



LOWER FALLS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION RIVERSIDE COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION TO THE ZONING AND PLANNING AND LAND USE COMMITTEES

JUNE 4, 2019

WHERE ARE LOWER FALLS AND AUBURNDALE?

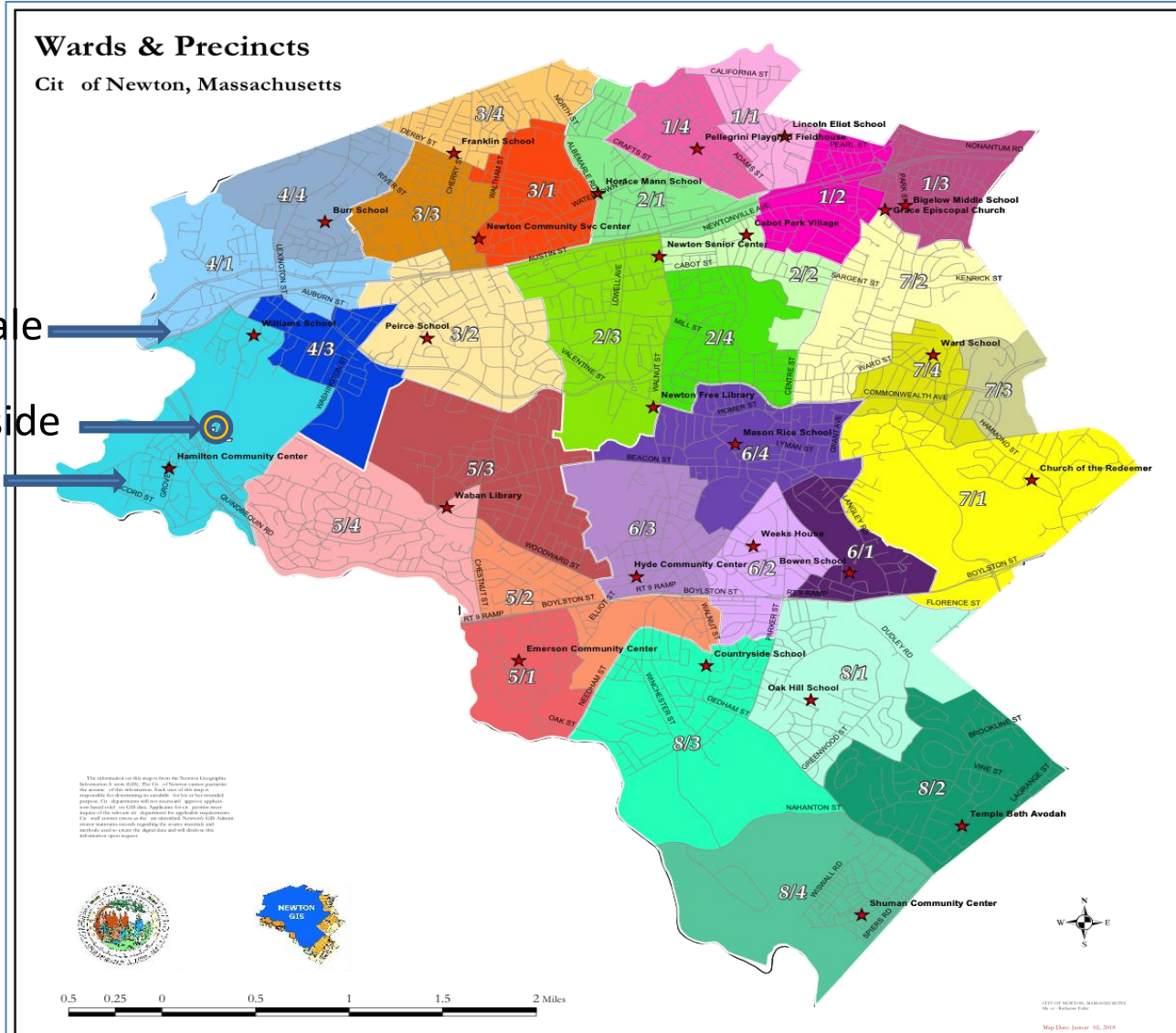
Wards & Precincts

Cit of Newton, Massachusetts

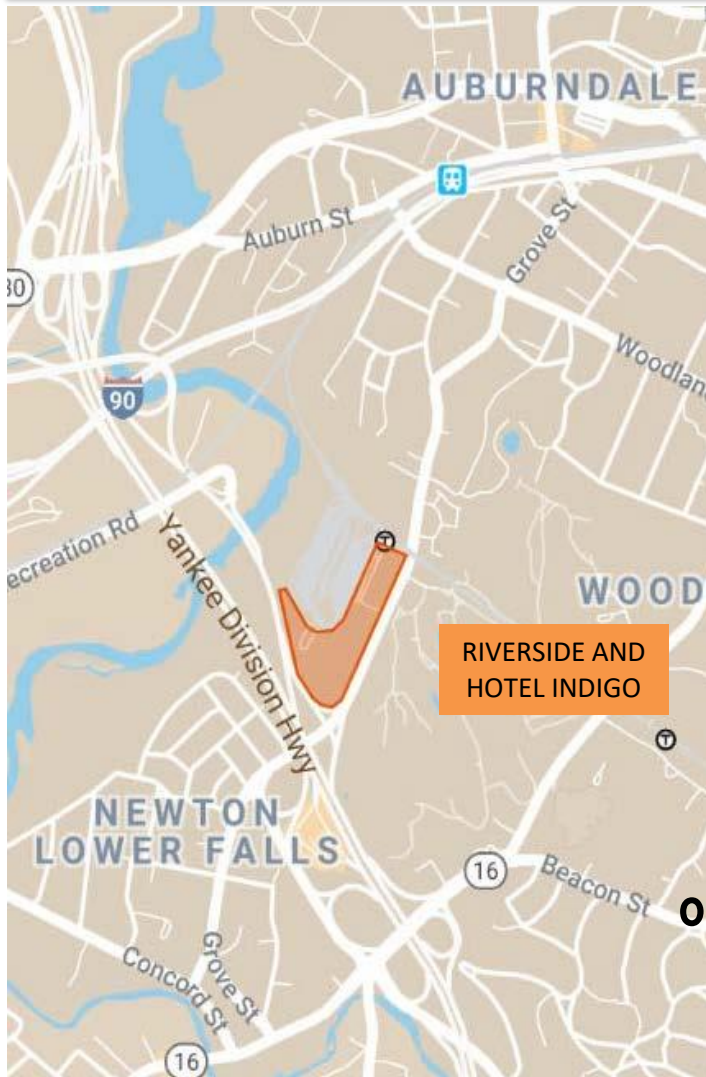
Auburndale

Riverside

Lower Falls



THE POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PARCEL



**Located between Lower Falls and Auburndale
on Grove Street: a narrow, designated scenic roadway**

NOT ISOLATED FROM LOWER FALLS RESIDENCES

400 ft. from Lower Falls houses

(less than the distance from the front
door of City Hall to the other side of
Walnut Street)

Abutting Condominiums at 416 Grove St.



NOT ISOLATED FROM AUBURNDALE RESIDENCES

**200 ft. from apartment
complex in Auburndale**

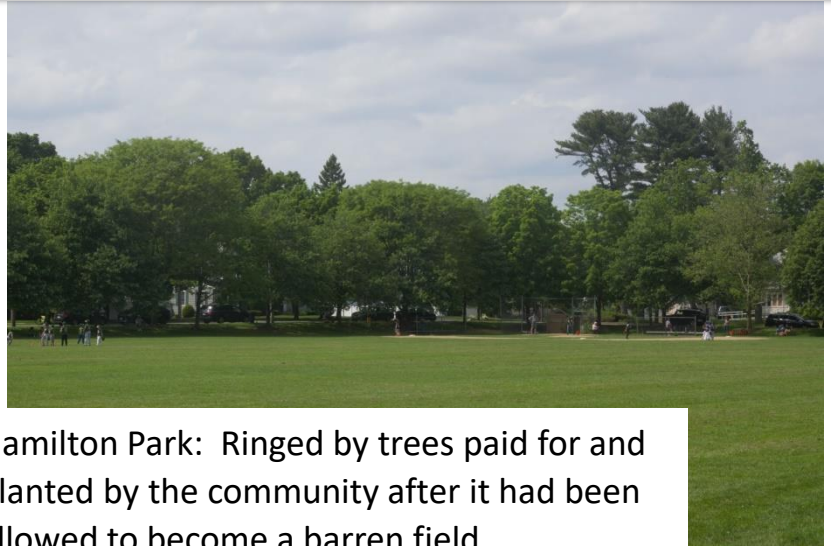
**Other Auburndale residences
a short distance away**



NEWTON LOWER FALLS



The playground: paid for and installed by Lower Falls residents twice in the last 20 years.



Hamilton Park: Ringed by trees paid for and planted by the community after it had been allowed to become a barren field.



One of many benches paid for with funds raised by the community because there were none in the Park.

Even the traffic islands have been landscaped by Lower Falls because they were neglected.





PROPOSED AMENDMENTS – PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES

- **Statement of intent aligned with the facts and the value we place on neighborhoods**
- **Creation of spaces that encourage community**
- **Size and scale that fit**
- **Studies and standards that protect new and existing neighborhoods**

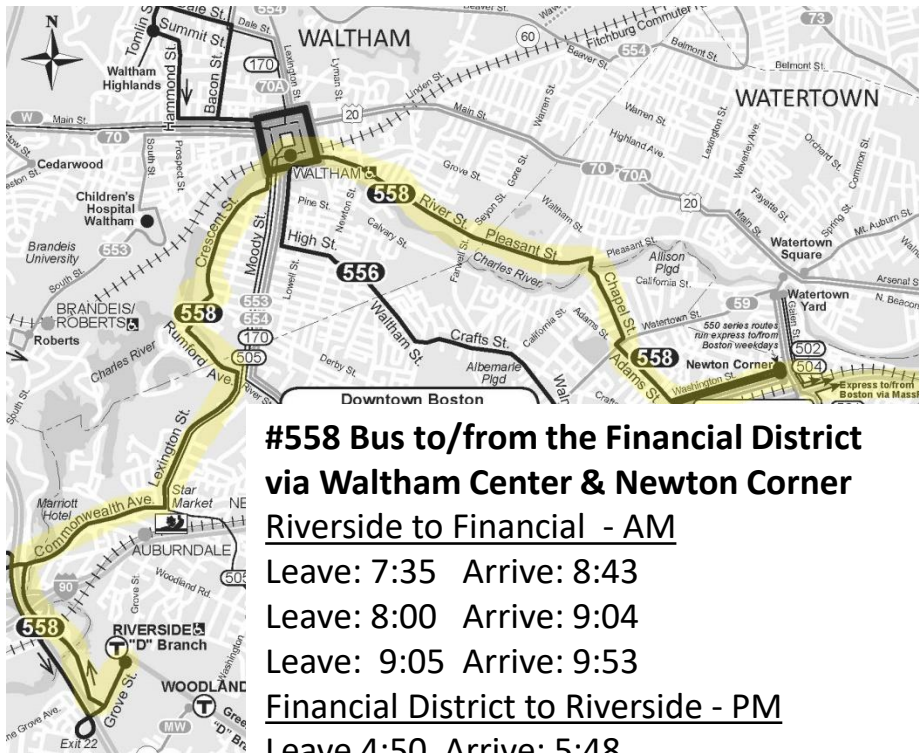


PRINCIPAL PROPOSED AMENDMENTS – OVERVIEW

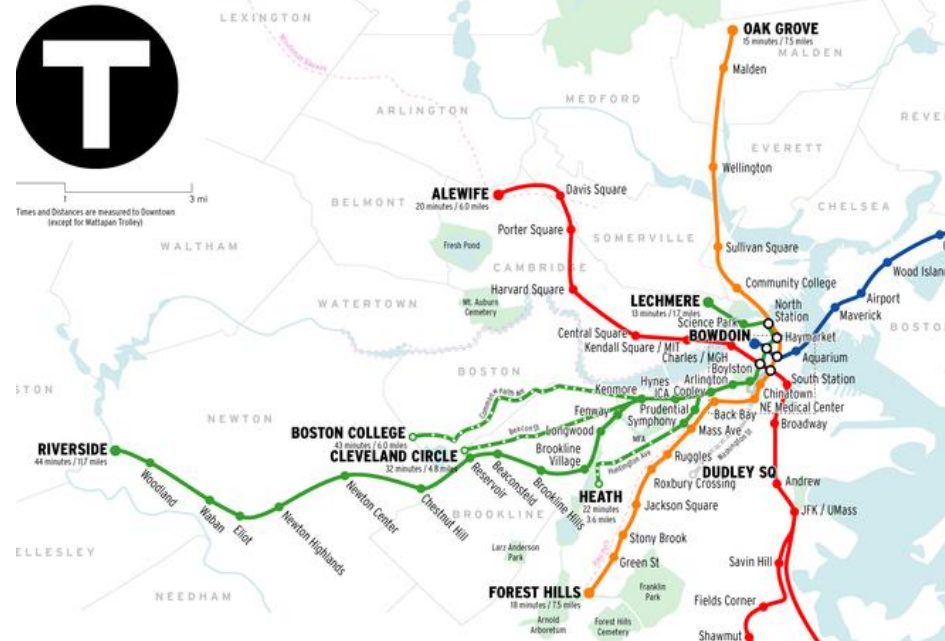
- **District Name and Purposes:**
 - Remove the TOD Label—it is misleading and not helpful
 - Expand on protection of the surrounding neighborhoods—the current language is insufficient
 - Add creation of a healthy, safe and comfortable community—an important purpose not now addressed
- **Civic Open Space and Community Center:** vital to create a community at Riverside
- **Dimensional Standards:** ensure a development that is appropriately sized to not overwhelm, overburden or be a misfit for the surrounding neighborhoods or Grove St.; emphasizing housing over office uses
- **New Special Permit Application Requirements and Criteria:**
 - Enhanced traffic submission and addition of missing criterion
 - Noise study and criteria
 - Pedestrian-level wind study and criteria
 - Visual impact study and criteria
 - Construction impact study and criteria

RELY ON FACTS NOT LABELS – REMOVE “TOD” LABEL (Section 4.2.1.B)

Two transit options:
Green Line and #558 Bus



Green Line: Long ride to Boston
and all major transit nodes; not
viable for commuting to many
major centers of employment





FOCUS ON NEIGHBORHOODS – BOTH OLD AND NEW (SEC. 4.2.1.B):

Protection of Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale should be clear.

The quality of our neighborhoods matter. The wrong development at Riverside can hurt our neighborhoods and they must be protected from:

- Too much traffic
- Too much noise
- Too much incompatibility with the existing neighborhood character

Riverside should be a great place for people to live.

It should be clearly acknowledged that Riverside must be a healthy, safe and comfortable place to live—designed to encourage community by the inclusion of high-quality, indoor and outdoor civic spaces.

New Categories of Uses Added:

- **Civic Open Space (Sections 4.2.3, 4.2.4.B)**
- **Community Center (Sections 4.2.4.F.1.d & 4.2.4.G.1)**

CIVIC OPEN SPACE

Civic spaces such as plazas, community gardens, parks and playgrounds are vital to make a real community at Riverside and to create a feeling of openness.

- “Beneficial open space” requirement is inadequate: can be met by narrow strips of grass, glorified traffic islands, space next to highway ramps and other spaces that are not beneficial community spaces. (See, as example, Mark Development’s beneficial open space plan (special permit filing, civil plan sheet C-4.0)).
- Access to the Charles River (a carrot one can expect from any developer) is not an adequate substitute:
 - at least a quarter mile from center of “town”;
 - separated from the site by the MBTA facilities;
 - does not build community
 - does not protect against a congested development.



COMMUNITY CENTER

- **A key component of the 2013 approved plan that is referenced in the current MU3 requirements, but not adequately defined.**
- **Its size is calculated as a percentage (1.5%) of the development.**
- **The previous community center was 11,000 sq. ft. Under the proposed amendments, it would be 9,600 sq. ft.**



RIVERSIDE SHOULD COMPLEMENT THE SURROUNDING AREA

Development at Riverside should be appropriately sized to fit in with the surrounding neighborhoods and Grove St. It should not overwhelm or overburden them.

- Establish appropriate building height and setback on Grove Street and rest of site
- Establish appropriate upper story setbacks for tall buildings to protect light, air and sky views within the development
- Establish appropriate overall size limitation
- Prioritize housing at the site

Necessary to comport with the Comprehensive Plan directive:

“Development is to be guided to reflect the character held or sought by existing residential neighborhoods, protecting the qualities of that which exists.”



KEEP GROVE STREET SCENIC

On Grove Street (Sections 4.2.3 & 4.2.4.A):

- 4 stories with 30 ft. setback
- Additional 15 ft. setback for portions of buildings over 100 feet long on Grove Street
- Avoid overwhelming Grove Street (less than 30 ft. wide)
- Avoid a wall-of-buildings streetscape
- Allow for landscaping and mature tree replacement on this designated scenic roadway
- Allow for separate bike/scooter path and pedestrian sidewalk – for basic safety.
- Comparison to Riverside Center (next door): 4 stories; varied setback of up to 90 feet from the curb

RIVERSIDE CENTER AS A MODEL



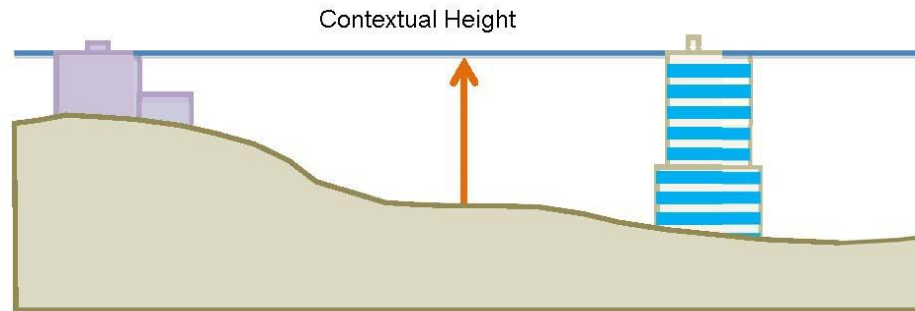
- 4 stories
- Up to 90 ft. setback from curb allows for landscaping, a positive pedestrian experience
- Respectful of the character of Grove Street

CONCENTRATE HEIGHT AT BACK OF SITE WHILE RESPECTING VIEW FROM LOWER FALLS

Buildings Not on Grove Street (Sections 4.2.3 & 4.2.4.A)

Maintain existing height limit: 135' by special permit (potentially 13 stories) and no ground-floor setback.

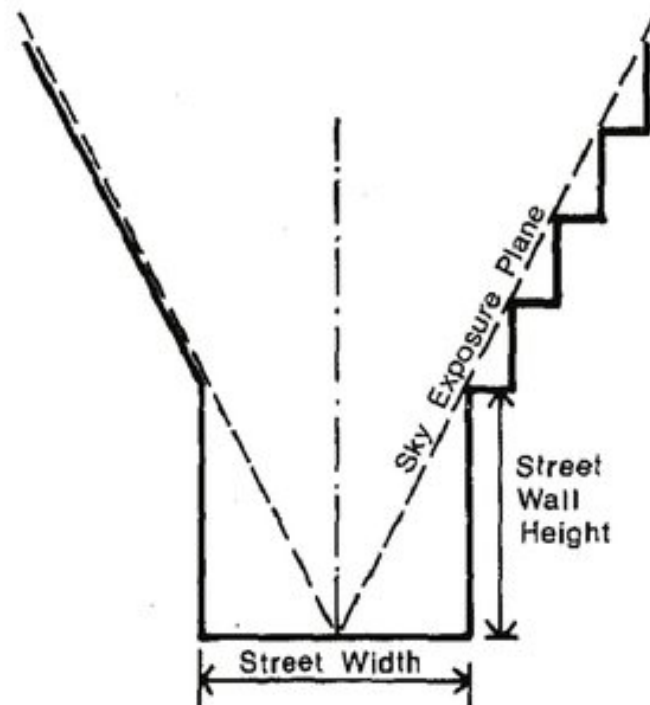
- Tallest building approved in 2013 was 120' high and 10 stories: somewhat above contextual height of Hotel Indigo.



- Planning Dept. Memo 2/3/12: “During the last working session, the Committee was open to the possibility of a ten-story office tower which could reasonably have a contextual height of approximately 203 feet above Newton Base Elevation. The Hotel Indigo has contextual height of 173 feet above Newton Base Elevation and is the highest structure within 1,200 feet.”

ALLOW LIGHT INTO THE DEVELOPMENT

- Add additional setbacks for stories above 50 ft.
- Necessary for adequate light and sky exposure — consider adopting a sky exposure plane





PROJECT SIZE: START WITH 2013 (Section 4.2.4.G)

Increase from 580,000 sq. ft. to 650,000 sq. ft. (not including parking, but including a community center) without the Hotel Indigo lot and 825,000 sq. ft. with the Hotel Indigo lot.

Plus a “bonus” of 100,000 sq. ft. if there is direct access to and from Rt.128/95 both northbound and southbound.

Based on:

- Years of discussions plus public hearings about what was appropriate for the site, leading to the exiting MU3 and the 2013 special permit with a limit of 580,000 square foot limit (not including the 11,000 square foot community center), with the condition imposed in the special permit of a direct exit from the site to Rt. 128/95 northbound.
- The Planning and Development Dept. assessment in 2012 that the provision of direct northbound ***and southbound*** highway access might alleviate enough traffic on Grove Street to permit an additional 100,000-125,000 sq. ft. of development over the 580,000 ultimately approved. (See Planning and Development Dept. Memo, attached to the Riverside Committee Memo as Ex. C, at pp. 5-6.)



OPTIMIZE USES FOR THE SITE

(Section 4.2.4.G.1)

- **Favor housing over office: increasing the existing residential maximum from 335,000 SF/290 units to 480,000 SF/415 units**
 - Help to address need for housing, including affordable housing
 - Reduce traffic impact (because office generates more traffic than housing)
 - Reduce traffic and parking conflicts between MBTA commuters and office workers, who would come and go at the same time (versus residents who would be leaving when commuters arrive)
- **Sufficient office (120,000 sq. ft.) to help offset the costs to the City**
- **Sufficient retail (40,000 sq. ft.) to provide convenience shopping for the residents**

1.5 MILLION SQ. FT. AND 230 FT. TOWERS ARE INAPPROPRIATE AT RIVERSIDE

Boston Landing in Brighton: A close comparison.

Mark Development Proposed Zoning	Boston Landing
1.5 Million Sq. Ft. on 14.4 Acres	1.7 Million Sq. Ft. on between 14-15 Acres
230 ft. high buildings – up to 20 stories or more	Tallest building – 17 stories





PROTECT NEIGHBORHOODS - BOTH NEW AND EXISTING

New Special Permit Application Requirements (Sec. 7.3.5.A) and Special Permit Criteria (Sec. 7.3.5.B)

- **New Special Permit Application Requirements and Special Permit Criteria:**
 - **Enhanced traffic submission and addition of missing special permit criterion**
 - **Visual impact study and criteria**
 - **Noise study and criteria**
 - **Pedestrian-level wind study and criteria**
 - **Construction impact study and criteria**



FULLY UNDERSTAND TRAFFIC IMPACTS

(Sections 7.3.5.A.6, 7 & 8)

PRINCIPAL NEW TRAFFIC REPORT REQUIREMENTS (SECTIONS 7.3.5.A.6, 7 & 8):

- **Analysis of the impacts of ride-hailing services (e.g., Uber and Lyft):**
Use of ride-hailing services doubles the number of vehicle trips versus use of a private vehicle. Particularly if car ownership is reduced, use of ride-hailing services may have a significant traffic impact that should be understood.
- **Analysis of the impacts of delivery vehicles (resulting from online shopping):**
The use of online shopping has and will continue to expand dramatically. The traffic impact of residential use of the site generating many delivery vehicle trips should be examined and understood.
- **Analysis of internal site traffic flow and functioning:**
With the potential for large numbers of park & ride commuters and office workers arriving and leaving the site at the same time of day via what will likely be one narrow roadway and utilizing one or two garages, the internal site traffic flow and potential for backs up that may create safety hazards or impact other roadways should be fully assessed.



MAKE SURE POST-CONSTRUCTION TRAFFIC MITIGATION PLAN WORKS BEFORE PERMIT IS GRANTED (Section 7.3.5.B.3)

- **The Current Ordinance:**
 - Special permit applicant must identify “[t]he means of making mitigations if it is found pursuant to [post-construction traffic monitoring] that the trips counted exceed the projected adjusted volume by 10 percent or more.” (Section 7.3.5.A.6.c.iii.)
 - If the specified traffic volume is exceeded, mitigation measures must be implemented “to reduce the trip generation to 110 percent of the [projected]adjusted volume.” (Section 7.3.5.E.1.c.)
- **What’s Missing:** Any provision requiring the City Council to assess the adequacy or anticipated efficacy of those post-construction mitigation measures, before granting a special permit.

The important obligation to undertake post-construction traffic mitigation if it turns out that the traffic projections were wrong is entirely hollow if there is no determination, *in advance*, that the mitigation will work.

- **Proposal:** Add a requirement that the City Council determine that post-construction traffic mitigation will be effective.



KEEP NOISE AT SAFE & COMFORTABLE LEVELS: Study (Section 7.3.5.A.13) and Special Permit Criteria (Section 7.3.5.B)

- The current ordinance does not address noise, known to be not just annoying but also a health risk.
- **Proposed amendments:**
 - **Require submission of a noise study** looking at:
 - all potential noise impacts of a proposed development on the surrounding neighborhoods (including noise from increased traffic and reflected highway noise)
 - noise levels within the proposed development that may have a negative effect on residential and open space uses
 - **Add a special permit criteria** that noise levels:
 - not increase in Auburndale and Lower Falls (where noise from Rt. 128/95 is already above acceptable levels)
 - be within established acceptable levels in residential and open space areas



AVOID WIND TUNNELS: Required Study (Section 7.3.5.A.14) and Special Permit Criteria (Section 7.3.5.B.7)

- Pedestrian-level winds generated by tall buildings can be uncomfortable and even dangerous
- The current ordinance does not address the potential wind effects of tall buildings, such as those permitted by special permit in the MU3 District

Proposed Amendments:

- **Require submission of a wind study for all buildings over 100 ft.** (Based on the Boston zoning code.)
- **Add a special permit criteria that pedestrian-level winds must be below certain thresholds** (based on Boston's development review guidelines)



UNDERSTAND HOW THE DEVELOPMENT WOULD LOOK:

Required Studies (Section 7.3.5.A.12) and Special Permit Criteria (Section 7.3.5.B.4)

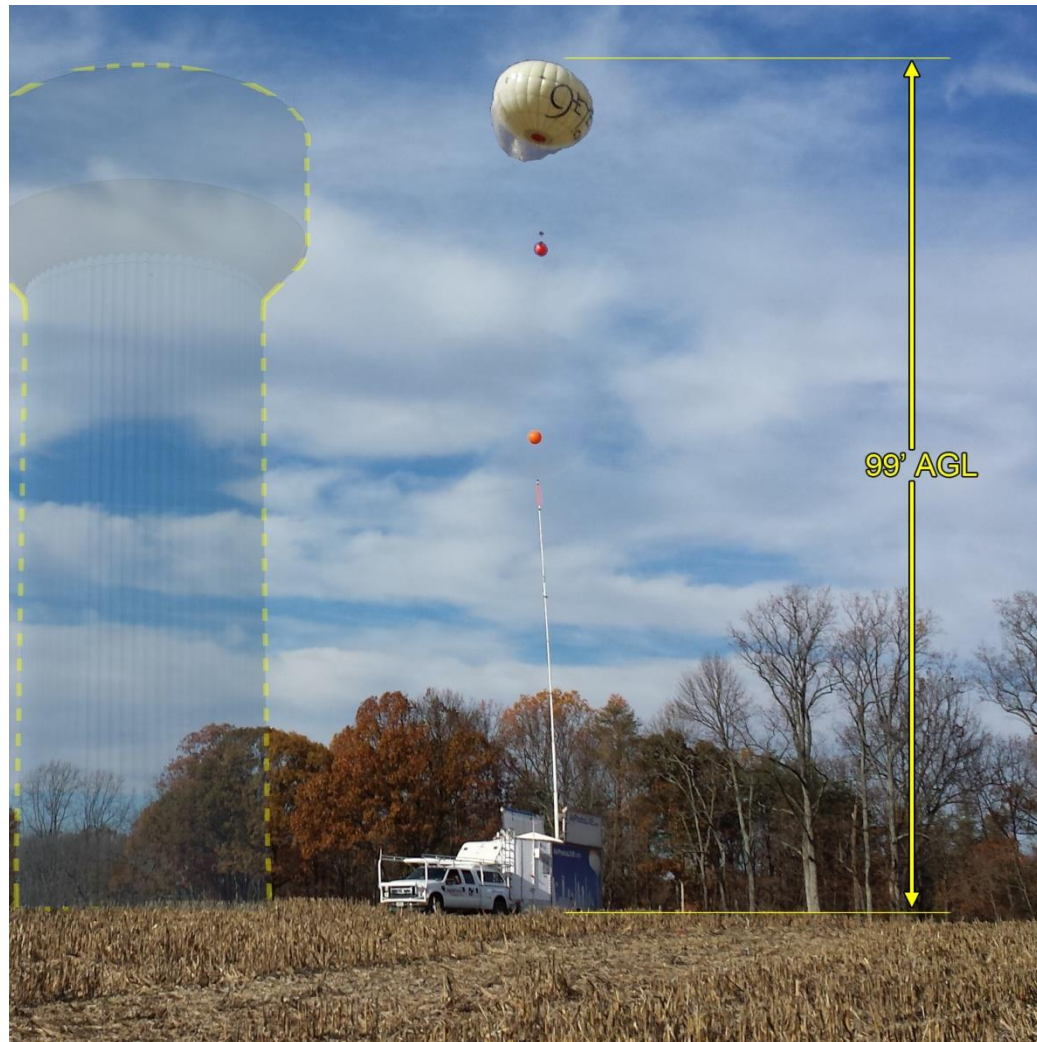
- Comprehensive Plan: In growing the City and increasing density, care must be taken to protect the character of existing residential neighborhoods.
- The existing ordinance provides no tools or requirement to assess visual impacts of a proposed development that may significantly alter neighborhood character and the scenic qualities of the Charles River and Riverside Park.

Proposed Amendments:

- Add requirements to
 - provide imagery accurately depicting visual impact of the proposed project, both during the day and at night, from locations in the surrounding neighborhoods where it will be most visible.
 - provide imagery accurately depicting the visual impact of the proposed project from the Charles River and Riverside Park.
 - conduct balloon tests to demonstrate building heights and impact
- Add special permit criteria protecting against adverse visual impact, lighting impacts on the surrounding residential neighborhoods, and potential solar glare on Rt. 128/95 and the surrounding neighborhoods.

BALLOON TEST

Example of Balloon Test



Courtesy of Digital Design and Imaging Service Inc.



ASSESS CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS BEFORE GRANTING THE PERMIT: Required Plan and Impact Analysis (Section 7.3.5.A.10) and Special Permit Criteria (Section 7.3.5.B.19)

- Construction could take many years. The surrounding neighborhoods should not be subjected to more than minimal noise, traffic, dust and other potential adverse effects for such a prolonged period.
- It must be determined before a special permit is granted what impacts construction will have and how they will be managed.

Proposed Amendments:

- Add requirement to submit construction management plan and assessment of impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Add special permit criteria protecting Auburndale and Newton Lower Falls from any significant adverse construction impacts.



ADOPT NECESSARY STANDARDS

We are not opposed to sensible development at Riverside.

But development-at-all-costs mentality mortgages our future -- Newton must draw a line so that what we value about all neighborhoods is preserved.

We must have zoning standards for Riverside that:

- **Protect the surrounding neighborhoods**
- **Ensure development of a high-quality, safe & healthy new community**

There is no “do-over.” Riverside must be done right.