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**City of Newton, Massachusetts**  
 Department of Planning and Development

1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459


Setti D. Warren  
 Mayor

**Candace Havens**  
 Director

**WORKING SESSION MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 29, 2013

**TO:** Board of Aldermen

**FROM:** Candace Havens, Director of Planning and Development  
 Eve Tapper, Chief Planner for Current Planning 

**SUBJECT:** #258-12 BH NORMANDY RIVERSIDE, LLC/MASSACHUSETTS BAY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY petition for a change of zone to Mixed Use 3/Transit Oriented District for a portion of land located at 327 Grove Street, also identified as Section 42, Block 11, Lot 3A, currently zoned Public Use.

#258-12(2) BH NORMANDY RIVERSIDE, LLC/MASSACHUSETTS BAY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY petition for a SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to construct a mixed use, transit-oriented development including an office building of approximately 225,000 sq. ft., a residential building containing 290 apartments with 5,000 sq. ft. of retail space, a three story building containing approximately 15,000 sq. ft. of retail space and approximately 8,000 sq. ft. of community space, and related site improvements; to permit office use on the ground floor, medical office use, retail and personal establishments of more than 5,000 sq. ft., eating and drinking establishments of more than 5,000 sq. ft., retail banking and financial services, and health club establishments on the ground floor; and reduced minimum setbacks of side setback of office building, and front setback of retail/community building; parking facility design standards including stall width, stall depth, maneuvering space for end stalls, minimum width for entrance and exit driveways, tandem stalls, number of required off-street loading facilities and design standards of same, landscape screening requirements, surfacing and curbing requirements and one foot candle lighting at 327 GROVE STREET, Ward 4, on land known as SBL 42, 11, 3A containing approx. 9.4 acres of land in a proposed Mixed Use 3 Transit Oriented Zoned district. Ref: Sec 30-13(f), Table A Footnote; 30-13(g); 30-15(v)(1); 30-15, Table 3; 30-19(d)(22); 30-19(h); 30-19(h)(2)a); 30-19(h)(2)b); 30-19(h)(2)e); 30-19(h)(4)a); 30-19(h)(5)a); 30-19(i); 30-19(i)(1)a); 30-19(j); 30-19(j)(1)a); 30-19(j)(2)d); 30-19(l); 30-19(l)(2); 30-19(l)(3); 30-19(m); 30-23; 30-24; 30-24(i)(7) of the City of Newton Revised Zoning Ordinance, 2012.

In response to questions raised at the Land Use Committee public hearings, previous working session meetings and/or staff technical reviews, the Planning Department is providing the following materials for the upcoming working session. This information is supplemental to staff analysis previously provided for the public hearing.



**BACKGROUND**

At its March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Land Use Committee held a working session on transportation, site access and parking issues for the proposed Station at Riverside development. This memo outlines the issues that will be addressed at the April 2<sup>nd</sup> working session. These issues include all aspects of site design (i.e., internal pedestrian, vehicular and bicycle circulation, architectural design, and open space), and a comprehensive signage package. At a third working session scheduled for May 7<sup>th</sup>, the Land Use Committee will discuss the fiscal impact of the project, engineering, and water sewer infrastructure improvements, and will complete any further review of traffic and parking issues.

**SITE DESIGN**

Integration of structures and uses. The proposed development at the Station at Riverside includes all of the elements required for a Mixed-Use Development in the Mixed-Use 3 zone, including at least two different principal uses (office and retail) in addition to a residential use, pedestrian and bicycle connections to and through the development, a community center, enhanced and beneficial open space, improved access nearby and adequate parking. Based on these criteria, the Board of Aldermen may be able to make findings that the project meets the special permit criteria laid out in Section 30-24 (i)(1-13), which is the legal requirement to approve a special permit for this project. However, the Planning Department believes that with the proposed site design and uses the development falls short of its potential to fulfill the purpose of the Mixed-Use 3 zone as described in Section 30-13(f). In part, the purpose of this zoning district is to “create a vibrant destination where people can live, work and play.” The proposed development, as designed, separates the uses on the site instead of integrating them to create a vibrant, engaging streetscape. The Planning Department has recommended the petitioner consider vertical integration of the uses (i.e., retail uses on the ground floor with office and residential above) to create an interesting, pedestrian-friendly streetscape that will encourage people to walk throughout the development. Given that the office building and residential building will likely be separately managed limits this effort, though some proposed retail at grade near the residences will help create a synergy with the community use/ public space without being detrimental to the residential experience. The site has been designed with adequate sidewalks and pathways, and staff would be supportive of additional retail spaces along the internal frontages of the business and residential buildings with a series of smaller businesses, so as to encourage exploration of the site and provide more points of interest.

Architectural Design. To date, neither the petitioner nor the MBTA staff has submitted plans for the Intermodal Commuter Facility (ICF). During testimony at the public hearing on November 27, 2012, MBTA representatives explained the process for designing such a facility. It includes several opportunities for public input as design proceeds. As part of the lease agreement between the petitioner and the MBTA, the petitioner is responsible for financing the design and construction of the ICF and without this parking structure, the proposed mixed-use development cannot be built. While the petitioner is seeking State funds to cover a portion of the cost associated with the ICF construction, the State is awaiting an indication of community

support, such as an affirmative vote on the special permit application. The petitioner should be prepared to discuss progress on this issue at the working session and/or provide a schematic design of this structure so as to better understand the physical relationship between proposed structures in the vicinity and the public view of the site.

In addition to the design of the ICF, the Planning Board and several Aldermen have expressed disappointment about the architectural detailing on the residential building. While in general the Board cannot judge a project specifically on the architecture of a building, in this case, the Board must make a finding that the project demonstrates “Excellence in placemaking.” Per Section 30-24(i)(6), this means that the *“proposed Mixed-Use Development provides high quality architectural design and site planning so as to enhance the visual and civic quality of the site and the overall experience for residents of and visitors to both the Mixed-Use Development and its surroundings.”* The residential structure is viewed prominently from Grove Street. Previous designs of this building have been oriented toward the street so as to relate to the residential structures on the south side of Grove Street. The most recent plans have been reoriented away from Grove Street and toward the surface parking lot. The Planning Department feels that both frontages should interface with their surroundings and suggests the petitioner reconsider the design of the Grove Street frontage, in particular.

Open Space. The Mixed-Use 3 zone requires that 15% of the development parcel be reserved for beneficial open space and that 50% of this beneficial open space be freely open to the public. While the submitted site plan shows that the proposed development complies with these requirements, the Planning Department does not believe that the proposed open space follows the intent of these provisions. The park along Grove Street in front of the retail/community center building includes areas for both active and passive recreation. This area will indeed be a gathering place for residents and visitors to the site. However, the rest of the “beneficial open space” is more isolated and remote. The benches are placed in these otherwise undevelopable areas and the features and/or access to these areas should be made engaging so as to be functional and fully utilized.

Sidewalks and pathways. The proposed development includes new internal sidewalks and along Grove Street to get to the site. The petitioner has also agreed to provide bike lanes along Grove Street including over the Route 95 Bridge. The Planning Department has consistently advocated for five-foot bike lanes across the bridge and wherever else it is feasible along Grove Street. That said, there is a real space constraint close to the train trestle. In response to this discussion at the public hearings, the development team submitted a letter on January 22, 2013 in which it agreed to modify the layout of Grove Street to accommodate wider bike lanes if the City agreed this was desirable. The Planning Department recommends that the petitioner submit plans showing this modified cross section for further review.

The internal pedestrian and bicycle circulation appears to be adequate to connect the different uses on-site; however, the plans do not show all proposed locations of bike racks. The Planning

Department recommends that bike racks/corrals be spread throughout the site, including under cover in the residential parking structure similar to the one shown within the office building garage.

In addition, the internal roundabout will slow vehicular traffic to ensure further pedestrian safety at intersections. To provide internal connections to the beneficial open space on-site as well as connections to off-site amenities, the petitioner has worked with the MBTA to provide access from the development parcel to the edge of the MBTA property nearest the Charles River. Neither the petitioner nor the MBTA have control over the informal pathway system along the banks of the Charles River; however, the petitioner has volunteered to build an overlook on MBTA property that could connect to the river in the future, if the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which owns the riverfront property, and the City's Conservation Commission grant permission. An elevated overlook will likely provide better views of the river than can be seen now from ground level. This feature retains the possibility of a bike and/or pedestrian path on the old train trestle over the highway toward the Newton Lower Falls neighborhood. This path should be continuous through the site to allow for residents of Lower Falls to access the MBTA station and for children to walk to the Williams School without crossing major intersections on Grove Street at grade. Further, a group of residents has submitted a description of potential off-site pathways in this area to which this internal pathway system could connect in the future (See Attachment A).

The petitioner has not submitted architectural plans of the proposed overlook, so further analysis of this amenity is difficult. Additional information about how this overlook could interface with possible future connections with walking and/or biking trails would be useful. In addition, the Planning Department requests that the petitioner submit a landscape plan for the pathway from the office building to the overlook; so far, all of the landscape plans submitted for the project end at the office building and shows the proposed materials and design of the path only. There are no proposed plantings along the edges of the path to make this walk more pleasant and appealing. While the overlook will not be on land included in the development parcel, the pathway will be part of the project and appropriate landscaping along this path should be included, as well.

On-site vehicular circulation. In general, the on-site vehicular circulation appears adequate for the number of cars expected. The Planning Department is pleased that the petitioner has reinstalled a roundabout at the four-way intersection opposite the residential building and the office building. This roundabout was removed from the plans submitted at the last working session when a roundabout was added at the Collector-Distributor Road (C-D Road). Several Aldermen questioned this decision at the working session. As a result, the roundabout has since been added back into the plan. In addition to facilitating the steady, safe flow of traffic within the site, the roundabout will also provide more open space than a four-way stop intersection would have.

Deliveries. In response to questions at the public hearings about how each building will be serviced for trash pick-up and deliveries, the development team submitted additional plans showing these details. The plans showing the loading route for Building C (the retail/community center) are confusing (See Attachment B). How does the delivery truck get into the tight loading area in the ICF? In addition, it appears as though the truck will be parked on the sidewalk leading to the parking structure. While the ICF is on the MBTA's parcel, the petitioner has located a loading area within this structure to service Building C. How can the City ensure that the final design of the ICF will include this loading facility?

### **COMPREHENSIVE SIGN PACKAGE**

At the Urban Design Commission's (UDC) March 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, representatives of the development team presented a comprehensive sign package, as required by the Mixed-Use 3 zoning district. The UDC made several comments and has submitted a memo with a detailed analysis of the package (See Attachment C). Chief among the UDC's concerns is the size and number of tenant signs on Building C along Grove Street. The development team has proposed large, horizontal tenant banners in addition to signage within a sign band above the doorway to each store. The UDC believes that these signs are excessive and out of scale with the building relative to the retail establishment it is identifying. At the meeting, the development team seemed amenable to some changes to the proposed tenant signage, but to date no changes have been submitted for review.

The UDC also expressed concerns about the proposed internal wayfinding signage. The development team presented plans that show large green "highway-like" signs along the internal roadways. These signs will direct vehicular traffic on the site to Route 95/128 via the C-D Road. Similar large green signs are also proposed at off-site locations to direct traffic to enter the site from the C-D Road. Off-site, this type of sign is appropriate; however, while the Planning Department understands the need to direct vehicles to the C-D road to exit the site, the proposed signs are too large and for the interior of the site. We recommend that the development team redesign the interior directional signs to fit into the streetscape and of the mixed-use project. In addition, we recommend that the petitioner consider adding signage to direct pedestrians and vehicles to the various uses within the site.

### **SNOW STORAGE**

After the public hearings, the development team submitted a letter explaining its plans with regard to snow plowing and storage. The developer and the MBTA intend to collaborate on a snow program that will include storage of snow along the roadways and sidewalks after a light storm and removal of snow from the site after a significant weather event.

### **PETITIONER'S RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 1) Provide at a minimum, schematic design and elevations of the Intermodal Commuter Facility.
- 2) Provide roadway section showing five-foot bike lanes along Grove Street where feasible.

- 3) Submit planting plan for pathway from the Development Parcel to the Charles River.
- 4) Submit architectural elevations of the proposed Charles River Overlook.
- 5) Clarify the loading arrangement for Building C.
- 6) Consider a more comprehensive, appropriately scaled on-site wayfinding plan.

**Attachment A:** Walking and biking trail connections to and from Riverside

**Attachment B:** Building C Loading Route

**Attachment C:** Memo from Urban Design Commission, dated March 28, 2013

March 12, 2013

Board of Alderman Land Use Committee  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton Centre, MA 02459

**Re: Walking and Biking Trail Connections To and From BH Normandy's  
Proposed Station at Riverside**

Dear Land Use Committee Member:

We are a group of Auburndale and Lower Falls neighbors who are concerned that the developer's proposal for Riverside Station does not address walking and biking trail connections in the neighborhood including the adjacent Charles Riverside Park. Please accept this letter and five attached exhibits as our proposal to correct this problem.

### **Introduction and Summary**

The proposed development of a mixed-use project called The Station at Riverside by BH Normandy Riverside LLC offers a unique opportunity to create enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access from Riverside to neighboring villages and to the beautiful Charles Riverside Park which is adjacent to the site. The goal of this proposal is to enhance existing infrastructure, at minimal cost, to promote safe and efficient pedestrian and bike access between the new development and the Newton communities of Auburndale and Lower Falls.

There is no dispute that green spaces and nature paths provide a benefit for all Newton residents as well as Riverside Station office workers and apartment dwellers. Providing this river access to and from the proposed Riverside Station development seems essential to any responsible permitting of the project. We believe it is very important that there be walking and hiking access from the Riverside Station development to the following two areas:

- The hiking loop passing through DCR's adjacent Riverside Park and into Auburndale, and
- Safe Pedestrian Connection Over To Newton Lower Falls.

#### **A) A hiking loop around Riverside Park and into Auburndale:**

Riverside Park is literally right next door to the Riverside MBTA station and the Park provides a green, surprisingly quiet oasis in the midst of a highway-riddled area. The Riverside Park also has a rich history which includes community recreation in the middle of the last century. Today, Riverside Park features fields, woods, the beautiful concrete

arch railroad bridge, and a section of the Charles rich with herons and wood ducks, providing a serene refuge from the development that surrounds it. There are two attractive footbridges leading into Riverside Park -- one recently renovated and the other slated for repair soon -- as well as playing fields, picnic areas, and a canoe dock. Six months ago, the MWRA built a paved trail connecting the Weston end of the downstream foot bridge up to Recreation Road.

Our group of Auburndale and Lower Falls neighbors urge the Land Use Committee ("LUC") to ensure that the Riverside Developer improve access to the Riverside Park and into Auburndale in two ways:

1. Ensure there is a two lane bike and pedestrian path or sidewalk (as set forth in the developers June 2012 proposal) which connects the Northwest corner of the Riverside Station project to Recreation road. This will allow one connection to the existing Riverside Park loop.

2. In addition, we urge the LUC to provide funding to upgrade the Tunnel at the end of Charles Street in Auburndale. This tunnel lies at the Northeast end of the Riverside Park loop and it will allow a second connection to the Riverside Park loop. This tunnel at the end of Charles Street is currently the only point of access to the loop from the Newton side.

If the tunnel at the end of Charles Street is repaired, it will allow Auburndale residents to reach the Riverside MBTA station by going through the tunnel, over the trestle bridge, and up through Recreation road. The other advantage of completing this tunnel and Riverside Park trail loop is to connect Riverside Station to the Charles River Bike Trail, which currently has its southern terminus in Lyons Park in Auburndale.

#### **Attached Exhibits 1 - 4**

1. Satellite1.png is an aerial view of the Riverside Park, with the concrete arch railroad bridge in the center, DCR's pedestrian bridges upstream (right) and downstream, the parking garage of the Riverside Office Center to the southeast, and the Mass Pike to the north.
2. LeoMartin.jpg is a map from DCR's web site that shows the extents of Riverside Park at the north end.
3. CRNF bike trail alternatives.pdf showing potential trail routes along the Charles, including loops to the northeast that take advantage of DCR's pedestrian bridges in Riverside Park.
4. The concrete arch bridge, taken from the downstream pedestrian bridge. The concrete arch is one of several beautiful features of Riverside Park.



**B) Safe Pedestrian Connection over the Highway to Lower Falls:**

Our group of Auburndale and Lower Falls neighbors (but not the Charles River Neighborhood Foundation) further urge the LUC to ensure that the Riverside Developer renovate the existing train bridges crossing recreation road and I-95 to create a path between the Riverside development and the street grid in Lower Falls. This path would terminate on existing spurs of Clearwater and Deforest Streets in Lower Falls.<sup>1</sup> The costs involved would include an engineering study to assess the structural soundness of the bridges, converting the existing rail bed to a pedestrian / bike path, and enhancement of the bridges with new wooden planks, fencing or perhaps a cage in order to meet safety codes.

As it stands, the developer has proposed a double-roundabout system on Grove Street crossing Rte. I-95/128 which focuses on vehicular traffic, rather than those traveling on foot or bicycle. These two rotaries make the crossings problematic and confusing for pedestrians/commuters but particularly for the young elementary children and their families walking to and from the Williams school. The train bridge crossing would be a safer alternative for pedestrians and bicyclists traveling from Newton Lower Falls to the Riverside Station.

**Attached Exhibit 5.**

5. An additional trail map which includes the safe pedestrian/bike connection between Riverside Station and Newton Lower Falls.

The specific segments involved in the above proposal on Exhibit 6 are numbers:

- #1- the old rail bed from Riverside across two bridges to Newton Lower Falls
- #14 - Charles St to Lasell Boat House – from Charles St across the Lasell Boat House bridge to Recreation Road at Riverside Park
- #16 - Charles St to Riverside - – from Charles St through the tunnel under the commuter rail T line along the rail spur to Riverside
- #17 - Riverside to Recreation Road – from Riverside parking lot through the back of Hotel Indigo along Recreation Road across the Charles River to Riverside Park
- #18 - Charles River Bike Path to Charles St. - the end of the Blue Heron Bike Trail at Lyon's Park along Commonwealth Ave, to Auburn St and Charles St under the Mass Pike.

<sup>1</sup> This proposal is limited to bike/pedestrian trails that could be accomplished with relative minor investments, using existing infrastructure. The proposals deliberately exclude any path segments that would be objectionable to the Lower Falls community.

For the foregoing reasons, we urge the LUC to recommend that the full Board not approve the Riverside Station project until the Developer addresses the above issues.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



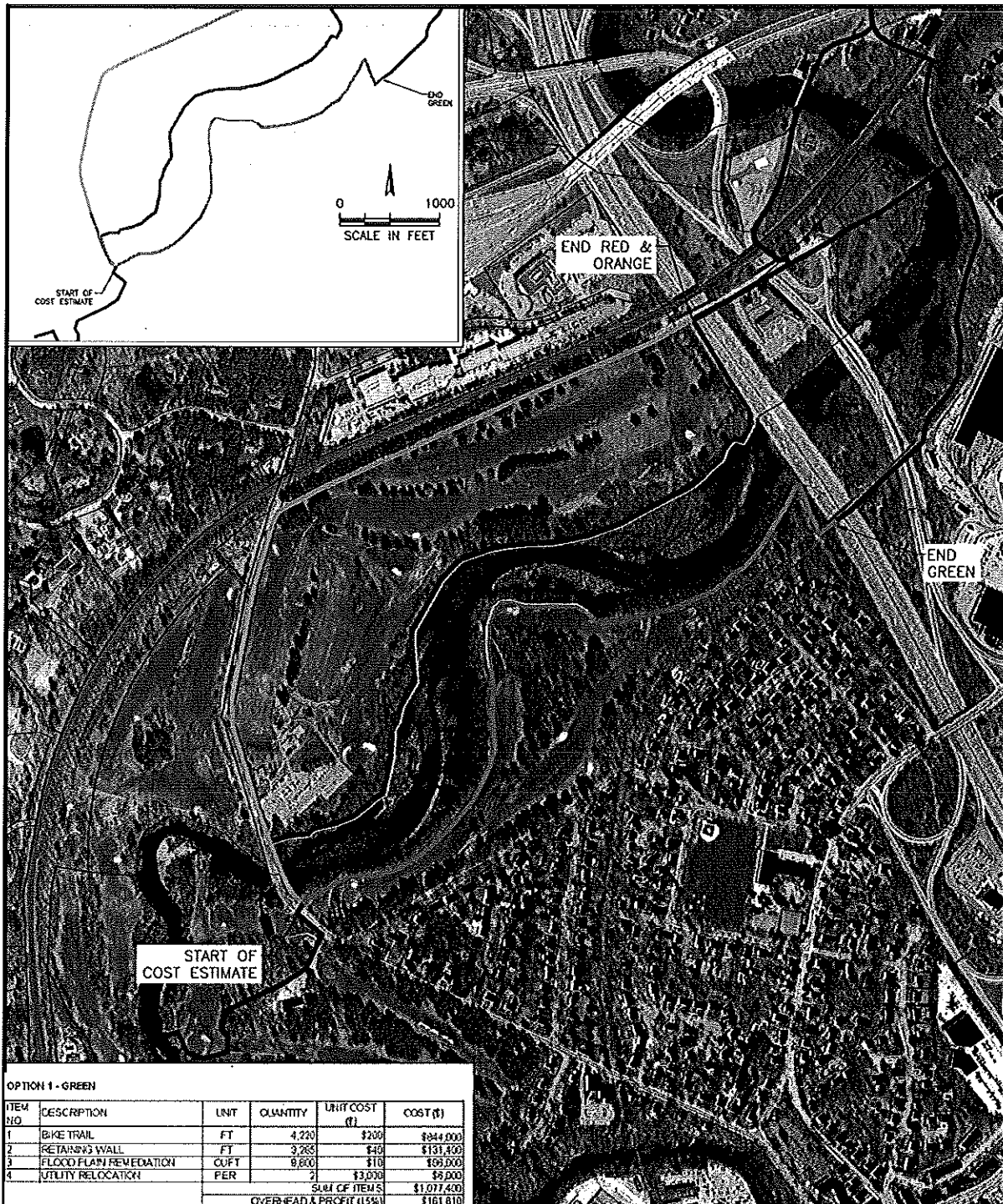
Tod Cochran, (Auburndale, tod.cochran@gmail.com)

Amy Sangiolo (Auburndale, amysangiolo@gmail.com)

Bob Persons (Auburndale, rpersons@rcn.com)

Ted Chapman (Newton Lower Falls, ehchapman@verizon.net)

Cc: Board of Aldermen  
Candace Havens  
Steve Buchbinder  
Riverside Station Neighborhood Coalition



**OPTION 1 - GREEN**

ITEM NO	DESCRIPTION	UNIT	QUANTITY	UNIT COST (\$)	COST (\$)
1	BIKE TRAIL	FT	4,220	\$200	\$844,000
2	RETAINING WALL	FT	3,285	\$40	\$131,400
3	FLOOD FLAIN REMEDIATION	CUFT	9,600	\$10	\$96,000
4	UTILITY RELOCATION	PER	2	\$3,000	\$6,000
SUM OF ITEMS					\$1,077,400
OVER-HEAD & PROFIT (15%)					\$161,610
PERMITTING & ENGINEERING (20%)					\$215,480
CONTINGENCY (25%)					\$269,350
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>\$1,729,840</b>

**OPTION 2 - RED**

ITEM NO	DESCRIPTION	UNIT	QUANTITY	UNIT COST (\$)	COST (\$)
1	BIKE TRAIL	FT	4,630	\$200	\$926,000
2	RETAINING WALL	FT	3,285	\$40	\$131,400
3	FLOOD FLAIN REMEDIATION	CUFT	43,500	\$10	\$435,000
4	UTILITY RELOCATION	PER	2	\$3,000	\$6,000
SUM OF ITEMS					\$1,478,400
OVER-HEAD & PROFIT (15%)					\$221,760
PERMITTING & ENGINEERING (20%)					\$295,680
CONTINGENCY (25%)					\$369,600
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>\$2,375,440</b>

**OPTION 3 - ORANGE**

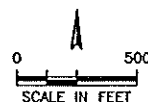
ITEM NO	DESCRIPTION	UNIT	QUANTITY	UNIT COST (\$)	COST (\$)
1	BIKE TRAIL	FT	4,320	\$150	\$648,000
2	RETAINING WALL	FT	220	\$40	\$8,800
3	FLOOD FLAIN REMEDIATION	CUFT	0	\$10	\$0
4	UTILITY RELOCATION	PER	10	\$3,000	\$30,000
SUM OF ITEMS					\$686,800
OVER-HEAD & PROFIT (15%)					\$103,020
PERMITTING & ENGINEERING (20%)					\$137,360
CONTINGENCY (25%)					\$171,700
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>\$1,098,880</b>

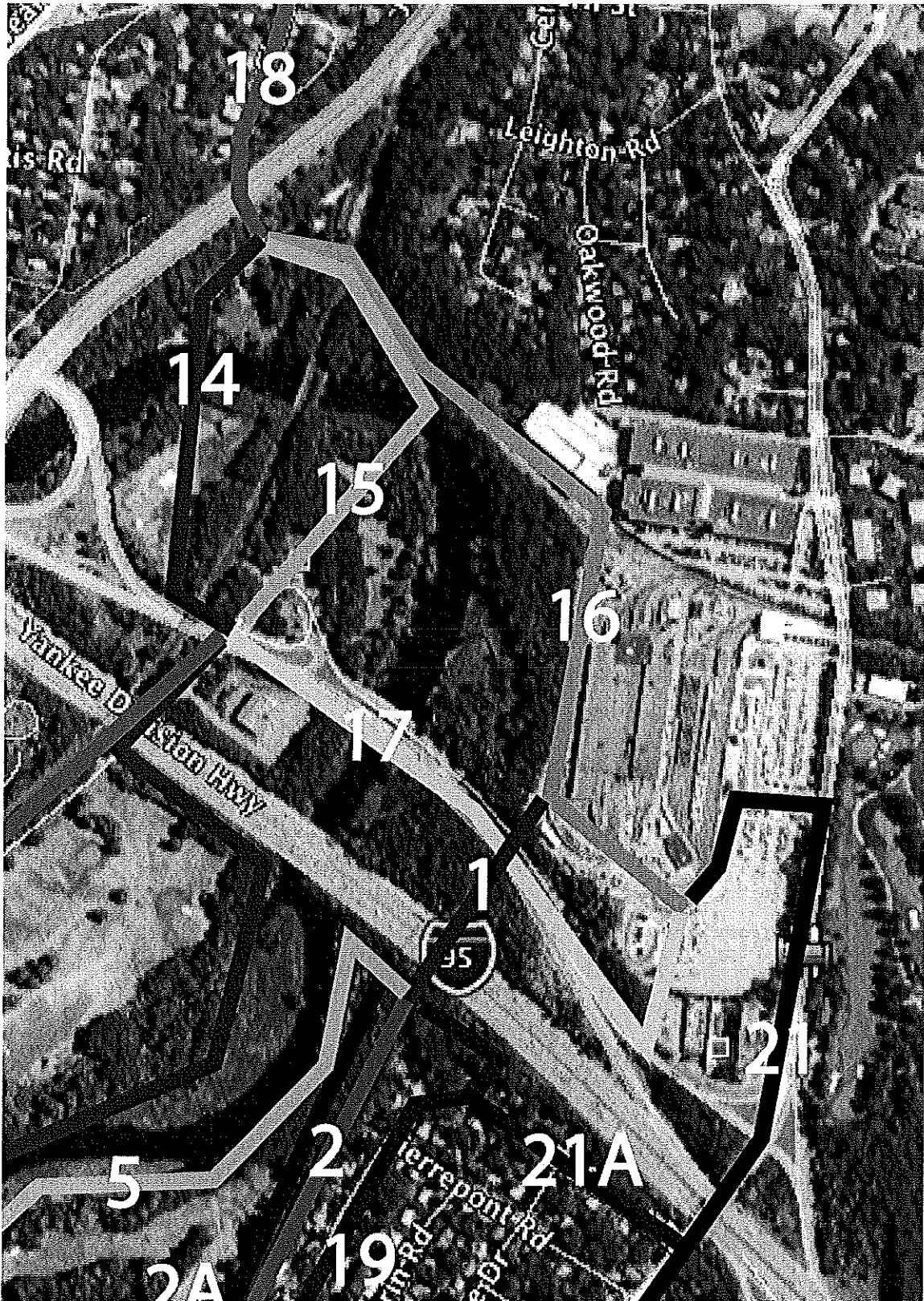
- ASSUMPTIONS:**
- 1 Cost estimate is for the colored sections (Green, Red, Orange) shown in the plan ONLY as an aid to determine the most economical route.
  - 2 Unit Base Cost is estimated to be \$150 per foot of 8-ft wide trail for well compacted material along existing roadway or rail bed.
  - 3 Unit Base Cost is estimated to be \$200 per foot of 8-ft wide trail along the golf course and/or resource area due to trail base material import/compaction and export of unusable material.
  - 4 Flood plain remediation assumes a 12-ft wide and 1-ft deep impact. Cost is an estimate of providing flood storage to mitigate the loss of this storage.
  - 5 Estimate does not include a safety fence within the golf course areas (options 1 & 2) to protect pedestrians from the golf activity. This may be required for public safety.
  - 6 Detail on the bridge crossing at the start of the trails (options 2 & 3) is insufficient and therefore the cost associated with this crossing has not been included.
  - 7 The contingency is provided for the variability and unforeseen conditions that will arise due to the conceptual nature of this project at this time.

Color Data Imagery, March 2008 2008

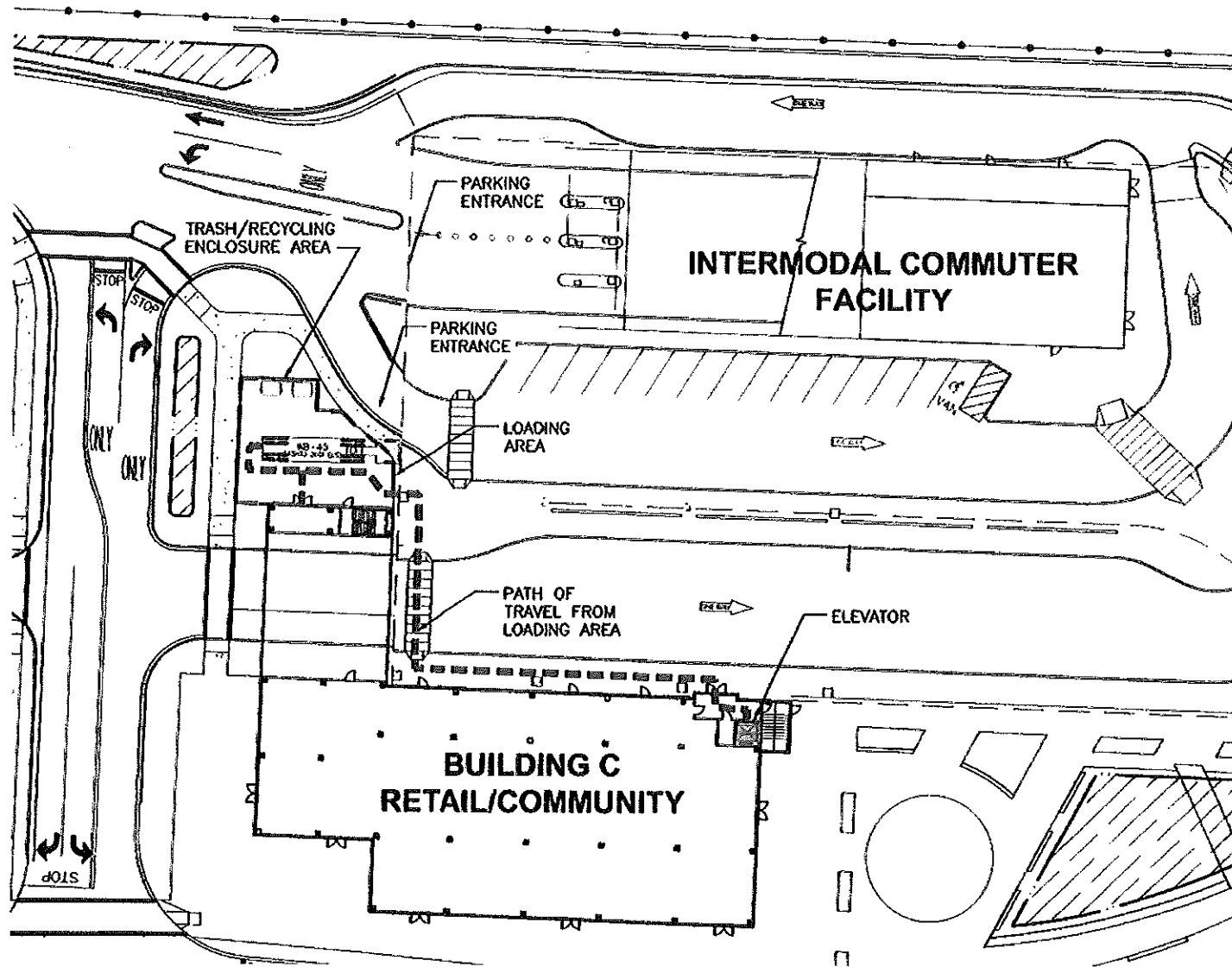


**Preliminary Cost Estimate**  
**CRNF Bike Trail**  
 Newton, Woburn & Weston  
 Massachusetts





# Building C Loading Route



# Memorandum

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**To:** City of Newton Board of Aldermen  
**CC:** Eve Tapper Chief Planner  
**From:** Newton Urban Design Commission  
Jess Alpert, James Doolin, Richard Griffin, Chairman, Michael Kaufman, Trudy Reilly  
**Date:** 3/28/2013  
**Re:** Riverside sign program comments

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The Urban Design Commission has reviewed the plans and other written materials for the sign program submitted by the applicant, and have viewed several presentations of the material.

The Commission first wants to emphasize that in general, we believe that unless there is an overly compelling reason to the contrary, this applicant should comply with the regulations of the current Sign Ordinance, and not need to seek relief from the Ordinance. This would ensure a consistency of signage throughout the City.

However, if the Board sees reason to grant the petitioner some relief from the ordinance, here are our specific comments on the petitioner's proposal:

1. Sign elements should not extend above the tree line (20 feet).
2. We do not support the blade signs for individual tenants; rather, the blade signs should identify the overall project or development name.
3. There are too many blade signs shown; they should be located in strategic locations, such as the corners of buildings.
4. The freestanding monument signs are too tall; they should be no taller than 16' (per sign ordinance). Lower signs would be more consistent with the development and its architecture.

*March 28, 2013*

5. The signs at the building parapets are not necessary. The Commission discourages these locations for signs as they serve less as identifiers for people to reach the site, and more as billboards to be seen from the highway.
6. The larger green highway-type signs should be reserved for public streets and access ramps to Rte. 128, and not for internal site roadways.
7. A comprehensive internal site direction sign program should be developed that will direct vehicles to the site exits, and to the roadways and buildings on the site. The design of these signs should be consistent throughout the site and their scale should be appropriate to the architecture of the site.