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Mayor

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**#425-18 & #426-18**

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**Barney Heath**  
Director

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**PUBLIC HEARING/WORKING SESSION MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** November 9, 2018  
**MEETING DATE:** November 13, 2018  
**TO:** Land Use Committee of the City Council  
**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development  
Michael Gleba, Senior Planner  
**CC:** Petitioner

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

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**PETITIONS #425-18 & #426-18                      156 Oak St., 275-281 Needham St. &, 55 Tower Rd.**

**Petition #425-18-** for a change of zone to BUSINESS USE 4 for land located at 156 Oak Street (Section 51 Block 28 Lot 5A), 275-281 Needham Street (Section 51, Block 28, Lot 6) and 55 Tower Road (Section 51 Block 28 Lot 5), currently zoned MU1

**Petition #426-18-** for SPECIAL PERMIT/SITE PLAN APPROVAL to allow a mixed-use development greater than 20,000 sq. ft. with building heights of up to 96' consisting of 822 residential units, with ground floor residential units, with restaurants with more than 50 seats, for-profit schools and educational uses, stand-alone ATMs drive-in businesses, open air businesses, hotels, accessory multi-level parking facilities, non-accessory single-level parking facilities, non-accessory multi-level parking facilities, places of amusement, radio or TV broadcasting studios, and lab and research facilities, to allow a waiver of 1,600 parking stalls, to allow a reduction in the overall parking requirement to not less than 1900 stalls, to waive dimensional requirements for parking stalls, to waive end stall maneuvering requirements, to allow driveway entrances and exits in excess of 25', to waive perimeter landscaping requirements, to waive interior landscaping requirements, to waive lighting requirements for parking lots, to waive general lighting, surfacing and maintenance requirements, to waive off-street loading facilities requirements, to waive sign requirements relative to number, size, location or design, to waive the number of signs allowed.

The Land Use Committee (the “Committee”) held a public hearing on September 25, 2018 on these petitions. This memo reflects additional information addressed to the Planning Department as of November 7, 2018.

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As indicated by the tentative schedule for Land Use Committee public hearings (**Attachment A**) pursuant to the above-referenced petitions, this memorandum is focused on the open space and site design aspects of the so-called “Northland Newton Development” proposed for the subject parcels.

### **Background**

As proposed, and subject to the requested zoning change of the three subject parcels from Mixed Use 3 (MU3) to Business 4 (BU4) and the granting of requested special permit, the project involves the construction of a 1,924,273 gross square foot, 13 building mixed-use development on 22.6 acres of land. The proposal includes 822 residential units comprising 1,089,080 square feet of residential space, (including apartments and several townhouse type units), 193,200 square feet of office space, 237,097 square feet of retail space and 4,000 square feet of community space. The project would have 1,408 on-site parking stalls within garages and surface parking as well as accommodations for 1,106 bicycles.

### **Site Characteristics**

The site is currently occupied by the existing historic structure located at the northwest corner of Needham and Oak streets identified as “Building 1” in the project plans (this building will be preserved per actions of the Newton Historic Commission that also require the maintenance of views of it) as well as large disused industrial structures and active commercial buildings. The site is currently accessed by several curb cuts, including one at the end of Tower Road and several on Needham Street; along Oak Street there is curb cut near the west end of the property as well as one that serves Building 1’s loading area located to the east and closer to the blockfront’s center.

Much of the site is currently impervious given its large existing building roofs, generally underutilized parking areas and other paved areas. The grade of the property slopes upward approximately 20 feet from its lowest point near the intersection of Needham and Oak streets toward the its boundary with the Upper Falls Greenway. There are also some relatively steep (approximately 18-20 foot) downward grades near the northern boundary, along the proposed southerly extension of Tower Road associated with the exposed portion of the South Meadow Brook (other portions of which run through the site in an underground culvert). These defining features, as well as the to-be-preserved Building 1, serve to both constrain and provide opportunities for development of the site.

### **Proposed Design**

The project is designed as an urban center with active streetscapes, street level retail, public spaces and “on-street” parking, all arranged within a modified gridded street system. The project’s 13 structures range from two to eight stories in height, with the tallest measuring 95.6 feet high. The site would be accessed by four driveways: one located off Tower Road, two off Needham Street (one to the proposed “Main Street,” the other to the proposed westerly extension of Charlemont Street), and one on Oak Street serving the proposed “Pettee Lane.” All internal roadways, including the proposed “Main

Street,” Charlemont Street extension and Pettee Lane referenced above are considered internal driveways (i.e., not as accepted public or private ways). Consistent with the site’s proposed urban street environment, these interior roadways would be lined with sidewalks featuring streetlights and street trees.

## **Analysis**

As requested by the Planning Department, the Horsley Witten Group, Inc. (HW) submitted an initial peer review (**Attachment B**) of the proposed site plan and open space concepts, focusing on the project’s site layout, access to and movement within the site, the organization and design of public spaces, and the “sense of place.” The petitioner should be prepared to discuss the memorandum, its findings, requests for additional information, and recommendations at the public hearing.

Horsley Witten’s review found the project overall to be well designed and consistent with Newton’s goals for mixed-use development. The site plan meets Needham Street at logical points and sets up a framework of walkable blocks. HW noted the design provides a clear center with the Village Green and that the Greenway and Needham Street are treated as active frontages and, as a result, most buildings do not have a traditional back and are surrounded by the public realm on all sides, which will require advanced approaches to architecture, service/loading, circulation, and use and tenant mix. HW highlighted Building 7 as presenting a challenge for flow-through retail in particular and recommended the petitioner look at strategies to frame Needham Street while addressing parking, access, and permeability. HW also made recommendations regarding the internal circulation such as reviewing turning movements at the mobility hub, extending the drop-off lane on Building 6, and reducing internal travel lane widths. The Planning Department concurs with HW’s assessment and offers the following additional comments on site design:

### **Building location, mass, scale**

As a general note, the Planning Department’s impression is that as proposed the site plan is perhaps overly focused inward. The Department recommends that additional design effort be applied to the project’s edges along Needham and Oak streets. Toward that end staff has the following comments and questions:

- The Planning Department recognizes both Building 7’s importance and the challenge it represents for creating a truly active environment along Needham Street. As designed this building fronts both Needham Street and the “unnamed street” to the west. Ground level retail is projected for this building, yet experience indicates that “flow-through” retail is difficult to operate and the tendency of stores is to limit access/egress to one side (usually the one better oriented to available parking). As Needham Street does not have curbside parking and currently lacks significant pedestrian activity, retail operators at this location can be reasonably expected to place their active entrances along the “unnamed street” side and use the Needham Street side for, at best, display windows, contrary to adopted goals and policies for active streetfronts. The Planning department recommends that the petitioner examine strategies to bring activity through the building – perhaps by creating a large street level arcade through the building or perhaps redesigning it as two smaller buildings- to visually and/or functionally connect Needham Street with those elements of the project “behind” Building 7.

- Can a pedestrian passageway that respects the historic nature of the structure be created through Building 1 (the existing mill building) to create an additional entrance to the site on Oak Street?
- Building 4 faces Oak Street but is set back with the small Oak Street Park and a surface parking lot directly fronting Oak Street. Aside from this location, the proposed project has screened off-street parking well. The Department recommends that the petitioner explore alternative options such as expanding Oak Street park and placing parking below grade or within a building, or redesigning Building 4 as two smaller buildings facing one another with one located somewhat closer to Oak Street, and open space in between the buildings.

Relatedly, the Planning Department has some concerns regarding the location of Building 9 which is slated for use as community space. While this location would likely benefit from its proximity to the Greenway and adjacent park space, it is nevertheless positioned away from the what is expected to be the more active areas of the development. As such, the Department will need additional information on the community space's expected management structure, mission, operations, and programming to better assess the appropriateness of this proposed location. Planning believes this information will evolve through the review process and the location and function of the community center can be revisited at a future meeting.

The Department is also concerned that the scale of several of the proposed blocks and buildings are relatively oversized. Indeed, as noted in the HW peer review (see para. 14) the perimeters of Buildings 5 and 6 exceed (albeit slightly) the quarter-mile standard generally applied for "walkable blocks. While the blocks are on the large side, some of the buildings themselves far exceed recommended lengths for active, human-scale streetscapes. Buildings 5 and 6 in particular comprise the entire blockfronts and the Planning Department recommends the petitioner break these into smaller buildings, with 180 feet as a goal for maximum building façade lengths. To help address these concerns, the Department suggests the following:

- The Department recommends the Petitioner explore placing Building 5's parking level below grade. This modification could have the concurrent benefits of lessening this large structure's apparent mass, giving it a street-level appearance of separate buildings, and creating a large open space.
- The Department also recommends the Petitioner explore breaking Building 6 into multiple buildings. At a minimum there should be a break in the building façade every 180 feet to give the appearance of multiple buildings and both north-south and east-west pedestrian access should be provided through the building, lined with active uses and of sufficient width and height. Staff believes such passages could create more street-level interest and help "break down" what could be perceived as overly large structure.
- Make the "bump-outs" along Pettee Lane larger and install seating to enhance that street's residential street nature.

An additional general observation about the site plan is that it is unclear how snow storage and removal would be handled. The petitioner should be prepared to describe its plans for this issue.

### **Parks and Open Space**

Several park and open spaces are proposed. These include a "village green" along the proposed "Main Street" at its intersection with the extension of Tower Road. A currently culverted portion of South Meadow Brook would be "daylighted," i.e., uncovered, in an area identified as "Mill Park" near the

waterfall in the area around and between Buildings 1, 2, and 3. Additional open and recreational areas would be created at the north end of the site near the Tower Road entrance (close to the proposed community use-focused Building 9), and an enhanced section of South Meadow Creek.

Horsley Witten's review of the parks and open space within the project noted the parks are spread out around the development and each serve a particular purpose with an assumed user group. HW concurred with the overall approach and recommended that the petitioner further consider the intended users and incorporate design details to meet the needs of these users. Suggestions include reviewing elements such as access, park elements, bathrooms, ADA parking and drop offs, on-street parking, bicycle infrastructure, play areas adjacent to outdoor food venues, and seating options. HW provided specific recommendations such as adding bicycle racks to the Main Street connection to the Greenway, providing gateway elements between the Village Green and Oak Street Park, providing seating and tables in the Mill Park, and adding benches in the hardscaped area where the shuttle bus pull off is located. HW also requested additional information on the precedent sites for the Village Green, recommended a stronger connection between the playground and South Meadow Brook Park, and recommended the final plant schedule more closely align to the sustainability and ecological restoration goals. The Planning Department concurs with HW's assessment and offers the following additional comments on open space:

Regarding the "Village Green," the Department urges that the streets surrounding it be designed and operated as "shared streets" for the benefit of pedestrians and park users as well as vehicle drivers. Toward that end, the petitioner should consider finding another location for Building 1's pick-up/drop-off area along the Village Green's southern edge to reduce the number of vehicles navigating the area and enhance its character as a pedestrian space. In the event these spaces remain as proposed, the petitioner should consider designing them as "back-in angled" stalls to reduce the speed of vehicle using them. Also to be considered is a system of indicating to drivers along Main Street the availability of spaces located around the Village Green so as to prevent unnecessary entry of vehicle into the area when all spaces are occupied.

Regarding the design of the Village Green itself, the Planning Department suggests the need to working with the petitioner and others to explore issues related to whether ADA access through the village green should be provided. It also recommends the inclusion of additional shaded seating around its perimeter.

As for the other proposed park and open spaces, the Planning Department notes that:

- shading would also be important at the playground and requests additional detail on that issue;
- the installation of built-in seating at appropriate locations, especially including spaces for wheelchairs to be located in and around such facilities is encouraged;
- the various play areas should be programmed for different age groups as indicated by design and equipment;
- an appropriate location for an off-leash dog area should be identified;
- the petitioner should confirm and maintain the accessibility of Mill Park for all users;
- the petitioner should identify how it proposes to provide for and ensure permanent ongoing public access to the project's public spaces including the above referenced parks and open spaces as well

as the street system;

- upon its initial review of the proposed bicycle path facilities the Department appreciates their design and extent but will reserve more detailed discussions for a subsequent memorandum to be submitted in advance of the public hearing on the transportation aspects of the project currently scheduled for January 15, 2019.

### **Needham Street Area Vision Plan**

In addition to the analysis above, the Planning Department also reviewed the proposal in the context of the Needham Street Area Vision Plan, adopted by City Council in August 2018. In December 2017, the Planning Department kicked off a six-month community engagement process to develop a holistic vision for the Needham Street area. The Planning Department assembled a twenty-one-member engagement committee including City Councilors Crossley and Kalis as well as residents, commercial property owners, topic-area experts, and representatives from neighborhood and citywide organizations. The engagement group met regularly between December and April to advise the Planning Department in the preparation of the vision document.

The adopted vision for the Needham Street area strives to produce a prosperous mixed-use district designed for all ages. It includes goals such as continuing to reflect the industrial history of the area and the current commercial strength while adding diverse residential options and modern innovation industries and incorporating cultural and recreational opportunities as well as environmentally sustainable technologies and design. The plan includes tailored visions for Environmental Health, Transportation, Land Use, Design and Implementation. The proposed project will be analyzed as each meeting topic relates to the vision document. The site design and open space proposals for the project relate to the following action items in the vision plan:

- a. Create a "Sustainable Living" theme for Needham Street focused on the natural amenities of the area including the Charles River, South Meadow Brook, and the Upper Falls Greenway. (Vision for Environmental Health)*

The proposed project addresses this goal by opening up the site to the Greenway, providing prominent connections from the site to the Greenway, and by highlighting the South Meadow Brook in multiple locations. The project will provide a boardwalk and viewing point over the existing daylighted section of the Brook near the northern edge of the site. The petitioner also proposes to provide some sort of marking at grade level through the site to represent the Brook where it flows within a culvert below grade as well as opening up the area near the "waterfall" at the end of the Mill Park. Planning Department staff recommends that the petitioner highlight these amenities with wayfinding and educational signage.

- b. Increase native plantings to address heat island effects, provide stormwater management, add shade where needed, create habitat, and increase aesthetic appeal. (Vision for Environmental Health)*

The draft plant list included in the petition is more than half non-native plants. Planning Department staff recommends that the petitioner further develop this list in conjunction with City staff and that a plant list be included in the proposed design guidelines that emphasizes the above goals.

- c. *Require new development/redevelopment to incorporate new publicly accessible open spaces in the Needham Street area. (Vision for Environmental Health)*

The petition creates multiple publicly accessible open spaces within the site, including the Village Green, play area, Mill Park, and South Meadow Brook park. Planning Department staff recommend that if the petition is approved, a condition be included requiring these spaces stay open to the public in perpetuity.

- d. *Place bike racks, benches, and informational, educational, and/or play features along trails. (Vision for Environmental Health)*

The proposal includes a gateway to the Greenway at the termination of Main Street that provides a pocket park. Planning Department staff recommend that this park and connection include bicycle racks, seating, and wayfinding signage.

- e. *Locate parking behind and/or below buildings (Vision for Design)*

The proposal primarily wraps parking with active uses, aside from the surface parking area in front of Building 4. Planning Department staff recommends the petitioner further investigate pushing parking below ground wherever possible and breaking up large buildings at the ground level. As most of the proposed buildings will have four visible sides the petitioner should also continue to find creative ways to screen any un-lined parking areas as well as loading areas. This will be further discussed at the Architecture and Design Guidelines meeting, tentatively scheduled for February 12, 2019.

- f. *Line public open spaces with active facades to invite people to utilize the public space (Vision for Design)*

The central gathering space in the development, the “Village Green”, is lined by active residential and commercial uses on all sides. In addition, office workers at the Mill Building will be required to park within Building 6 and walk adjacent to the Village Green to get to the Mill Building, adding additional pedestrian activity in this area. The Mill Park is lined by the Mill Building on the southern side and Building 3 on the northern side. This section of Building 3 is parking and does not have active uses, however the linear park will benefit from the adjacent office use of the Mill Building. The petitioner should take extra care in designing the façade of Building 3 to ensure this section is well screened.

- g. *Work with property owners to activate the Greenway and its edges with art installations, access into abutting shops, direct entries, public gathering spaces, etc. (Vision for Design)*

The proposal creates two prominent new access points to the Greenway at the termination of Main Street and between the community center and play area. The connection at Main Street will also include a small pocket park. Additionally, the proposal would remove the existing fencing, creating a more porous connection between the project and the Greenway and will include townhouse buildings that front on both the Greenway and the proposed Pettee Lane. The townhouse buildings will include backyard areas directly adjacent to the Greenway. The petitioner has noted however that due to the cars that park perpendicular to the Greenway on Chestnut Street, some low landscaping may be necessary in order to block headlights from the residential units in the townhouse buildings.

- h. Require new building heights to meet residential heights at neighborhood edges; utilize grade change and upper story setbacks to reduce visible height of larger buildings. (Vision for Design)*

The proposal includes 13 buildings varying in height from two to seven stories. In general, the height is focused within the center of the site and steps down towards the edges. Along the Greenway, the townhouse buildings are three stories and on Chestnut Street opposite these buildings across the Greenway, heights range from two to four stories. Directly abutting Oak Street is the existing Mill Building and a three-story townhome building. The Mill Building ranges from one story near the intersection with Needham Street to three stories further west along Oak Street (though it presents as quite taller than three stories due to grade change and the floor to ceiling heights). Across Oak Street is a six-story condo building near the intersection of Needham Street and a number of two to two and a half story residences. Along Needham Street the proposed buildings range from two stories at the southern end to five stories at the northern end, adjacent to an existing five-story office building. The proposed project does an excellent job of respecting the height of the surrounding edges while taking advantage of the grade changes and size of the site to locate height internally. The Needham Street Area Vision Plan also discusses the height of buildings in relation to the width of the open space in between them and states that the idea ratio is one to one. Planning staff recommends that the petitioner provide sections through the taller buildings and internal streets within the site.

- i. Encourage deep lots along Needham Street to be divided into smaller blocks to increase walking route options and public space opportunities; set requirements for changes in building facades to break up the massing of buildings. (Vision for Design)*

The proposed site is very large at over 22 acres. The petitioner proposes breaking down the large site into smaller blocks with an internal street network. Planning staff finds that this is in line with the vision, however staff recommends the petitioner aim to increase pedestrian connectivity through the larger blocks by breaking up buildings or providing alternative connections through the buildings.

- j. Establish standards for and encourage active commercial front yards along Needham Street, e.g. outdoor dining, new tree planting, lighting, etc. (Vision for Design)*

The proposed project has three separate buildings with frontage along Needham Street. All three buildings will have ground level commercial uses and two of the buildings will include upper story residential units. While this is consistent with the vision, Planning staff would like to see more attention paid to this edge and more opportunities for activity along Needham Street, as discussed above.

The Planning Department is continuing to work with other city departments, as well as the petitioner and the consultant peer reviewer to continue analysis of the proposed project.

As identified in the tentative schedule for the Land Use Committee's review of the rezoning and special permit petitions, the next public hearing session, scheduled for December 11, 2019, will be focused on issues related to the housing and the economic impacts of the project.



**ATTACHMENTS**

<b>Attachment A</b>	Tentative schedule for Land Use Committee public hearings
<b>Attachment B</b>	Horsley Witten Group, Inc. Site Plan and Open Space Review

# **ATTACHMENT A**

## **TENTATIVE LAND USE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE**

### **NORTHLAND NEEDHAM STREET/OAK STREET**

#### **Special Permit # 426-18 and Request to Rezone #425-18**

<b>Land Use Committee Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>9/25/2018</b>	Project Overview	Applicant to introduce project and committee to discuss schedule.
<b>11/13/2018</b>	Site Design and Open Space	Review of site plan, including placement of buildings, roads and open space as well as sight lines and shadows.
<b>12/11/2018</b>	Housing and Economic Impacts	Review of proposed residential and commercial program, including: analysis of the number of housing units, including affordability levels; the commercial mix; and the overall fiscal and economic impacts of the proposed project.
<b>1/15/2018</b>	Transportation	Review of the proposed internal street network and circulation including bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and analysis of the traffic impacts, shared parking proposal, and transportation demand management strategy.
<b>1/29/2018</b>	Sustainability and Stormwater	Review of the sustainability report and efforts to reduce impacts to natural resources as well as sustainability and conservation proposals.
<b>2/12/2018</b>	Architecture and Design Guidelines	Review of design guidelines that will regulate future detailed architectural design of the proposed buildings.
<b>3/12/2018</b>	Project Revisions/ Mitigation	Review of any revisions made to the project as well as updated analysis of those revisions and discussion of necessary mitigation measures.

## ATTACHMENT B

### Horsley Witten Group

*Sustainable Environmental Solutions*

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November 6, 2018

VIA EMAIL

Ms. Jennifer Caira  
Chief Planner  
City of Newton  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton, Massachusetts 02459-1449

Re: Site Plan & Open Space Review  
Northland Newton Development  
Mixed Use Development Special Permit Site Plan Review

Dear Ms. Caira:

The Horsley Witten Group, Inc. (HW) is pleased to submit this initial peer review regarding the site plan and open space concepts presented for the Northland Newton Development located on Oak Street, Needham Street, and Tower Road in Newton, MA. We understand that the Special Permit/Site Plan Review Application includes the construction of 822 residential units within 1,089,080 square feet (sf) of residential space, 193,200 sf of office space, 237,097 sf of retail space and 4,000 sf of community space in 13 buildings on 22.6 acres of land.

As part of our review process, HW reviewed the following documents and plans:

- Memorandum of Agreement, Needham Street Development, dated July 13, 2018;
- General Permit Application, 156 Oak Street, 275-281 Needham Street, and 55 Tower Road, dated July 31, 2018;
- Zoning Review Memorandum, 156 Oak Street, 271-281 Needham Street, 55 Tower Road, dated August 2, 2018;
- Special Permit Application, 156 Oak Street, 275-281 Needham Street, and 55 Tower Road, dated August 10, 2018;
- Needham Street Area Vision Plan, adopted August 13, 2018;
- Northland Newton Master Plan & Design Guidelines, dated August, 2018;
- The Northland Newton Development, dated August, 2018;
- Public Hearing Memorandum, Petition #425-18 and #426-18, dated September 21, 2018;
- Petitioner's Presentation, Northland Investment Corporation, dated September 28, 2018;
- Tentative Land Use Committee Schedule, Northland Needham Street/Oak Street; and
- Site Plans for The Northland Newton Development, Needham Street/Oak Street, Newton, Massachusetts, dated August 6, 2018, which includes:
  - Cover Sheet
  - Legend

Sheet 2

○ Area Plan	Sheet 3
○ Zone Change Plan	Sheet 4
○ Overall Site Plan	Sheet 5
○ Zoning Assessment Plan (Building 1)	Sheet 6
○ Zoning Assessment Plan (Building 2 & 3)	Sheet 7
○ Zoning Assessment Plan (Building 4, 12 & 13)	Sheet 8
○ Zoning Assessment Plan (Building 5, 10 & 11)	Sheet 9
○ Zoning Assessment Plan (Building 6 & 7)	Sheet 10
○ Zoning Assessment Plan (Building 8 & 9)	Sheet 11
○ Layout and Materials Plan	Sheet 12-14
○ Grading and Drainage Plan	Sheet 15-17
○ Utility Plan	Sheet 18-20
○ Erosion and Sediment Control Plan	Sheet 21
○ Site Details	Sheet 22-23
○ Existing Conditions Plan of Land	Sheet 24-26
○ Layout and Materials Plan Enlargement	Sheet 27-29
○ Grading Plan Enlargement	Sheet 30-32
○ Planting Plan Enlargement	Sheet 33-35
○ Landscape Details	Sheet 36-39
○ Architectural Plans	Sheet 40-88

We offer the follow comments regarding the development from the neighborhood scale:

1. The City's Comprehensive Plan land use strategies focus on Smart Growth and place-centered planning. With Newton being mostly built out, strategic redevelopment provides an opportunity for the City to grow within the existing land use, transportation, and open space framework. The majority of the Northland Newton Development site is currently impervious, featuring existing building roofs and generally underutilized parking areas. The project development concept appears to be consistent with Newton's goals for mixed-use Smart Growth development. For this review, our analysis is limited to preliminary site layout, access to the site and movement within the site, organization and design of public spaces, and sense of place. We have not reviewed economic or traffic/transportation impacts. At this point our comments are limited to "big picture" design framework, understanding that future detailed design development review will be required.
2. The scale of the proposed development requires structured parking to meet the proposed program requirements. Proposed structured parking is mostly "wrapped" with mixed-use building space including active ground floor uses, which is strongly encouraged to reinforce vibrant and beautiful streetscapes, an active public realm, and "eyes on the street" for safety and comfort.
3. The plan defines a clear center, focusing internally on the proposed Village Green and framing Main Street and the Village Green with active commercial uses and consistent building frontage. The Upper Falls Greenway and Needham Street are also treated as active frontages, requiring dual-sided buildings that front both onto these edges as well as internal streets. This requires advanced approaches to architecture, service/loading, circulation, and use and tenant mix, especially for Building 7 as discussed in further

comments. The existing mill building (Building 1) provides much of the edge condition fronting on Oak Street, facing the existing residents to the south, with the inclusion of Pettee Lane and the proposed pedestrian connection into the site from Oak Street via Oak Street Park. The edge condition to the north varies, consisting of the proposed playground and community building, Tower Road, the streamside park, and Building 8 backing onto existing buildings. HW concurs with the general approach, with more detailed review comments for specific streets and buildings in following comments.

4. The site plan layout as currently configured meets Needham Street at logical points, setting up an internal framework of walkable blocks and increasing connectivity to Needham Street consistent with the vision expressed in the Needham Street Area Vision Plan to increase intersection density and reduce block sizes. The distance between Charlemont Street and Main Street is approximately 350 feet, and the distance from Main Street to Oak Street is approximately 360 feet – far exceeding the existing auto-oriented intersection density.
5. The alignment of Charlemont Street at a signalized intersection in the location shown on the plans offers the potential to extend the street network east of Needham Street, with improved linkage to Christina Street, consistent with the Needham Street Area Vision Plan vision for a better connected roadway system.
6. The proposed separated shared use path connects the Upper Falls Greenway to Needham Street at the Charlemont Street intersection, taking advantage of proposed intersection crossing improvements on Needham Street to facilitate pedestrian/bicycle access to the east and a potential future greenway connection over the Charles River. HW recommends the proposed intersection design and details be confirmed to clearly and comprehensively address the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and other disadvantaged users to maximize safety and comfort at this key crossing location.
7. As currently proposed the two-way shared use path takes a 90-degree turn by the bioretention area in order to cross the street and continue between the playground and community center. Is there a way to make this angle less severe? The design might incorporate a boardwalk section of path to bring bicyclists over the bioretention area, view the stream, and potentially park the bikes to use the stream observation area.
8. Tower Road is designed to intersect Main Street at a “T” terminating on the Village Green at a raised intersection condition. HW concurs with this design element for its traffic calming and placemaking benefits. Because the vehicular circulation is proposed one-way around the Village Green, it appears that the turning and queuing conflicts that may have been presented by the intersection offset will be minimized. An offset intersection is also proposed at Charlemont Street and Tower Road. HW concurs with this general approach, however recommends additional details be provided as the design progresses and during traffic engineering review to ensure safety and function at these intersections.
9. In conjunction with the termination of Tower Road at the Village Green, HW understands Pettee Lane has been designed with a jog at Tower Road and a jog south of proposed Main Street to provide traffic calming and discourage “cut-through” traffic to Oak Street and residential neighborhoods south of the project. HW concurs with this approach.

We offer the follow comments regarding the development from the block, street, and building Scale:

10. Building 4, Building 8, and Building 13 are the only proposed buildings that appear to be oriented with a clear front and back. All other buildings face high quality public realm on multiple sides, and in some cases, all four sides. This will require multiple building facades appropriate for facing the high-quality public realm proposed in the plan, and careful coordination of service, loading, deliveries, trash/recycling, and parking garage access. It appears part of Charlemont Street is dedicated to service, deliveries, and garage access for Building 6 and Building 8. Additional information is required to clarify these functions for all buildings.
11. Building 7 is proposed with active frontage on both the Unnamed Street to the west and Needham Street. The placement of Building 7 with active frontage on Needham Street is consistent with the Needham Street Area Vision Plan for increased walkability and placemaking within the corridor. The building design may pose challenges due to its dual frontage. HW requests additional information regarding the proposed design of Building 7, potential tenants and their orientation to both streets, expected points of arrival via vehicle/pedestrian/bicycle/other and flexibility for this building to adapt over time as the Needham Street corridor evolves. Additional methods to frame Needham Street with active building frontage and address parking/access/permeability should be investigated. There appears to be opportunity to provide a gateway public open space fronting Needham Street in this location. This may benefit the development and the Needham Street streetscape, but would have to be balanced to maintain the significant benefits provided by a rhythm of consistent building facades facing the street, especially when Needham Street is in the preliminary stages of a long-term character transition.
12. The existing Mill Building is a barrier to accessing the site from Oak Street. HW understands the location of the intersection of Pettee Lane with Oak Street was designed to minimize cut-through vehicular traffic and shifting the intersection location further east may be infeasible due to topography. HW recommends additional detail regarding pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to the site via Oak Street Park be explored. See comments in the Parks and Open Space review section of this letter.
13. The location of the community building, Building 9, is adjacent to the playground, shared use path, and Upper Falls Greenway. HW recommends additional information be provided detailing the anticipated operation of this building and potential programming to clarify the building's function and review its proposed location. Parking spaces at the playground are limited and additional information should be provided on who the intended users are and how they would be accessing the site. Ensuring there is convenient access to the playground for parents with children will be part of its success.
14. The perimeters of the blocks occupied by Building 5 and Building 6 both slightly exceed 1/4 mile, a typical measure of a walkable block. Both buildings are designed to occupy the entire block with internal wrapped parking decks, thus minimizing pedestrian permeability through the blocks. This may also be detrimental to the "park once" strategy proposed by consolidated visitor parking within the Building 6 parking deck, especially for elderly or other mobility impaired visitors. HW recommends that additional strategies to improve permeability and walkability be considered.
15. Is parking for the existing mill building provided in the Building 6 parking deck? Is the Building 6 parking deck the only "public" parking location for office users and visitors to

the site (other than on-street parking)? Where is ADA parking for the existing mill building provided?

16. The location and alignment of the mobility hub requires access to the site via Main Street to align pick-up and drop-off on the east curb adjacent to Building 7. HW recommends the function of turning movements - design vehicle turning movements to facilitate these maneuvers, as well as traffic impacts on the Needham Street and internal intersections, be reviewed in more detail as the design progresses (HW understands that others will review the traffic movements).
17. Why does the drop-off lane along the east face of Building 6 not extend to Main Street for either drop-off or on-street parking purposes?
18. Limited on-street parallel parking is proposed in the vicinity of the Village Green, including the Tower Road approach. Understanding that this is a shared street condition which, properly detailed, should provide significant traffic calming and placemaking benefit, has additional on-street parallel parking in this location been considered?
19. Ten-foot wide travel lanes are generally considered a maximum for safe slow-speed streets and maximizing placemaking benefits. HW requests clarification for eleven-foot lanes proposed for Tower Road, Charlemont Street, and the Unnamed Road.
20. The proposed one-way loop around the Village Green is designed with a 20-foot travel lane. This is wide given the one-way condition, especially in a shared-street design adjacent to the Village Green. HW recommends that the Applicant clarify this decision.
21. HW understands additional detail is being developed regarding shade analysis, and welcomes review of this information as soon as it is available.

We offer the follow comments regarding the Parks and Open Space:

22. The Northland Development has seven different named parks: Village Green, Mill Park, Linear Park, South Meadow Brook Park, the Neighborhood Playground, the Main Street Connection to the Greenway, and Oak Street Park. These parks are spread out around the development and each serves a particular purpose with an assumed user group. HW concurs with the approach to provide a diverse variety of open spaces around this development; however, HW recommends considering the intended users and incorporate design details to meet the needs of the various users. Access to or between the parks, park elements, bathrooms, etc. can be reviewed with a more explicit vision of who is likely to occupy which space. Handicapped parking and drop offs, on-street parking, bicycle infrastructure, additional play areas adjacent to outdoor food venues and bathrooms, seating options, etc. all help make these outdoor spaces more comfortable to a variety of users. For instance:
  - Bike racks could be added at the Main Street Connection to the Greenway for bicyclists taking a break or parking their bikes to enter the development.
  - The Oak Street Park would benefit from gateway elements and open sight lines into the Village Green so it seems more welcoming and less like a back door. As designed the park consists largely of a sloped sidewalk connection and bioretention system.
  - Seating and tables could be included in Mill Park for the office employees.

- Benches could be included in the hardscaped area of the Linear Park where the shuttle bus pull off is located.
23. Information on precedent sites per the proposed uses of the Village Green open space is required to review whether the scale of the park suits the vision. Currently the lawn space is approximately 100'x120' in the Village Green, this compares to 180'x160' of park space at Needham's Town Hall which is used for farmer's markets and performances. The space in Needham has trees within its lawn. The lawn space adjacent to Dewey Square by South Station in downtown Boston is approximately 65' by 190'. Programs for this space include seasonal ice skating rinks, "screens on the green", visitors eating lunch in lawn chairs and a variety of other uses. Currently the space shown for the Northland Village Green is open and flexible, amenable to multiple programmatic uses like the space by Dewey Square. HW concurs with this approach, however additional information would be beneficial to ensure the scale correlates with the intended uses.
24. HW recommends combining the benefits of having the playground and South Meadow Brook Park across the street from one another. Like the hardscaping detail that follows the stream to the daylighting location, elements of the playground could speak to being in close proximity to the stream as well as the bioretention area, and educational signage or other features could be spread between both parks acting as a connection between them. Per the vision of Environmental Health in the Needham Street Vision Plan to create natural areas that encourage activity and environmental education, the opportunities in these parks should be maximized. In addition, HW recommends utilizing other parks and streetscape stormwater elements around the Northland Development as opportunities to meet the environmental education goals with signage and actively connecting people with nature.
25. Currently the plant set includes a draft plant schedule. More than half of the trees on the plant schedule are not native. A final plant schedule is required to review the plant selection for these spaces, however the selection of the plants should both align to the sustainability, community and wellness site design and ecological restoration goals of the Northland Guidelines by using native and drought tolerant plantings to reduce irrigation and save water.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this review for consideration by the Planning Board. We hope that you find these comments helpful in your evaluation of the site plan concept and the open space layout for this project. Please feel free to contact Jon Ford at [jford@horsleywitten.com](mailto:jford@horsleywitten.com) or 401-272-1717, or Janet Bernardo at [jbernardo@horsleywitten.com](mailto:jbernardo@horsleywitten.com) or 857-263-8193, with any questions.



Sincerely,

**Horsley Witten Group, Inc.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Ford', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jonathan Ford, P.E.  
Senior Project Manager – Community Design