

NEWTON RIVERSIDE VISIONING PROCESS

Key Takeaways from the February 10, 2019 Open House Stations

The following pages detail Key Takeaways from information gathered at the stations from the February 10, 2019 Open House at Williams Elementary School. The first two stations served to orient attendees to the meeting format and history of the Riverside site.

The remaining stations were organized into relevant topics:



On the following pages, sample quotes were taken directly from written comments received from these stations, as well as those recorded in the Public Feedback Form filled out by meeting attendees collected at the close of the meeting. For each station, Key Takeaways were determined based on this feedback received from the public.

Quotes were selected to show a range of comments that we received.

3 THIS VISIONING PROCESS

The following are relevant questions recorded from the third station, which detailed the timeline and extent of the Visioning Process for the Riverside Site. Though this station was not originally intended for feedback, we have attempted to address some overarching questions about This Visioning Process below:

Key Questions from the Community:

“How can we ensure that the results of this visioning will be heard and acted upon by the mayor and council?”

Relevant answers from the project website's FAQ page:

How will comments be collected, synthesized, and used?

The Riverside Vision Planning Team will be reviewing every comment that is submitted on this website as well as those provided during the public events and through email to riverside@newtonma.gov. Public comment is one of the various inputs used in the development of the vision plan.

How will the Vision Plan be used?

The Planning Department will present the plan to the Land Use Committee of City Council at the culmination of the planning process, which is anticipated to wrap up in May 2019. The goal is for the vision plan to be used as reference to guide decision-making for the Riverside site.

***“Washington Street Visioning is 13 months.
Why is Riverside visioning only 10 weeks?”***

The timeframe of this project was set so that the Vision Plan produced can be used by the City Council to inform their review process for the proposed development in a timely manner.

What was said?

"Access to the Charles River. Pedestrian, bike, boater with secure bike parking."

"Expand and enhance public spaces."

"Bike paths and green space along the river."

"Need to preserve the Charles River Watershed and nature trails and the river."

"Community Center with indoor and outdoor space to accommodate community meetings and events, and community education and classes."

"Consider creating a variety of spaces and activities that are available year-round and accessible to all community members and a site that is easily reachable by a host of transportation options."

Quotes were selected to show a range of comments that we received.

Key Takeaways:

A desire to see a mixture of active and passive recreational opportunities on site.

A strong interest in improved access to the Charles River with additional programming and conservation was evident.

An ambition to see a dedicated space for community activities included in the overall program of the site, taking the form of a community center, dedicated recreational space, or educational facility.

What was said?

"Minimize traffic: Grove Street is already too busy."

"Better bike trails - recreation and commuter."

"Direct site access to nearby highways."

"Very careful traffic/transportation planning. A traffic glut will kill surrounding neighborhood livability."

"Make accessible options possible to adjacent parks/trails."

"Entrances to Riverside are currently inadequate and increase backup of traffic on Grove St. Ways to handle traffic volume and speed of cars are needed to maintain neighborhood safety."

"Improve access to I-95."

Quotes were selected to show a range of comments that we received.

Key Takeaways:

Widespread concern about the impact of any development on traffic in adjacent neighborhoods, with the impact on Grove Street being of particular concern.

Questions and concerns about current MBTA service and potential future expansion to service and facilities.

A preference to see direct highway access (both on I-95 and 128N/S) to and from the site.

A desire to see the site serve as a true multimodal destination, with pedestrian and bike access integrated within existing and planning trails and pathways as well as transit (bus + rail).

Disagreements about the amount of parking that is necessary on-site; some expressed concern about special events capacity, while other pointed out current low usage rates on-site.

What was said?

"More housing, as much affordable housing as possible given financing constraints."

"Perfect site for dense housing development! A true TOD opportunity!"

"We need more housing stock especially affordable housing, to keep young professional and the elderly in Newton."

Quotes were selected to show a range of comments that we received.

"Attractive affordable housing [to create] options for seniors, millennials, and families."

"Building heights similar to those in adjacent buildings."

"Prioritize commercial development, as this is [a] rare opportunity to have additional commercial tax revenue. Only allow housing after enough commercial development has occurred to ensure revenues from taxes will exceed costs by a large factor."

Key Takeaways:

Concerns surrounding the impact of anticipated housing contributing to capacity issues within Newton's school system.

Differing opinions concerning the type, scale, and quantity of housing desired on-site.

Questions about what metrics will determine the balance between the scope of commercial and residential development on the Riverside site.

A desire for variety of housing types to address demand for housing that accommodates a range of populations and incomes.

What was said?

"Want a development that meshes with [surrounding] neighborhoods."

"Turn an eyesore of asphalt into a vibrant place - but one that fits within the scale of the neighborhood."

"If buildings are too large, they will isolate the abutting neighborhoods. Building size needs to reflect the community the buildings exist within, not the highway that bisects the community."

"Large scale please!"

"Smaller scale!"

"Riverside is currently ugly and depressed - make it a destination."

"A true village-scale; small buildings with 3-4 stories, parks, and open space with reduced density and impact on its surroundings."

"High towers with mixed income housing... Housing for millennials!"

Quotes were selected to show a range of comments that we received.

Key Takeaways:

Desire to see the development complement and integrate within the current context of adjacent neighborhoods.

Range of opinions about the scale and nature of any preferred development.

A desire for an aesthetically pleasing design that respects the character of Newton's villages.

General agreement on the need for a thoughtful approach and setback along Grove Street.

What was said?

"Primarily commercial - office and lab space. Overall project must be net revenue positive for the city."

"Ground floor retail including restaurants and community serving services."

"Are there ways to incentivize and subsidize small, locally-owned businesses, restaurants, shops, and coffee/bakery outlets?"

"Many small businesses."

"Perhaps professional office but not retail/shops."

"What kind of retail or office/lab space would serve Riverside and the abutting neighborhood best? Can we plan for commercial that reduces traffic by car?"

"No need for retail (coffee shop is good) or office space. Low income housing - 100%"

Quotes were selected to show a range of comments that we received.

Key Takeaways:

Differing perspectives about the scale of commercial development that would be beneficial at the Riverside site.

A strong desire to see local, small businesses represented in the commercial development on the Riverside site.

A desire to see a mix of uses that serve the surrounding communities without negatively affecting existing village centers.

Interest in generating tax revenue through commercial development.