



ENGINEERING SUCCESS TOGETHER

## MEMORANDUM

Date: January 2, 2013

To: University Station Development Team

From: Don Leighton Project #: 4410

Subject: University Station Review of Planting  
and Pedestrian Walkability

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide review comments for the Preliminary Landscape Plans, dated 11/30/12, for the University Station-University Avenue Redevelopment in Westwood,. As the design is further developed, it is recommended that the following areas continue to receive attention.

### Pedestrian Walkability

#### General:

1. **Seating Areas:** Evaluate adding more seating areas at major pedestrian circulation routes and community spaces.
2. **Orientation Elements:** As the plans develop, consider incorporating design elements into both the landscape and architecture that will provide pedestrians and motorists a visual orientation to major walkways, gateways, and primary door entrances. Compliment these elements with a wayfinding signage system that reflects character of the Town of Westwood.
3. **Gateways:** The current use of gateways is very significant in the development's wayfinding. Continue to develop the hierarchy of gateways from both north and south with the landscape walls and other features and consider adding markers to signify smaller entrance and routes. In particular no gateway features for the southerly entrance along University Avenue have been provided.
4. **Landscape Nodes, Overlooks, and Plazas:** The nodes, overlooks and plazas are well developed at this time. Continue to develop the pedestrian spaces currently designed and look for more opportunities in smaller areas along the two entrance/exit roads connecting University Avenue to the large storefronts.
5. **Project Phasing:** Noting that phased development is possible, the proponent should clarify how portions of the site not developed during the first phase will be treated.
6. **Plan Development:** It is anticipated that plan development for the Core Development Area will need to consider the following detailed information as plans are advance:
  - General dimensioned layout and details of sidewalk materials, feature strips, plantings, light poles, planters, bollards, trash containers, signal equipment, fencing, furniture, bike racks,

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walls and other urban design elements within public and private roadways. Summarize proposed planting by a table proposed on each sheet including botanical and common name, height and size at planting, height and size at maturity, quantity to be planted, typical spacing, and symbol used to represent the planting on the plan.

- Grading plans as appropriate to detail specific landscape features.
  - Show location, type sizing and screening of any solid waste disposal facilities.
  - Details as required to show construction of streetscape design elements.
7. **Misc Other:** Label internal streets and public spaces with so that they can be easily referenced in the future correspondence. Placeholder nomenclature may be most appropriate at this stage ie. Site Drive A etc.

### **Area Specific Comments**

1. **Office Building A, B & C Connections:** The Public Plaza/ Wegman’s outdoor eating area between the retail anchors is an important civic space. We recommend evaluating the feasibility of a stair/ramp access point along the blast ledge to encourage pedestrian use of the retail. The natural benching of ledge may assist with this.
2. **Existing Pump House Connections:** Pump house access point has been omitted from pedestrian circulation along University Ave.
3. **Building “S”-Assisted Living:** As the path layout is developed, consider a direct connection from the front drop off to the porous paths. Assess if park circulation and lighting is in accordance with outdoor spaces needs for residents in assisted living facilities. Assess adjacent bench locations near assisted living building; consider spacing benches out as limited mobility resting areas.
4. **Hotel / Mixed Use Formal Lawn:** The formal lawn/plaza within the mixed-use is a great civic space. As the concept is refined consider adjusting planting between the two end plazas to allow for pedestrian access to the lawn. Also consider tabling intersections/raising roadway to be flush with the sidewalk in order to facilitate crossing at intersections or otherwise creating a ‘flex space’ that can be cordoned off for special events.
5. **University Ave at Building “S” Restaurant:** Evaluate the feasibility of connecting the park open space pedestrian walks behind DWWD to the pedestrian crossing at the intersection. This could increase the expansiveness of the green space and provide a more direct connection to the southerly core development driveway.
6. **University Avenue:**
  - Evaluate adjustment of Sidewalk width and available landscape area along the west side of University Ave. to create a multi-use path and linear park connecting the ‘Entry Park’ to Canton Street.

- Reduce slope between sidewalk (or multi-use path) and curb. Landscape area at back of sidewalk can be steeper so that sidewalk elevation stays closer to curb height especially if sidewalk becomes a multi-use path.
- Sidewalk is not shown and should be provided on west side of University Avenue south of Harvard Street.
- Sections A and B (L-300) indicate buffering between the back of walk and building face however plans do not. Plans should be adjusted to indicate buffering.
- On plan sheet L-105 – between Restaurant B and C – evaluate feasibility of buffering sidewalk to position sidewalk off the road or alternatively make sidewalk wider.

**7. Misc Sidewalks:** Many of the sidewalk widths are not identified on the plan and should be clarified. In general we would anticipate minimum sidewalk widths of 6 feet at minimal use locations. Wider sidewalks are appropriate in many instances. In particular we note the following:

- Along the northerly Driveway to Core Development, sidewalks look narrow as you advance into the development. Clarify dimension. Consistent with the idea of emphasizing primary pedestrian routes into the site, it may be appropriate to make the walk on one side wider than the walk on the other.
- Clarify how sidewalk connections along the northerly driveway are made to Residential Building A2. We recommend preparation of a rendering along the southerly side of A2 be developed to shown the nature of the building architecture along this face and how it relates to the core retail facades and pedestrian scale elements.
- Along the southerly driveway to Core Development, sidewalks look very narrow as you advance into the development. Clarify dimensions. Consistent with the idea of emphasizing primary pedestrian routes into the site, it may be appropriate to make the walk on one side wider than the walk on the other.
- Sidewalk looks very narrow at Building I/H and A/B facia and wider walks should be considered. Clarify Dimensions.
- In the vicinity of the proposed building “S” Assisted Living, evaluate extension of the pedestrian walk to/from the MBTA along the easterly edge of the parking lot to connect with open space paths.
- Sidewalk should be considered on both sides of N Star way to intersection with Marymount Street.

## **Planting**

### **General Considerations**

1. **Density:** As the planting plans develop, continue to refine the density and quantity of plants. The current depiction on the plans shows very dense planting, although it is acknowledged that the sizes shown in plan are mature sizes. The designer might consider using fewer trees and shrubs but increasing nursery size. In park and open areas, fewer, anchoring, single very large specimens might be included. Allee spacing can be further apart and screening placement can be in ribbons, drifts and clusters with groundcover space in between.

It is acknowledged that there are many good reasons to include a high percentage of green space in such a development, including supporting sustainability, biodiversity, habitat, air cooling, and carbon sequestration. Within these green spaces, however, maintenance, safety, and viewsheds can be adversely affected by the density of planting.

2. **Variety:** Continue to place an emphasis on increasing variety of plant types and planting styles to highlight the uniqueness of each place in the development. Suggested plants to consider including, in appropriate areas (in no special order): Red maple varieties with a more spreading habit; pinus strobus; pinus rigida; thuja plicata; cornus florida; acer saccharum; betula populifolia/papyrifera/lenta; picea glauca; abies concolor; halesia spp; sassafras; cercis Canadensis; magnolias; cladristis kentuckea; cotinus obovatus; vaccinium corymbosum; comptonia peregrina; rhododendron maximum; chamaecyparis thyoides and nootkatensis; nyssa sylvatica; hamamelis; cornus ammomum; cephalanthus; lobelia cardinalis; carex spp; rosa spp; other rhus spp; hydrangea quercifolia; leucothoe; buxus, prunus laurocerasus; more varieties of native grasses and junipers; more ferns; rudbeckia laciniata; more colors of daylilies.
3. **Safety:** As the planting plans develop take into consideration how plant density and groupings will affect safety of pedestrians/joggers at night and in outlying areas. Also consider how these factors affect road, sign, and pedestrian/biker visibility for motorists, especially in medians.
4. **Viewsheds:** As the plans develop, take into consideration how plant density and groupings will affect desirable viewsheds, the experience of travelling around the site, and areas to be screened. Provide additional sections indicating the relationship between building height, particularly at the office site and residential building 2A, in relation to abutters in the adjacent neighborhoods.
5. **Lighting:** As lighting plans develop, coordinate with tree placement along roadways, and with safety around planted areas.
6. **Retaining Walls:** Proposed landscaping should be shown with any proposed retaining walls so that root ball spacing and root growth impacts can be evaluated.
7. **Maintenance:** It is suggested, as the plant schedule is refined, attention be given to choosing varieties that easily maintain appropriate size and shape in accordance with their placement.

8. **Slope Planting:** In a few locations it is noted that street trees have been planted in markedly sloped areas next to roadways. Examine more closely to ensure storm water runoff/erosion around roots/mulch and trash runoff into street would not be a problem.
9. **Winter Considerations:** In planting design consider snow storage areas. Consider snow and ice removal chemicals, if any.
10. **Well Protection:** Well protection areas may call for particular attention in planting; check with town regulations. Consider if formal lawn is compatible if used within the well radius or if maintenance with reduced or no fertilizer, is needed.
11. **Irrigation:** There is no indication on the plans as to the extent and type of irrigation being considered. Irrigation strategies for the entire site should be clarified.
12. **Rosemount Road:** show all the civil/grading walls –planting may be impacted

**Preliminary Plant Schedule:**

1. **Native/Non-Invasive:** The plant schedule is notable for its emphasis on native plants. No plants on the Massachusetts Prohibited Plant List, and no invasive plants, were found on the schedule. As the list is developed it is recommended to continue this screening process. The designer might consider substituting the very few non-native plants on the list with natives, such as an appropriate variety of *juniperus virginiana* or *communis* for the Hetz juniper, or *ilex glabra* or a native mounding evergreen for the Helleri holly.
2. **Deer/other pests:** No plants currently affected in our region with widespread pest problems were found on the list. Continue to check to be sure no pest-susceptible plants find their way onto the list. Evaluate whether the inclusion of *taxus* is advisable, as it is highly favored by deer.
3. **Variety/Biodiversity:** As the plant schedule and planting layout is developed, it is recommended to emphasize planting for variety and biodiversity throughout the development. If local regulations permit, avoid mono-plantings of street trees. Especially mix varieties in the outlying open areas, park areas, and wetland areas of the development. Refer to P-8 in next section.
4. **Drought Tolerance:** Continue to use this characteristic in refining the list.
5. **Details:** The planting details are well developed at this time. The inclusion of planting details for swale, rain garden, and any riprap/erosion control areas could be considered.
6. **Seed Mixes:** It is recommended that environmentally appropriate seed mixes be included on the plant schedule for lawn, swale, park, and wetland areas. The mixes should be native, no-mow, drought-resistant, deep rooted, non-monoculture as much as possible.

**Opportunities for Planted Low Impact Development Techniques**

1. **Rain Gardens:** The plan offers many opportunities for rain gardens and bioswales. Especially at planted corners, parking area islands, and medians, the opportunity to include rain gardens should be considered.
2. **Green Roofs:** Opportunities to include green roofs for storm water management and educational purposes should be considered especially since the office development 'to the west' will view over the majority of the developments roofscapes.
3. **Green Walls:** Especially in commercial and park areas, the attractive qualities of green walls should be considered.