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Barney S. Heath  
Director

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## PUBLIC HEARING/WORKING SESSION MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 20, 2019  
**MEETING DATE:** September 24, 2019  
**TO:** Land Use Committee of the City Council  
**FROM:** Barney S. Heath, Director of Planning and Development  
Jennifer Caira, Chief Planner for Current Planning  
Neil Cronin, Senior Planner  
**CC:** Petitioner

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

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### **PETITION #140-19(1), #140-19(2), and #140-19(3) 355 and 399 Grove Street**

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Special Permit/Site Plan Approval to construct a 10 building, mixed use, transit-oriented development of not more than 1,520,000 sq. ft. and more than 20,000 sq. ft. of gross floor area including; up to 650,000 sq. ft. of office use, up to 750 residential units containing no more than 750,000 sq. ft., retail space of not more than 200,000 sq. ft., buildings up to 18 stories in height, building height of up to 230 feet, Floor Area Ratio up to 2.7, no more than 10% beneficial open space; to permit retail and personal establishments of more than 5,000 sq. ft., for-profit educational uses, restaurants with more than 50 seats, places of amusement, open air businesses, animal services, ground floor health club establishments, hotel, banks up to and over 5,000 square feet, theatre/hall, laboratory/research facility, multi-level accessory parking facility, multi-level non-accessory parking facility, single level accessory parking facility, single level non-accessory parking facility, reduction of the residential parking requirement to 1.25 stalls per unit, reduction of the overall commercial parking requirement by 1/3, a waiver of parking stalls not to exceed 750 stalls, waivers to parking facility design standards including: waiver of off-street loading facilities requirements, waiver of the number, size location or design requirements relative to signs at 355 and 399 GROVE STREET on land known as Section 42 Block 11 Lots 3 and 4, containing approximately 14.4 acres of land in a district zoned Mixed Use 3 Transit Oriented (MU3), BU2 (a portion to be rezoned to MU3), BU5 (to be rezoned to MU3). Ref: Sec. 7.3.3, 7.4, 4.2.2A.2, 4.2.2.B.1, 4.2.2.B.3, 4.2.2.B.3, 4.2.3, 4.2.4.A, 4.2.4.F.b, 4.2.4.F.1.b, 4.2.4.G, 4.2.4.G.1, 4.2.4.G.2, 4.2.4.G.3, 4.4.1, 5.1.4, 5.1.4.A, 5.1.4.C, 5.1.8.B.1, 5.1.8.B.2, 5.1.8.B.4, 5.1.8.B.6, 5.1.8.D.1, 5.1.8.D.2, 5.1.8.E.1, 5.1.9.B, 5.1.9.B.1, 5.1.9.B.2, 5.1.9.B.3, 5.1.9.B.4, 5.1.10.A.1, 5.1.10.B.3, 5.1.10.B.5, 5.1.12, 5.1.13, 5.2, 5.2.13, 5.4.2.B, of the City of Newton Revised Zoning Ord, 2017. **Subject to approval of proposed zoning ordinance amendments in Sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4.**

The Zoning and Planning Committee and the Land Use Committee opened a joint public hearing on these petitions on June 4, 2019. The Zoning and Planning Committee continued their public hearing on June 10, 2019, while the Land Use Committee continued their public hearing on June 25, 2019. The Zoning and Planning Committee and the Land Use Committee held another joint public hearing to review the modifications to the petition on September 9, 2019, both public hearings remain open.

### **Consistency with the Riverside Vision Plan (May 2019)**

The Planning Department, with the help of residents and stakeholders, participated in a community engagement process that resulted in the Riverside Vision (the “Vision”). The Vision sets out principles for the future of the site and it is intended to be used as a guide to assist decision-making. The Vision identified several principles for a development at the site within six categories: Newton Community Connections (C), Housing for Newton (H), Model for Sustainability (S), Quality Design (D), Robust Newton Economy (E), and Transportation Hub (T).

To assist with the review of the petition, the Planning Department retained Horsley Witten, Utile, and Form + Place (together, the “Peer Review Team”). The Planning Department met with the Peer Review Team as well as with the petitioner twice to review the site design, open space, and the Grove Street frontage as they relate to the goals and principles stated in the Vision. The Peer Review Team issued a memo summarizing the group’s analysis and identified items that require further clarification (**Attachment A**). This memo incorporates the thoughts of the Peer Review Team and offers additional analysis.

#### Newton Community Connections (C)

*Vision: The Riverside site should create social connections and physical spaces that benefit people living and working on site, as well as residents and workers of the nearby neighborhoods and all of Newton.*

C1: Provide a variety of usable public open spaces

The key considerations from the Vision include providing both traditional and non-traditional open spaces, enabling physical activity and healthy living, including spaces that benefit the larger Newton community, and providing electrical, water, and data hookups at public spaces. The site design includes several open spaces at various sizes and the Peer Review Team found the network of open spaces to be appropriately scaled, programmatically diverse, and intelligently located in relationship to retail nodes, gateways into the neighborhood and pedestrian desire lines. The open spaces will be open to the public and, consisting of green spaces and hardscaped areas, are intended to serve both active and passive uses.

The hotel green includes wide sidewalks and plazas adjacent to Buildings 2, 3, and 4, as well as a shared space with pavers, and a green island currently featuring a bocce court. The amphitheater is located between Buildings 4 and 5 and seeks to utilize the grade change between Main Street and Grove Street with a terraced green space that also provides accessible access in the form of switchbacks. At the base of the amphitheater is a knoll and a level open space which can be used for play and serve as a design element in the bend of Main Street. The transit plaza is located at the base of Buildings 7, 8, and 9 and is primarily hardscaped, featuring a bike shelter that will reinforce the site’s multi-modal

identity, but also features some soft space at the edges with plantings. Directly south of the transit plaza lies the transit green which is envisioned as a large open space, with easy access to Grove Street. Lastly, the office green is located at the base of Building 1 and is a large open space. Along with these outside public spaces, the Planning Departments recommends providing some interior public space related to the transit station. Such space could be used to as a waiting area for either buses or trains with up to date transit information and arrival times and a public restroom, which would benefit commuters and residents. Further information regarding the details and programing of these spaces is necessary to understand their impact with respect to placemaking. For example, because the office green is not located along Main Street, the Peer Review Team suggests that this space be different and be designed towards the office users. Moreover, additional details as to the planting and hardscaping strategies of these spaces will be necessary as part of the Design Guidelines.

In addition to the open space on site, any development at this site should connect to the existing open space(s) nearby such as trails, the bridges across Interstate 95, Recreation Road, and the Charles River/Riverside Park. The plans indicate that a two-way bicycle track will be constructed along the northern side of Grove Street that will loop around the site and continue north before converting into a shared-use path while approaching Recreation Road, the Charles River, and Riverside Park. The plans also indicate that bicycle facilities will also extend across Interstate 95 to the proposed roundabout at the intersection of Grove Street, Asheville Road, and Quinobequin Road, but the plans do not state what type of infrastructure, i.e. bike lane, protected bike lane, or sharrow these connections will take. In addition to the bicycle track, the petitioner is also proposing pedestrian infrastructure to make these connections. The Planning Department is supportive of these connections as both an open space strategy and as a transportation strategy. However, the petitioner should be prepared to clearly state which connections will be made, the dimensions and types of the infrastructure envisioned to make these connections, to state how these connections will meet the existing infrastructure and to whose approval.

**Graphic I: Bicycle Connections**



The MU-3/TOD zone requires that 15% of the site be classified as Beneficial Open Space. The Ordinance defines this space as,

“Areas not covered by buildings or structures that are available for active or passive recreation, which shall include, but are not limited to: landscaped areas, including space located on top of a structure, gardens, playgrounds, walkways, plazas, patios, terraces and other hardscapes areas and other recreation areas, and shall not include: (i) portions of walkways intended primarily for circulation, i.e. that do not incorporate landscape features, sculpture or artwork, public benches, bicycle racks, kiosks or other public amenities, (ii) surface parking facilities or associated pedestrian circulation, (iii) areas that are accessory to a single housing unit or (iv) areas that are accessible to a single commercial unit, and controlled by the tenant thereof, and not made available to the general public.”

The revised plans indicate that the Beneficial Open Space has increased from 15.8% to 17.2%, totaling 2.48 acres. The Planning Department agrees with the Peer Review Team’s opinion that further study of the revised Beneficial Open Space Plan is required to ensure that all areas are appropriately treated per the definition.

#### C2: Energize the site with vibrant ground floor retail, art, and activity

The Vision identified key considerations such as providing active and publicly accessible ground floor uses, welcoming community wide events and gatherings, incorporating public art and placemaking, providing spaces and facilities for recreational rentals and storage (bikes, kayaks, paddleboards, etc.), and dedicating a minimum of 1% of construction costs to public art. The Peer Review Team finds that the mix of uses, including residential, hotel, office, retail, and multi-modal transit stop – and their arrangement around several nodes in the plan - will result in an active 24/7 environment. This liveliness will make the small neighborhood a destination for people who live nearby.

As proposed, the ground floors of most buildings are comprised with active uses such as retail, open spaces, and dwelling units with individual walk up entries. Retail has been strategically located along Main Street, creating nodes at both ends of the site. The petitioner has identified the locations which will be dedicated to retail uses, and the spaces which will be flexible based upon the market demand, but will always be active, publicly accessible spaces. The Planning Department recommends that the petitioner consider locations for incorporating art and incorporating the transit station into a placemaking strategy. The Peer Review Team has also requested further illustration of the character of Main Street between Buildings 6 and 9, where the retail arcade sits below the main garage structure. More information is also needed regarding the intent of retail location and understanding the flexibility regarding short-term and long-term approaches.

#### C3: Include dedicated community space with active management and oversight

The Vision suggested that the petitioner include offering space for programming on-site community activities, creating and implementing a framework for management of community spaces and programming, creating a calendar for booking community spaces and events, siting community spaces near the station, and providing restrooms and a kitchen in at least one community space on site. The

petition includes a variety of public spaces, however no community space within buildings has been identified. The petitioner should explore whether there is a need for community space and what sort of space would be complementary to nearby community spaces. The petitioner should also provide information as to the management and oversight of community and public spaces.

#### C4: Provide activities and businesses for all ages

The Vision suggested that the petitioner locate some of the activity areas near the transit station, providing best-fit of cross-generational activities, offering desirable activities and uses that draw a variety of populations, and designing public spaces with youth and elders in mind as well as their caregivers. The proposed open space plan includes spaces that can be used by all ages and locates retail nodes, passive and active open spaces, and bicycle parking near the transit station. In addition to the walkable site design, there are quiet spaces, spaces for residents and workers to sit and eat or hang out in small groups, and there are unstructured spaces for more active uses. There are also natural play areas for children at the base of the amphitheater. The petitioner should also consider including seating in the more active spaces for caregivers.

#### Quality Design (D)

*Vision: The Riverside site should embody its status as a transit hub and important development site, with design and scale informed by the local context, thoughtful design principles, and the current and anticipated needs of Newton and the region.*

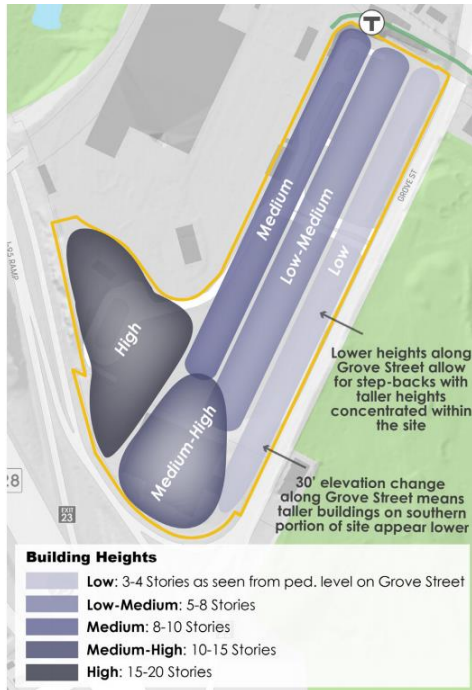
#### D1: Provide an appropriate mix of uses and sufficient density to support a great, vibrant place

The Vision suggests that the site density and mix of uses should be robust enough to ensure that a community at the site vibrant and that the commercial, retail, and office uses are supported, and occupancy and the number of customers is high enough to ensure the health of the community. The current petition calls for 524 dwelling units, 523,509 square feet of office space, and 71,070 square feet of retail space. As discussed above, the Peer Review Team found the mix and arrangement of uses and open spaces will result in a lively, active environment. The Peer Review Team believes that the office square footage will provide enough of a daytime density to activate the site and to attract a diversity of retail tenants.

#### D2: Utilize site topography and landscaping for creative, contextual site planning

As stated in the Riverside Vision, the site has unique topography such that the western portion of the site is lower than the grade of Grove Street, while site becomes almost level with Grove Street at its eastern boundary. To utilize the site's topography, the Vision suggested that taller structures be located at the northwest boundary to minimize perception of building height and to feature a prominent structure visible from Interstate 95. The structures should then decrease in height towards southwest boundary, but still be visible from the interstate. Along Grove Street the structures should be three to four stories as seen from the pedestrian level on Grove Street, ensuring the Grove Street edge maintains its character.

**Graphic II: Height Map**



The Planning Department believes that the petition is consistent with the recommended heights identified by the Vision. Height is concentrated at the rear of the site, adjacent to the interstate while the buildings along Grove Street take advantage of grade changes across the site and provide step backs at the top floor. Buildings 4, 5, and 6 contain four stories from Grove Street with a fifth story stepped back from the story below. Building 7 is sited perpendicular from Grove Street, with limited frontage and is five stories with a sixth story stepped back from the street. The Peer Review Team found that the varied heights of the buildings, from the low buildings along Grove Street to the tall office building, makes the proposal appear as if it was developed over time and that the tall office building next to the interstate is appropriate. They stated that the buildings along Grove Street are appropriately scaled. The Peer Review Team believes the office building will add a daytime population and will attract a diversity of tenants to benefit the City and the project. The Peer Review Team also found that the presence of the buildings along the highway will serve as a gateway to the project and provide a presence critical to the success of the project, while conveying

minimal visual impact on nearby neighborhoods.

### D3: Require high-quality architectural and urban design

The Vision suggested that the site design feature human-scale, walkable blocks. Main Street is the major thoroughfare through the site, and due to the site's restrictions, there are few cross streets to create these blocks. As such, the buildings along Main Street are broken up by open spaces and different buildings types and architectural features, such as the townhouses along Building 10 and the pedestrian arcade along Building 9. The articulation and use of materials will be especially important for Buildings 9 and 10 where the large parking garage is screened through active uses and architectural design. While this building is quite long, it would be difficult to break it into smaller buildings and still provide the parking necessary for the project and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (the "MBTA"); the building also serves to screen the tracks to the north.

A major tenant of walkability is to design buildings to heights that will provide pedestrians with a feeling of enclosure. Currently along Grove Street, the pedestrian experience is limited due to the open edges of the street. By constructing buildings closer to the street, the petition seeks to improve the pedestrian experience along Grove Street and to connect Lower Falls and Auburndale. The Peer Review Team found the buildings along Grove Street to be appropriately scaled and also sited appropriately relative to the street edge, allowing for the comfortable accommodation of bike lanes, sidewalks, and landscaping zones. They also believe that the orchestrated rhythm of buildings creates an attractive foil to the expansive open space of the golf course across the street.

To provide this sense of enclosure, the ratio of building height at the property line to street width should be set at 1:1. The below table provides the distance from the grade of Grove Street to the top of the highest story not terraced. For example, Building 4 contains seven stories: the lowest two stories are built into the Grove Street hillside, while the seventh story is set back from the story below. Therefore, the building height, regarding this ratio, should be the measurement of the continual wall plane of the four stories from Grove Street. This ratio does not include either the lower two stories or the terraced seventh story because a pedestrian on Grove Street cannot “experience” them.

**Table I: Building Height from Grove**

Building Number	Height (Feet)
3	78
4	46
5	41.5
6	52
7	62

The plans indicate that the buildings along Grove Street are approximately 65 feet to 70 feet away from the unimproved southern side of Grove Street, opposite the site. As a result, the buildings are in line with the building height to street width ratio for pedestrian scale. The only outlier is Building 3 which exceeds the ratio by approximately eight feet. This building is located at the corner of the site adjacent to the highway, where the Vision identified more height is appropriate.

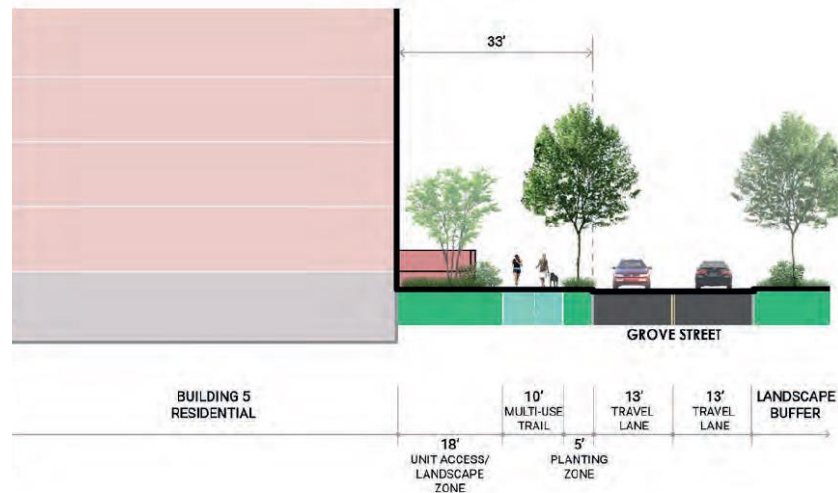
#### D4: Highlight the Riverside MBTA Station

As stated in the Vision, the petitioner should consider maximizing the station’s visibility through site design and wayfinding, providing easy access to the MBTA station from Grove Street and creating a unique station identity that works with overall site design. The proposed site design provides easy access to the station for those walking, biking or driving from either direction. The Planning Department, however, recommends the petitioner make a significant effort to highlight the MBTA station and incorporate the station in the placemaking of the project.

#### D5: Embody the Garden City through street-side landscape design within the site and along Grove Street

The Vision suggested that the petition include landscaping along Grove Street and throughout the site, when adding sidewalks along Grove Street, retaining or adding new landscaping/trees if setbacks exist, and providing safe pedestrian access during construction. The petitioner is proposing to provide at least five-foot-wide planting zones on both sides of all streets throughout the site, except for the southern side of Grove Street, which is outside the scope of the project. Additional information is needed on the northern side of Grove Street as the petitioner is proposing to separate the sidewalk from the bicycle track, which will affect the landscape zone shown along Buildings 5 and 6. All landscape guidelines within the site and along Grove Street will also need to be incorporated into the Design Guidelines.

**Graphic III: Grove Street Cross-Section**



**D6: Celebrate the Charles River and recreation opportunities**

Key considerations identified in the Vision Plan include enhancing visibility to/from the Charles River, providing natural areas wayfinding and signage, and providing locations and funding for public art. The revised proposal has reduced the overall size of the project as well as the commitment towards connections and improvements to the Charles River. The petitioner has offered \$2 million, which could be used to connect the site to adjacent trails and the river. The petitioner should be prepared to develop a wayfinding program that will inform future residents of the site as well as of adjacent neighborhoods and beyond of the site's connections to such recreation facilities.

**D7: Evaluate development at human-level to understand human-scale experiences**

The Vision Plan recommends evaluating building heights and visual impacts from a human-level perspective from adjacent neighborhoods and from Grove Street. The petitioner submitted multiple rendered views of the proposed project from the pedestrian level along Grove Street, from the highway, and from several points in the adjacent neighborhood. The views show the buildings to be appropriately scaled along Grove Street and to have a presence from the highway while minimizing visibility from adjacent neighborhoods. The neighborhood views (rendered on top of photos from winter) show very limited visibility of the proposed buildings; only a small portion of the office tower and/or the hotel are visible from most viewpoints.

The petitioner submitted a revised shadow study detailing the site's shadows during the spring and fall equinoxes, as well as during the winter and summer solstices. The revised study indicates that shadows will be largely contained within the site, except for during the afternoon on the winter solstice. On this day, shadows are projected to extend onto the southern side of Grove Street. The Planning Department is unconcerned with this spillover because it is limited to a certain portion of the year.



**Conclusion**

The Planning Department believes that the petition is consistent with many of the goals and principles stated in the Vision with respect to Newton Community Connections and Quality Design. However, additional information and detail is needed regarding certain aspects of the petition such as management and programming of the public spaces as well as the connections to off-site open spaces. The Planning Department will continue to work with the petitioner to address these items and will work with the City's transportation consultant to analyze the petition's transportation program in advance of the public hearing on October 29, 2019.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A:** Peer Review Memorandum, dated September 19, 2019  
**Attachment B:** DRAFT Conditions Regarding Site Design, Open Space, and Grove Street

# MEMORANDUM

**To:** City of Newton Planning & Development  
**From:** Peer Review Consultant Team  
(Form + Place, Horsley Witten Group, Inc., Utile, Green International, HR&A)  
**Date:** September 19, 2019  
**Re:** Riverside Station, Newton, Massachusetts  
Site Design, Open Space, and Grove Street Review

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The following comments / suggestions / recommendations are being provided by the Peer Review Team for the Riverside Station multi-use development. The comments below are related to the March 2019 application as well as the Applicant's follow-up materials submitted the week of September 2, 2019. Additional materials were received September 10 and have been reviewed at a preliminary level. More time is necessary for detailed review of these additional materials.

Our commentary is divided into sections, reflecting the three main public spaces that the Peer Review Team has focused on – Hotel Square, Amphitheater Green, Transit Square & Green – as well as the overall Site Design strategy, including thoughts on Main Street, Grove Street, the Office Green and other related issues. In general, the proponent has made favorable improvements to the site design and open space network.

Comment legend:

(F+P) – Form + Place  
(Green) – Green International  
(HW) – Horsley Witten  
(U) – Utile

**General:**

1. (U) Overall, the design team has done a remarkable job of creating a walkable mixed-use neighborhood that successfully camouflages an enormous parking garage and integrates a once-suburban T station surrounded by surface parking into a network of diversely-scaled streets and open spaces.
2. (U) The varied heights of the buildings, from the low buildings along Grove Street to the tall office building, makes the proposal seem less like a gated enclave and more like a town center that grew up over time. It is appropriate that the buildings are tallest on the west side of the site adjacent to the highway.
3. (U) A tall office building is warranted in the Riverside project location because it adds daytime/evening population, and will attract a diversity of tenants to benefit the City of

Newton and the overall project mix. The submitted shadow study does not appear to show impact to adjacent neighborhoods.

4. (U) The mix of uses, including residential, hotel, office, retail, and multi-modal transit stop – and their arrangement around several nodes in the plan – will result in an active 24/7 environment. This liveliness will make the small neighborhood a destination for people who live nearby.
5. (U) The network of open spaces are appropriately scaled, programmatically diverse, and intelligently located in relationship to retail nodes, gateways into the neighborhood, and pedestrian desire lines. See specific comments about the open spaces on following pages.
6. (HW) The network of open spaces are set up to facilitate a logical and context-appropriate sequence within the public realm, including pedestrian and bicycle connections to the surrounding network. More detail will be required to clarify detailed connections beyond the site, i.e. to Riverside Park and neighborhoods to north and south.
7. (F+P) Mark Development has provided a rendering and some photo-montage images that help illustrate the presence that the development will have from Route 128 and the surrounding area. The rendering depicts the “gateway” role that the buildings can play from the northbound side of the highway – a presence that will be critical to the success of the project. While the photo-montage images show very simple, unarticulated massing blocks, they do convey the minimal visual impact that the development will seemingly have on the Lower Falls neighborhood across Route 128.
8. (HW) An updated Beneficial Open Space Plan dated September 9, 2019 was provided demonstrating an increase in beneficial open space from 15.8% to 17.2% compared to the previous March 27, 2019 plan. Updates to the design of the open spaces listed below have increased their value as beneficial elements of the public realm. The updated plan appears to include Building 10 private stoops in the calculation, and includes additional Grove Street frontage area within the beneficial open space designation resulting from the Building 3 and 4 reconfiguration. More detailed review of this plan will be required as part of the discussion of open spaces.

## **Spaces:**

### **HOTEL GREEN**

#### Summary:

(F+P) The open space design approach for the Hotel Green has undergone significant change, due in part to the redesign and programmatic downsizing of surrounding buildings, but also to improve the overall connectivity and usability of the space. The design of the space has improved through two successive design review sessions. Among the most significant improvements was the reconfiguration of Buildings 3 and 4 to facilitate a pedestrian connection between Grove Street and the Hotel Green, utilizing an outdoor stair to negotiate the approximately 30' grade change. While additional architectural detail should help soften the

massing of Building 3, the separation of Buildings 3 and 4 has certainly had the added benefit of visually breaking down the scale of these buildings with respect to the Grove Street frontage.

(U) The design of the Hotel Green successfully balances the needs of pedestrians and the management of vehicles as they make their way to and from the parking garage in the hotel. Wide plaza-like sidewalks on either side of the space will encourage and support cafes and restaurants to spill out into the space. The center island is wide enough to support passive use and include a tree canopy that will help shade the hard surfaces.

Specific Comments:

1. (F+P) Another significant change to the Hotel Green was extending the open space across Main Street to engage the office and residential buildings to the north. Thought has been given to activating the ground level of buildings fronting on the Green by providing retail/restaurant lease space in addition to primary building entry lobbies.
2. (U) The design development of the open spaces along Building 2 and Building 4 should be carefully considered in parallel with the specific ground floor uses. The appropriate balance will need to be found between useable paved areas and lush planting zones.
3. (F+P) Attention has been given to the quality of the ground plane - hardscaped and landscaped areas - which has been designed with a pedestrian focus, affording opportunities for the integration of outdoor dining and amenities. Recent additions of crosswalks connecting across main street and in front of the hotel lobby should help facilitate the safe interface between pedestrians and vehicles.
4. (F+P) A new street level rendering of Hotel Green provides a convincing view of the scale and quality of this urban space. Ultimately, the architectural detailing of all the surrounding buildings – massing, façade articulation, materials, ground level transparency, etc. - will play a significant role in reinforcing the experiential quality of Hotel Green, and this will be defined through the City's Design Guidelines.
5. (U) Utile supports the decision to extend the asphalt portion of the Hotel Green loop a bit further south to more clearly signal the garage entrance and strongly supports the use of unit paving in a curb-less shared-use right-of-way for the other half of the Hotel Green loop leading back to Main Street.
6. (U) Utile supports the new crosswalk that connects the center island Hotel Green across Main Street to the Building 1 plaza and retail space.
7. (HW) Expansion of the use of the special paver treatment shown for the new crosswalk connecting the center island Hotel Green across Main Street could improve traffic calming and placemaking value throughout Main Street. For example, additional paver treatment should be considered for the crosswalk connecting the Building 4 sidewalk across Main Street to the space in front of Building 10, the mid-block crosswalk at the Amphitheater, and potentially through the center of the intersections of Main Street with Road A and with Road B which could include special public art details.
8. There is some difference of peer review opinion regarding parking within the Hotel Green:
  - a. (U) The team should consider removing the parallel parking up against the center island of Hotel Green to narrow the space devoted pavement and car-oriented uses.

- b. (HW) The Green appears to be divided into two areas – the focal fountain and seating plaza which blurs the edges across the roadway towards Buildings 3 and 4, and the Main Street end of the green, which is shown with a bocce court. More information will be needed to show how these two areas will function and connect. Provision of parallel parking against the center island of the “bocce” space should help increase its value as a spillover refuge or even a destination in its own right, as long as the resulting space is of sufficient width and properly designed. The parked cars should help shield this part of the green from moving vehicles, especially given its location. Will there be provision for seating or small-scale gathering in the “bocce” space? Will the “bocce” space and focal fountain/plaza connect within the green?
  - c. (HW) What is the intent for these parallel parking spaces, will they be high turnover loading zone, temporary valet spaces, other?
  - d. (HW) Additional precedents specifically including similar drop-off and hotel uses would be useful to demonstrate the design intent, geometries, and expected level of activity.
9. (U) The team needs to clarify how ADA access is addressed in the newly-added pedestrian connection between Grove Street and the Hotel Green.

## **AMPHITHEATER GREEN**

### Summary:

(F+P) As with the Hotel Green, the open space design approach to Amphitheater Green has incorporated some thoughtful design refinements. In response to peer review comments, the design of this more intimate space has evolved to include, not only an accessible, terraced landscaped area but, a more flexible flat lawn area along the Main Street edge. The addition of a green knoll, located at the “knuckle” in Main Street [in the northwest corner of the Green], will have a positive visual impact on the streetscape environment. The expanded sidewalk at the base of the amphitheater should provide ample space to accommodate staging for small performances. The sectional qualities of this space should be quite pleasing and should be able to be appreciated from the new overlook [belvedere] provided along the Grove Street sidewalk.

(U) Revisions to the Amphitheater Green have dramatically improved the functionality and visual interest of an open space that is located at an important knuckle in the plan. The space now allows for a more compelling connection to/from Grove Street while providing features that will make the space a destination in itself. Key was the decision to move the terraced ramps back toward Grove Street in order to open up both a flat lawn area and a mound that will function as a natural play space.

### Specific Comments:

1. (U) The overlook on Grove Street should be shifted to the southwest and closer to Building 4 in order to provide more dramatic views into the site by taking full advantage of the grade change. The symmetrically positioned overlook (as shown in the recent design drawings) is remote from both the stairs and the ramp. As a result, it will be underutilized because it is not along pedestrian desire lines.
2. (U) Of the two options presented in the most recent package, Utile prefers the mound on right side closer to Building 5. This alternative allows people with mobility issues to

occupy the top of the mound by using the first run of the ramp system that connects Main Street to Grove Street.

## **TRANSIT SQUARE & GREEN**

### Summary:

(F+P) Transit Square and Transit Green have been the source of considerable debate among members of the Peer Review group, and the Mark Development design team has made substantial improvements to the conceptual site design of these spaces. Challenged by a myriad of vehicular movements, including the multi-modal interface and emergency access needs adjacent to the Riverside MBTA Station, the utilization of these spaces has been thoughtfully reconsidered.

(U) The design of Transit Green/Plaza does an excellent job of domesticating a space that is challenged by the large areas of asphalt necessitated by the turning radii of MBTA buses. This is achieved by creating an almost continuous tree canopy that will help reduce the heat island effect and soften the hard edges of the spaces near the MBTA station.

### Specific Comments:

1. (F+P) Transit Square sits as a flexible hardscaped island in the middle of a plaza whose dimensions are largely mandated by the requirements of bus, shuttle and drop-off movements. The location of a bike pavilion building in the middle of the square is an opportunity to add architectural interest and provide bike storage proximate to the MBTA station entry. The bicycle connection from the Grove Street bike path, as well as the pedestrian crossings for bikers from the center island, should be further articulated. The remaining hardscape area on the island can be flexibly used for certain special occasions such as periodic outdoor markets. The inclusion of street trees in the middle of Transit Square and around the perimeter, where possible, will help soften what is otherwise a largely hardscape area.
2. (F+P) The design for Transit Green has evolved into a generous civic lawn space which will provide opportunities for a full range of active and passive uses, including the accommodation of large gatherings. Stairs along the south and east edges of the Green will help negotiate the grade changes along Grove Street and allow for a largely flat lawn area. The combination of open lawn and a bosque of trees should offer a nice contrast to Transit Square, and this flexible gathering space should attract considerable pedestrian activity, helping to anchor the ground floor lease spaces in Building 7.
3. (U) The team should explore strategies for planting more trees and trees more densely, especially along the sidewalks that define the outer edges of the plaza space (where only groups of two, three, or four trees are shown in the most recent plan).
4. (U) Likewise, the much-improved Transit Green, with its larger open space, would benefit from a more deliberate tree planting strategy that might contrast a denser canopy of trees with a larger section of lawn that is open to the sky.
5. (U) The bike shelter in the center of the Transit Plaza is a welcome addition because it will help signal the importance of bicycles as part of the multi-modal transportation hub. The shelter is an opportunity for an architecturally striking pavilion or canopy that

provides shelter for pedestrians cutting across the plaza in addition to providing bike parking.

6. (U) The team should consider a diagonal crosswalk directly from the Transit Plaza to the MBTA entrance in order to provide a visual clue for bus drivers of this important pedestrian desire line. The team should also review pedestrian and bicycle connections from Grove Street and the Transit Green to the bicycle shelter and Transit Square, which could similarly be diagonal crosswalks.
7. (HW) Please clarify the emergency access drive's paved width provided for vehicular use by buses and/or emergency vehicles and the function of this space. We note that the widths have been updated in the Design Guidelines cross section. This width should primarily be the appropriate width and design (flush condition, special pavers, etc.) to support the intended function of the square and green as a part of the public realm, including consideration of typical daily use as well as programming and events.
8. (Green) Is alternative surface treatment being proposed for Road C along the loop near the MBTA station? It is currently labeled as "Vehicular/Bus Roadway" whereas the proposed surface for the loop near the hotel is labeled as "Shared Roadway Paving". Alternative surface treatment should be considered for Road C along the loop near the MBTA station to create a pedestrian/bike friendly environment at an area with high pedestrian and bike demand.
9. (Green) Formal platform areas for buses and shuttles should be considered so passengers know where to wait and so spaces between different vehicle users are clearly delineated. This can be done through the use of signage, bus shelters, pavement markings, pedestrian waiting areas or some combination of the above.
10. (Green) There is still a concern that the curbside space for the transit center is not sufficient relative to the number of different users/vehicles that may be lining up in that space, especially at peak periods or in the event of expanded shuttle or bus services. A queue evaluation is requested to show that the curbside area is sufficient. Consideration of expanding the Transit hub area to the south slightly while still maintaining emergency only access from Grove Street is recommended.

## **BUILDING 1 SPACE**

### Summary:

(F+P) The Mark Development design team has made some adjustments to the open space to the north of Office Building 1, adjacent to the Building 1 Garage. The consolidation of the office drop-off loop at the rear of the office tower provides an opportunity for the Office Green to be a larger, more flexible open space. The qualities of this Green, and how the façade of the garage contributes to defining the space, should continue to be developed.

(U) The project team responded to the peer review team's comment to rearrange the garage access and drop-off loop in order to consolidate the open space behind Building 1 adjacent to the garage. The latest submission is much improved.

### Specific Comments:

1. (U) The open space behind Building 1 should be programmed to attract lunchtime and happy hour use by office workers. The potential use of the space for cornhole,

horseshoes, yoga classes, and other similar activities should drive the design development of the space.

2. (U) Consider a dramatic mural or super-graphic on the side of the garage to make the space distinctive and radically different from the other open spaces in the neighborhood.
3. (U) The space could also support a more dramatic and less conventional planting strategy to complement the mural and more active uses that will take place there.

## **GROVE STREET**

### Summary:

(F+P) The Grove Street elevation diagram, combined with the building/site cross sections, give a clearer indication of the topographic issues that the development is negotiating, and reinforce some of the underlying site design strategies, such as the locations for primary vehicular site access and decisions about building height. The Grove Street pedestrian level perspective renderings give a good indication of the scale of the buildings along this frontage and depict how the massing steps up the hill to the west. They also suggest that the buildings are sited appropriately relative to the street edge, allowing for the comfortable accommodation of bike lanes, sidewalks and landscaping zones, while providing appropriate definition to Grove Street.

(U) The buildings along Grove Street create an appropriately scaled and textured ensemble while driving or biking along Grove Street. The orchestrated rhythm of brick buildings also create an attractive foil to the expansive open space of the golf course across the street.

### Specific Comments:

1. (HW) The proposed setbacks for Buildings 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are noted on the Overall Site Plan to be approximately 20 feet from the property line, with some variation due to building projections, etc. It is important to note the perceived building setback experienced from Grove Street will be to the proposed curblane location, which varies generally between 30-35 feet from the building face. An exception is the right-turn lane in front of Building 6 where the setback from the building face to curb is approximately 15 feet (the civil plans and bicycle path connection need clarification in this area). The Grove Street setbacks include a planting zone (treelawn) as well as the proposed 10-foot wide multi-use trail.

Given the above summary comments, the proposed setbacks appear to be appropriate. The setbacks as proposed will reinforce an active pedestrian streetscape and contribute towards traffic calming on Grove Street. Clarification of the planting intent and addition of planting within the street tree line at the curb and within the building setbacks may help to soften the visual appearance, helping the buildings to better fit the streetscape context.

2. (U) Continuing the two-way bike path along Grove Street to the emergency access drive to the Transit Green will incentivize mid-block crossings by bicyclists traveling northbound on Grove Street at a location with poor visibility. Consider widening the sidewalk along the northwest side of Grove Street under the overpass to serve as a shared-use facility for pedestrians and two-way bike traffic, in order to provide a safer location for northbound bicyclists to cross the vehicle travel lanes.



3. (Green) We recommend clear physical separations between bicycles, pedestrians, and vehicles on Grove Street.

## **MAIN STREET**

### Summary:

(F+P) The various perspective renderings along the Main Street corridor give a good indication of how the street section transforms from east to west. The corresponding Site Section diagrams help clarify the appropriateness of the heights of the buildings relative to the streets on which they front.

### Specific Comments:

1. (F+P) One area that still merits further illustration is the character of the street between Buildings 6 and 9, where the retail arcade sits below the main garage structure. The apparent differences in the relative proportions of the arcade [width to height] in the street-level rendering as compared with the section, and the truncation of the upper part of the garage building in the rendering, make a complete understanding of the quality of this block of Main Street a little challenging. Architectural details that will come in later submissions should help clarify questions about the quality of this street section.
2. (U) It is unclear whether Buildings 5 and 6 have on-site parking. The sections and Level 1 plans provided show no parking, but the parking plan says there are 4 spaces for Building 5 and 8 spaces for Building 6. This is important to clarify in order to understand both the ground floor uses and the location of curb cuts along Main Street.
3. (U & HW) On-street parking is supported wherever possible for traffic calming and pedestrian realm value. "Pinch point" between Buildings 4 and 10 may require additional detail and clarification. Building 10: there are 3-4 ground floor units along Main Street. Consider direct entrances to Main Street (flush or with a few steps depending on elevation) and/or a landscape buffer between these units and the sidewalk.
4. (HW) More information will be needed regarding the intent of retail location, understanding that flexibility regarding short-term and long-term approaches may be required at this stage of plan development. The updated Design Guidelines include more refinement, showing intended "retail required", "retail allowed", and "commercial required" frontages. Additional discussion is expected as part of upcoming economic peer review.

**Draft Conditions Related to Site Design and Open Space:**

**GENERAL CONDITIONS**

1. All buildings, parking areas, driveways, walkways, landscaping and all other site features associated with this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval shall be located and constructed consistent with the Plan Set entitled “\_\_\_” dated \_\_\_ and as amended, \_\_\_ containing \_\_\_ sheets (the “Project Master Plans”) which are more particularly identified in Exhibit A and are hereby incorporated by reference. No changes to the Project are permitted unless they are consistent with the Project Master Plans as set forth in Conditions #7-9.
2. All buildings, parking areas, driveways, walkways, landscaping and all other site features associated with this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval shall be located and constructed consistent with and in compliance with the City of Newton Design Guidelines for the Riverside Station Redevelopment, dated \_\_\_ (the “Design Guidelines”), which is attached hereto as Exhibit B and is hereby incorporated by reference.
3. Pursuant to Zoning Ordinance §7.3.2.E, the time for exercise of this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval is extended to grant a period of three years for the exercise hereof without the necessity of a further public hearing. This Special Permit/Site Plan Approval shall be deemed to have been exercised upon the issuance of a building permit for all or any portion of the Project.
4. If within five (5) years from the date of this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval, the Petitioner has not applied for all building permits necessary to complete construction of the Project, then further construction under this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval is not authorized unless the Petitioner seeks and receives an amendment to this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval approved by the City Council that extends the time for fulfilling this condition.

**CONDITIONS REQUIRING COMMUNITY BENEFITS**

5. The Petitioner shall make a payment of \$2,000,000 to be allocated to create connections to the adjoining DCR land for the benefit of the public.
6. All open spaces shown in the Project Master Plans shall be open to the public at no cost from dawn to dusk every day. The Petitioner’s obligation to maintain the open spaces and to allow public access as required by this condition shall continue for so as the Project authorized by this Special Permit/Site Plan Approval or any amendment thereto is in effect.
  - a. All open spaces must be accessible to persons with disabilities.
  - b. The Petitioner shall maintain the landscape, lawns and plantings on the open spaces in good, healthy condition.
  - c. The Petitioner and the City shall work together for programming for the open spaces for public events. The City shall be responsible for the cost of such public events, but will not be charged rent for use of the open spaces.
  - d. The Petitioner may promulgate reasonable rules and regulations that govern use of the open spaces, which must be reviewed and approved by the City. The open spaces may be closed by the Petitioner, at periodic and reasonable times, for private events.