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Alderman Ted Hess-Mahan
Chair, Land Use Committee
Board of Aldermen

July 16, 2013

Re: Riverside Development
Land Use Public Hearing on #272-12(2) and #258-12

Dear Alderman Hess-Mahan and members of the Land Use Committee,

Please consider the following comments in your review of the latest Riverside project plans.

Design of Residential Building:

Regarding the residential building design, I am glad to see that there will be a more interesting and varied streetscape on Grove Street. The current design suggests at least a palimpsest of entrances onto the street. However, the most recent illustration that shows the orientation of the residential building and its entrances to Grove Street makes it appear that these entrances are contrived and not real.

Just as in the way the Chestnut Hill Square development faces Boylston Street or the Panera building faces Highland Ave across from Staples in Needham, the developer does not seem to intend there to be access to the street. Concerns about "security" are misplaced and irrelevant, and this should be reiterated at public meetings.

I would recommend that the developer redesign the building entrances on Grove Street so that they include real entrances, not just what appears to be rear porches. There should be a wider sidewalk on Grove Street with sidewalks going individually to each residence. There should be a more articulated and varied facade to the building that may include bay windows, awnings, and steps.

A very bad example was made by the Terraces condominium complex on Langley Road, where the orientation of the complex fails to integrate with the neighborhood. We need to avoid this from happening at Riverside (and everywhere else in Newton!).

Transportation:

Although much work and deliberation has taken place regarding the transportation plan for the project, concerns remain about the transportation plan:

- 1) The second traffic lane is unnecessary on Grove Street approaching the eastern roundabout at the Hotel Indigo for traffic going north to Route 128. It will encourage speeding and reduce safety.
- 2) The bypass traffic lane is unnecessary from Route 128 onto the western roundabout going eastbound on Grove Street. Similarly, it will encourage speeding past the roundabout, whereas one of the intentions of having a roundabout is to reduce speed and improve safety.
- 3) The signalization of the Grove Street entrance to Riverside is unnecessary, as are much of the "queue lanes" and widening of the road. By having the new entrance to the complex, the intention is to relieve traffic pressure from Grove Street and to make the Grove Street entrance somewhat redundant. The "scenic road" nature of Grove Street is being trampled on by this design, not to mention the loss of several mature trees. Having a traffic signal at this location ignores the studies that point out that there will actually be less traffic at this location than currently. The signal will also encourage undesired use of Grove Street by more traffic. Implementing this "improvement" is actually a detriment and is not an improvement at all.
- 4) The first floor of the garage building remains basically a traffic turn-around, which is unnecessary and which just adds undesired height to this very large garage building. People will be shocked by the size and massing of this building when it is actually built, but then it will be too late to change anything. I believe we want to encourage walking and use of the retail and public space that the project will create, and the garage's design detracts from those goals.

Overall, however, I see that there have been a number of positive changes to the project and hope that we can be supportive of the development while also having the developer address our remaining concerns. Ultimately, addressing the community's concerns will only make their project a better and more successful one.

Best,

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