



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts  
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Barney Heath  
Director

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**DATE:** February 16, 2022

**TO:** John Lojek, Commissioner of Inspectional Services

**FROM:** Urban Design Commission

**RE:** 156 Oak Street – Northland Design Consistency Review

**CC:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Community Development  
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director of Planning and Community Development  
Neil Cronin, Chief Planner  
Michael Gleba, Senior Planner  
City Council  
Petitioner

On November 14, 2019, the Land Use Committee of the City Council voted to approve the Northland Project via Board Order #426-18. Per the Board Order Condition 10, *“The procedure for preliminary review of building permit plans set forth in Conditions t/7-8 may be utilized by the Petitioner earlier in the design process for one (1) or more buildings or public spaces in order to receive initial opinions on the consistency of schematic/architectural drawings. If the opinions of both the Director of Planning and Development and the UDC after such an initial schematic review are that the schematic drawings are in full compliance with the Project Master Plans and consistent with the Design Guidelines, the Commissioner of Inspectional Services may accept final building permit plans without further preliminary review so long as they do not include any additional design elements or change any design elements governed by the Design Guidelines as confirmed by the Director of Planning and Development.”*

At its regularly scheduled meeting on October 14, 2020, Urban Design Commission (the “UDC”) appointed a **Subcommittee for Northland Design Consistency Review (the “Subcommittee”)**. The Subcommittee met eight times from October 28, 2020 to February 18, 2021. There is a separate memorandum documenting UDC recommendations from those eight meetings. The Subcommittee again met on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, to review the Northland submission for updates to Public Realm, Buildings 3, 5, 6a, and 6b since Consistency Review in 2020-2021. City’s peer review consultant, Utile (the “Consultant”) also joined the Subcommittee for this meeting. The Subcommittee reviewed the project and made a recommendation to the full Urban Design Commission for final Determination (attachment A) at its regularly scheduled meeting on February 9, 2022.

The Subcommittee includes James Doolin (Chair of Subcommittee), Michael Kaufman, John Downie, William Winkler, and Carol Todreas.

**MOTION: At its regularly scheduled meeting on February 9, 2022, Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the recommendations made by the Subcommittee to the Urban Design Commission (attachment A). Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Carol Todreas, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed.**



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**DATE:** February 9, 2022  
**TO:** Urban Design Commission  
**FROM:** Subcommittee for Northland Design Consistency Review  
**RE:** Northland Design Consistency

At its regularly scheduled meeting on October 14, 2020, Urban Design Commission (the “UDC”) appointed a **Subcommittee for Northland Design Consistency Review (the “Subcommittee”)**. The Subcommittee met eight times from October 28, 2020 to February 18, 2021. There is a separate memorandum documenting UDC recommendations from those eight meetings. The Subcommittee again met on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, to review the Northland submission for updates to Public Realm, Buildings 3, 5, 6a, and 6b since Consistency Review in 2020-2021. City’s peer review consultant, Utile (the “Consultant”) also joined the Subcommittee for this meeting. The Subcommittee reviewed the drawings and made the following comments and recommendations.

The Subcommittee reviewed the Plan Sets submitted on January 12, 2022, identified in Exhibit A:

- 01.12.22\_NND\_UDC Sequence 1 Update

The following items were discussed:

- Public Realm Updates for the following:
  - Mill Park
  - Mobility Plaza
  - Laneways
- Building Updates for the following:
  - Building 3
  - Building 5
  - Building 6A
  - Building 6B

Overall, the Subcommittee commented the project is much more compelling now than the earlier preliminary submission and is very pleased with the advancement of the overall project design. The project is continually showing improvement, it will be a very pleasant place. The buildings have refined and are getting better. The architectural evolution is good and the refinements in all buildings are positive.

At the meeting, the Subcommittee made comments and design suggestions /recommendations. Those comments / recommendations are captured in the memo below.

## **Open Space (Public Realm) Updates**

**The Subcommittee observed that there are some variations as compared to the Special Permit drawings but concluded that the Mill Park, Mobility Hub, and Laneways are consistent with the Special Permit drawings, the Preliminary Submission, and the Design Guidelines.**

Overall, the Subcommittee agreed that the three open spaces reviewed are consistent, they would like the applicant to consider the following **comments/recommendations** as the design moves forward:

### **Laneways**

Overall, the Subcommittee agreed that the Laneways are consistent and are an improvement overall. The programming and the functionality of the Laneways has expanded with the lawn areas that are flexible for multiple uses as opposed to the earlier design which had smaller spaces and it was harder to see how they will be used more flexibly. The simplification of the paving pattern is also good. Use of an ellipse as an organizing element is good and by rotating it, it connects to the building entries and hides the transformers.

The Subcommittee would like the applicant to consider the following **design recommendations** as the design moves forward:

- It is nice to have more useable green space in the Laneway, but applicant will need to consider how it performs in winter. Ensure balance of hard and soft space and the functionality of the Laneway is not reduced in winter.
- Consider variety of plants in the Laneways with winter interest like evergreens, winter berries, etc. Encourage use of plants/shrubs to have different interest in all seasons.
- Ensure lawns can get adequate light for a lawn to grow. The applicant responded that they have done shadow studies and the lawn in building 6 laneway will need to be synthetic. Recommend the applicant further evaluate and consider synthetic grass for both Laneways. Lasell University has a huge Lacrosse field, and it works well even in winter and recommend the same color as Lasell Lacrosse field.

### **Mobility Hub**

Overall, the Subcommittee agreed that the Mobility Hub is consistent and an improvement since last review.

### **Mill Park**

Overall, the Subcommittee agreed that the Mill Park is consistent and is a significant improvement. The daylighting of water is important. It's a lovely transition of greens, pathways, etc.

The Consultant complimented the team on the progress, attention to detail, and the resolution of some of the grading and materials choices.

## **Building Design – Buildings 3, 5, 6a, and 6b**

**The Subcommittee observed that there are some variations as compared to the Special Permit drawings but concluded that Buildings 3, 5, 6a, and 6b are consistent with the Special Permit drawings, the Preliminary Submission, and the Design Guidelines.**

Overall, the Subcommittee commented that the project is continually showing improvement. The buildings have been refined and are getting better. The presentation has been very clear and very easy to understand the proposed changes from earlier versions of the designs. The Subcommittee agreed that the buildings 3, 5, 6a, and 6b are consistent, but they would like the applicant to consider the following **comments/recommendations** as the design moves forward:

- Encourage as much articulation and depth to Juliet balconies.
- Observed there are fewer balconies on Building 3 as compared to earlier elevations but in general all the facades look great.
- Reduce the mechanical rooftop enclosure as much as possible shown on Building 3 and use cladding materials to ensure it is not obtrusive.

### **Public Comment**

Councilor Downs commented that this is the first time looking at this and impressed at how much better this is than what was approved. Councilor Downs suggested to have educational signs regarding the wood structural system being used for Building 7 and information in all the buildings regarding sustainability features. Applicant responded that they are required to provide interpretive signs and will provide them.

Councilor Crossley commented that she is thrilled with the progress that the project has made and is thrilled that the developer has taken the Council's interests so seriously about how many buildings will meet the Passive House standard. The process is terrific, and she wants to compliment the thoughtfulness with which UDC has commented on the project. This is the first time City Council has engaged in such a process where City Council has only seen schematic drawings when the project was approved. Basic elements of this project had been sound and good, but the City Council relied on the design review process to fill in the blanks and she hopes that it works well with every developer, but this developer has taken on the challenge of continual improvement and has been extremely sensitive to the quality of outdoor space and to the fabric of the buildings that contribute to those outdoor spaces.