

**To:** Concord Zoning Board of Appeals  
**From:** Concord Transportation Advisory Committee  
**CC:** Concord Select Board  
**Date:** October 26, 2023

**Subject:** NOVO Riverside Commons Project - Transportation Advisory Committee Recommendations

The Transportation Advisory Committee for the Town of Concord appreciates this opportunity to submit comments concerning the NOVO Riverside Commons project. One of our primary goals is to provide recommendations that will help reduce motor vehicle dependence and thus traffic impacts by enhancing the viability of other, more sustainable modes of transportation at the proposed development.

Situated near the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, the West Concord MBTA station, and the pedestrian-friendly village center of West Concord, the project's planned location offers an ideal setting for transit-oriented development. The addition of new housing units in close proximity to these multimodal resources will enable many residents to make some portion of their daily trips without a personal vehicle, minimizing the impact new development will have on traffic congestion in and around Concord.

It is our perspective that certain adjustments to the planned development may significantly enhance the feasibility of walking, cycling, and using public transit as preferred modes of transportation for a greater percentage of trips. The recommendations below are intended to make the most of the transit-oriented, walkable, and cyclist-friendly location of this development in order to minimize its traffic and parking impacts.

### **PEDESTRIAN ACCESS**

We are encouraged to see that the project includes the construction of a 900-foot-long by 10-foot-wide public access trail, connecting both of the proposed apartment buildings to the proposed Assabet River Multi-Use Bridge and Trail. The construction of this bridge and trail has already been identified as a pressing need for the West Concord community, and the development of NOVO Riverside Commons will make completion of this project even more critical.

We strongly urge the developer to actively collaborate with the Town and the state to construct the Assabet River Multi-Use Bridge and Trail. Given the enormous benefits this link will provide to employees who currently work at the Baker Ave business park and future residents at NOVO Riverside Commons, we feel it is appropriate for the developer to build or contribute to the cost of constructing this critical transportation infrastructure.

We recommend that every effort be made to align the construction timeline of both projects so that new residents can establish sustainable transportation habits beginning on move-in day.

## **BICYCLE PARKING**

While we are encouraged to see the inclusion of secure bicycle parking areas within both garages, we believe that the current provisions are not adequate to support travel by bike as a viable mode of transportation for the proposed number of units.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail provides easy access to a number of destinations by bike, including schools, shopping, dining, employment, and recreational opportunities. Given the project's close proximity to this resource, we recommend expanding the size of the long-term bicycle parking areas in both garages.

**We recommend the developer provide a minimum of one covered and secure bicycle parking space for every 5 units of housing, plus additional outdoor spaces for short-term bike storage.**

We believe every effort should be made to ensure residents can enjoy the same, if not greater, convenience when accessing a bicycle as they do when accessing their car.

With that aim in mind, we recommend that the majority of bicycle parking be ground-mounted racks, eliminating the need for residents to lift their bicycles onto wall-mounted racks. Inverted U racks and post-and-ring racks are preferred over other styles for both long-term and short-term storage due to their versatility, ease of access, and compatibility with a wide range of bicycle designs.

Furthermore, we recommend that a minimum of 5% of bicycle parking spaces in all bike parking locations (no less than two) be designated as extra-wide to accommodate wider and longer bikes as well as trailers suitable for transporting children, individuals with disabilities, and groceries.

We are open to the use of two-tiered space-saving racks in long-term bicycle parking areas, provided they are equipped with a lift assist feature and do not exceed 50% of the total available spaces in any bicycle parking area. This will allow for efficient use of space without compromising accessibility and usability, especially for residents with mobility limitations.

We also strongly recommend that secure, indoor bicycle parking be provided at no cost to building residents in order to incentivize their use.

## **PUBLIC TRANSIT: Shelter**

The Transportation Advisory Committee also recommends the inclusion of a well-lit bus shelter or other sheltered seating area designed to provide residents with a comfortable outdoor location to wait for public transit, school buses, and rideshare services.

This would be a particularly important amenity for seniors and residents with disabilities who may use paratransit and senior transport services provided by The Ride and the Council on Aging.

### **PUBLIC TRANSIT: Service**

The Town of Concord is in the process of exploring options for expanding local public transit services through the ongoing Comprehensive Transportation and Mobility Study.

A public shuttle bus connecting the two village centers, West Concord and Concord Center, has already been identified by several stakeholders as a desirable transit route and would be an attractive amenity to residents of the proposed NOVO development and employees at the Baker Ave business park.

The Transportation Advisory Committee would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the developer to identify pathways for establishing public transit service that would serve the NOVO Riverside Commons residents.

### **BIKE SHARING**

The Town of Concord has partnered with the Town of Acton to establish a regional bike share system with four stations. The system currently includes four stations conveniently located near grocery stores and other shopping and amenities. We strongly recommend the developer explore the possibility of hosting a Minuteman Bike Share station at NOVO Riverside Commons.

### **CAR SHARING**

Another innovative transportation solution we recommend exploring is partnership with a third-party vendor to establish an on-site car sharing program at NOVO Riverside Commons. Car sharing can serve as a low-cost alternative to private car ownership, offering residents greater mobility choice.

### **QUESTIONS**

In order to make more thorough recommendation, the Transportation Advisory Committee would appreciate learning more about plans for parking at the site as a whole:

- What is the total number of parking spaces planned for the site, including spaces for existing and future commercial buildings and medical facilities? What is the rationale and analysis behind providing this number of parking spaces?
- What are the occupancy rates of existing parking spaces at the site, and how are the usage patterns expected to change with the NOVO Riverside Commons development?

- Will all parking spaces at the site be provided for free, or are there plans to allocate certain spaces, such as those in the garages, to individuals who pay an additional fee?

## **FURTHER THOUGHTS**

Finally, we would like to highlight some related transportation issues that will require more focused attention from the Town and state in light of the NOVO Riverside Commons proposal:

1. **Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities across Route 2 at Baker Ave Ext.:** The absence of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and crossing signals, at Baker Ave Ext. poses a substantial barrier for active mobility. This issue is of great concern as it hinders residents of the Best Western Emergency Shelter from safely accessing the train station, schools, shopping, and employment opportunities in West Concord. This proposed development will increase demand for safe crossings across Route 2 in the opposite direction, and we hope that the state can act with urgency to establish a safe crossing at this intersection and at all intersections along Route 2 in Concord.
2. **Automobile Safety and Capacity:** Given the increased number of vehicle trips generated by this project, close examination of traffic flow patterns and signal timings will be required at Main Street (Route 62) at Baker Avenue/Cottage Street, as well as Concord Turnpike (Route 2) at Baker Avenue Extension. In particular, we recommend close attention be paid to how traffic flows will be affected when train crossings are in progress.
3. **Modernization of the Fitchburg Line:** Significant investments are needed to improve transit service along the Fitchburg Line. If the Town of Concord and the state of Massachusetts seek to meet the need for housing without adding to the traffic snarls that too many residents struggle through every day, the state must invest the time, talent, and money necessary to deliver fast, frequent, and reliable public transit to the Boston metro area.
4. **Winter Snow Removal on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail:** At present, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is not cleared of snow and ice during the winter months which limits the trail's ability to serve as a reliable transportation corridor. Snow and ice can persist on the trail for weeks following a storm, and during these periods, there is no alternative walking or cycling route from West Concord to the grocery stores, employment opportunities, and other amenities north of Route 2. We encourage the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Committee and other relevant authorities to ensure year-round access and transportation reliability for existing and future West Concord residents who cannot or choose not to drive to access these destinations.

- 5. School Transportation Planning:** We recommend that the developer collaborate with school transportation staff to designate a safe location and orderly procedure for student pick-up at the NOVO Riverside Commons development.

We appreciate your attention to these recommendations as you evaluate the NOVO Riverside Commons project. The Transportation Advisory Committee is committed to fostering safe, sustainable, accessible, and inclusive transportation solutions within the Town of Concord.