

## RIVERSIDE STATION

### The Site

The Riverside station site presents an opportunity for transit-oriented development in Newton. It encompasses 981,243 sq. ft. at 327 Grove St., Newton Lower Falls abutting the northbound exit ramp from Route 128 (I-95) to the Mass Pike (I-95), Route 30 and the Charles River, and about ½ mile from the Mass. Pike (I-90) and Rt. 30 in Auburndale. It is the final stop on the Mass. Bay Transportation Authority's Green D Line going to downtown Boston and to East Cambridge. It contains the only maintenance facility on the Green Line and some outbuildings and a bus terminal, used by Peter Pan, Greyhound, World Wide and charter buses, as well as MBTA Express buses. There is a large parking lot moderately used by commuters and heavily used by Red Sox fans during home games at Fenway Park. It is presently assessed at \$11,948,200. Its current zoning is "Public Use." It can be viewed on the city website via: [www.newtonma.gov/Planning/Riverside](http://www.newtonma.gov/Planning/Riverside). The site is owned by the MBTA, which has leased parts of it to BH Normandy for the next 87 years, with stipulation that MBTA's maintenance facilities and tracks will remain and that 960 commuter parking spaces will be provided to replace the current 960. BH Normandy also has control of the Hotel Indigo site nearby.

### Proposed Development

BH Normandy has submitted at least 3 different plans for the site and discussed them at public meetings held in Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale over the past 3 years, but no project has yet been filed with the City of Newton. A Draft Environmental Impact Report was submitted to and comments received back from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs in June, 2010. Those include requirements of MEPA (Mass. Environmental Policy Act). Included in the Draft EIR are comments from various state agencies, city officials, neighbors and non-profit planning and environmental groups. These are all available through the City's Planning Department web page at [www.newtonma.gov/Planning/Riverside](http://www.newtonma.gov/Planning/Riverside).

### Proposed Re-zoning

Submitted in late November, 2011:

"#400-11. Ald. Gentile, Harney, Sangiolo requesting establishment of a Business 5/Riverside Zone: a mixed-use transit-oriented district at the site of the current Riverside MBTA rail station. The proposed new zone shall allow by special permit a single commercial office building not to exceed 225,000 square feet with a maximum height of 9 stories, two residential buildings not to exceed 290 housing units in total, retail space not to exceed 20,000 square feet, along with a multi-use community center."

The proposed language differs from previous plans submitted by the developer in that it allows slightly more housing but only one, rather than two office buildings.

### Process

The item above was taken up by the Aldermanic Zoning & Planning Committee on January 9 for discussion. Future meetings include a community meeting, a public hearing, debate and recommendations. It could take at least 3 months of work. Each meeting on the item is open to the public and comments via email or letter are a viable way of making citizen voices heard. It will then move to the 24-member Board of Aldermen for a vote. It needs a minimum of 16 out of 24 votes to pass.

After zoning for the site is changed, the developer must then submit a specific project proposal to the City and request a "Special Permit" to proceed.

Once a "Special Permit" application arrives, the City will start several simultaneous reviews of the project proposed in the application. Impact studies of traffic, city finances and school enrollment will either be outsourced to independent, professional firms hired by the City but paid for by the developer, or done by City staff. Internally, nearly every City department will review the proposal: Planning, Fire, Public Works, Engineering and more. It will also be reviewed by several City commissions, including Conservation.

When these reviews are complete, the permit proceeds to the Aldermanic Land Use Committee for a public hearing, debate and recommendations, the Planning and Development Board, and then to the Board of Aldermen. Again, the public is welcome to all of these meetings, and can comment by email or letter once the meetings are closed to public comment.

In addition, state and federal agencies must issue permits for several parts of the project (e.g. Federal Highway, EPA, Mass. Department of Environmental Protection, MWRA and more).

## State laws affecting this development

Developing this site requires several state permits, since it involves the use of state land. A final Environmental Impact Report will be necessary about the same time as the special permit filing. The developer may also need state legislative approval to move an MWRA water pipe.

Chapter 40B, a state law, allows a developer to bypass local zoning for projects which supply a minimum amount (25%) of affordable housing. If Normandy cannot reach agreement with Newton on a mixed-use development plan, it could go ahead with a housing project completely independent of the city's development interests, although it will have to comply with state and local laws. These laws include a provision that prohibits a 40B development from worsening city infrastructure (sewers, stormwater run off, parks, playgrounds, roads). Schools are not allowed to be considered.

B.H. Normandy has already filed for 40B relief, but it can do so while also pursuing a mixed-use proposal.

## Traffic & Parking

Outside of the MBTA requirements, the City can negotiate the minimum (or maximum) parking requirements for the development. It can also regulate traffic as part of “impact zoning.” Less parking can mean less traffic – the developer can also choose lower-traffic uses for its buildings. Traffic can only be reviewed when a proposal is submitted – as part of the application for a Special Permit, as noted above. The City can require enhanced bike and pedestrian access (and bike cages or racks) to mitigate traffic, and can also require the developer to insist on traffic demand management from its lessees (car pooling, reduced prices for car pooled cars, shuttles, etc.) The site abuts the Charles River Parks and its many foot paths – including bridges, and with the right connections could be accessed by foot or bicycle from Weston and Wellesley.

## Impact on Sewers/Stormwater

Regardless of what is built at Riverside, the City will require that the developer mitigate the effect of increased sewage from this site by a program to remove infiltration—clean storm water that is leaking in to the sewer system. The state requirement is that the developer reduce infiltration into the sewers by an amount four times the sewer flow anticipated from the development. The City intends to increase this to eight times, and to require infiltration reductions (which therefore increase the pipes' capacity) in the sewers directly affected by the development. Such mitigation projects will be done offsite, both upstream and downstream of Riverside, in order to increase the capacity of that system.

Such repairs are greatly needed in Newton. Currently, Newton sends stormwater to Deer Island at a rate that exceeds all other MWRA communities—60-64% of what we send is not sewage, but clean water that could recharge our underground aquifer. The leaks in sewer pipes that allow that amount of water in also mean that when we have a major rain storm, sewage can back up (into basements) unless allowed to overflow at designated outflows. Riverside connects to MWRA through the sewers that flow under Lyons Field in Auburndale, which is used to relieve excess sewerage after major storms

There is currently no stormwater management system at Riverside, which is primarily impervious (asphalt) cover. A new development must meet City requirements, subject to rigorous review and oversight, to install a system to capture and contain water generated in a “100-year” storm (6” in 24 hours), for slow absorption in the groundwater system. Riverside is downstream of Quinobequin in the Charles River watershed, and does not affect flooding there.

## Community Space

In an earlier “visioning” session, some community members cited the need for more meeting spaces in and around Auburndale/Lower Falls. It is not clear what or how big such space would be yet, nor how it would be managed, or whether it would be offered to the community for free.