

October 9, 2012

Hotel Indigo Special Permit Public Hearing comments.

Bill Renke, 142 Cornell Street, Newton Lower Falls.

I am President of the Lower Falls Improvement Association and co-founder and co-chair of the Riverside Station Neighborhood Coalition, founded in 2010 by the three neighborhood associations surrounding the Riverside site. The RSNC is an advocacy group dedicated to educating residents living near the Riverside MBTA Station of its proposed development, and advocating on their behalf.

Map Change comments

The Map change and Special Permit applications for the Hotel Indigo are intertwined with the Riverside application. The committee must consider both of these applications comprehensively. The size, complexity, and design of the projects, and the relief sought by the petitioner, must be considered in total.

I am opposed to the Board granting the requested map change unless the petitioner resolves the lack of sufficient parking on the hotel site. I will speak more about this in a minute, but at least 20 additional parking stalls will be lost in Phase 2, and the petitioner has not proposed replacing them.

In addition, the Grove Street roadway modifications for the Riverside project involve its widening in front of the hotel. I am not opposed to the hotel FAR increasing from 1.0 to 1.2 in Phase 2, but the vegetative barrier in front of the hotel that screens the entrance from residents living at 416 Grove Street must be preserved, and if possible, improved.

Special Permit comments

The petitioner's proposed parking remedies are insufficient and should be rejected.

The Planning Memo states that the proposed uses on the site require 279 parking stalls, where only 216 stalls currently exist. The petitioner proposes creating 8 new stalls by restriping, but that still leaves the hotel 55 stalls short of the requirement in Phase 1 and 75 stalls short after Phase 2. Also, almost every stall and maneuvering aisle is nonconforming to current ordinances.

According to the recently published Parking Study, 224 stalls are sufficient for current hotel and restaurant demand, excluding special functions. If a successful project is built at Riverside, one can expect the increased economic activity will increase demand at the hotel and restaurant, thereby increasing the on-site usage and parking demands beyond that reported in the study.

During special functions at the hotel, the parking lot is full! Cars are parked along the outer edge of the driveway leading to the parking lot. These spaces are not marked and are likely illegal. Vehicle passage is restricted to a single lane, and congestion is common. If these spaces are illegal, signage and appropriate pavement markings should be added, and violators should be towed. If the spaces are legal, they should be properly marked.

On July 25th a Chamber event was held at the hotel. At 7:15pm I drove in and observed cars parked along the edge of the driveway. All marked stalls were occupied, and several cars were cruising around the lot waiting for people to leave. I saw no Police Officer directing traffic.

On June 12th, a charity event was held at the hotel. A friend, and member of the Newton Auxiliary Police, told me the lot was full and he parked across the highway, on Deforest Road, and walked to the event. Deforest Road is signed for only one hour parking.

Currently, the hotel lot is fenced in. Non-hotel guests who park there must walk up to Grove Street, and along the sidewalk, in order to access the MBTA station. After the Riverside project is built, walkways will link the hotel to the development and some drivers will park in the hotel lot and walk directly to the station, in order to avoid the MBTA parking fee. This will increase demand on the hotel lot, and require implementing a plan to prevent this activity.

I recommend that the petitioner extend the length of the parking deck. This extension could add at least 30 additional stalls to the upper lot. It won't satisfy the full parking requirement, but it would significantly reduce the shortfall.

That is all and I thank you for your time.