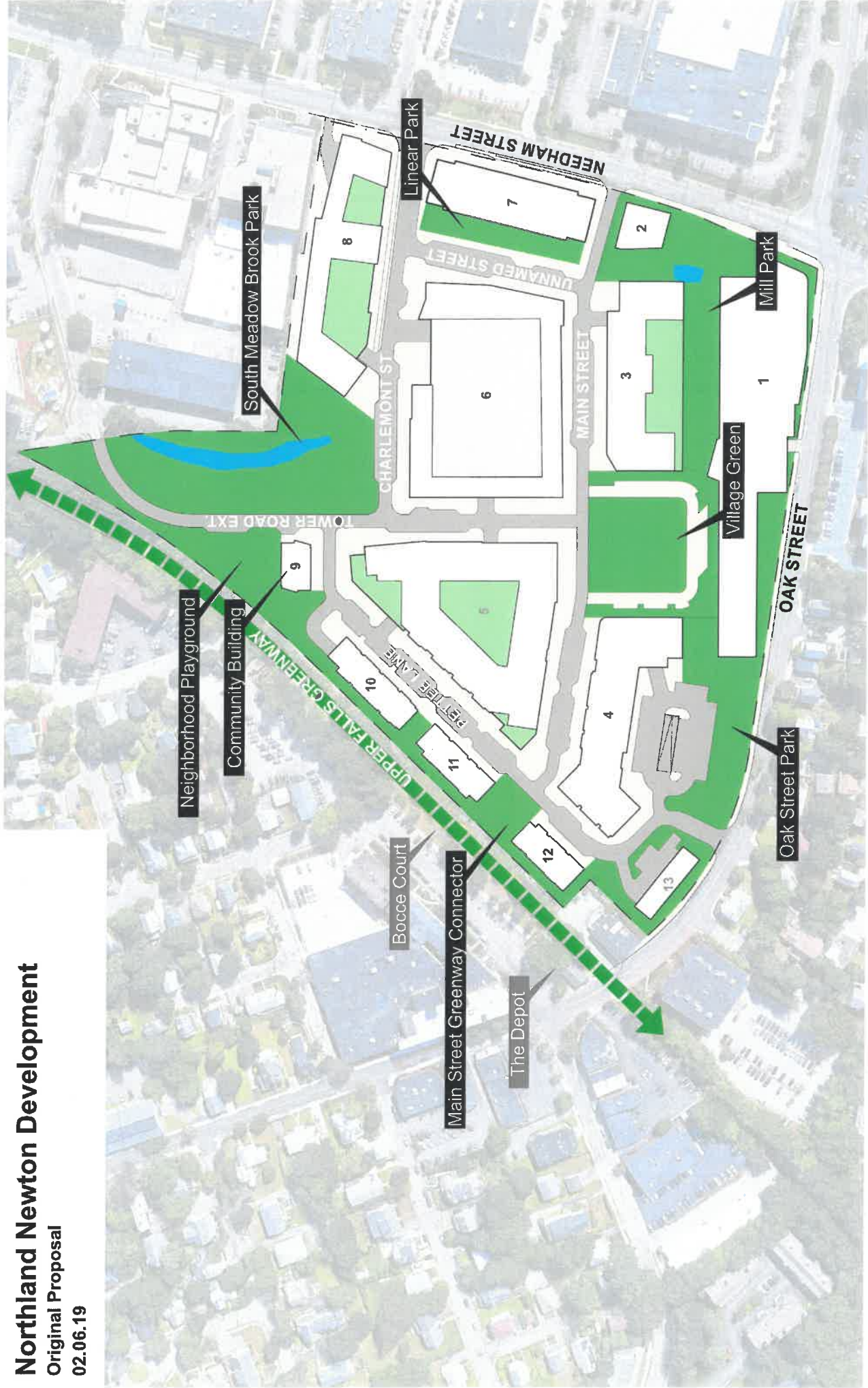
We are hopeful that on March 12 we will be able to get a sense as to whether the design changes have addressed the Committee's concerns, and we hope to be able to move from there to the discussion of sustainability and engineering, revisiting transportation to the extent necessary and moving forward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

