CONCORD SQUARE
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT, INC.

Draft

To: Wellesley Planning Board
From: Karen M. Cullen, AICP, Principal Planner
Date: Feb 26, 2010
Re: St. James The Great Reuse Study

Concord Square Planning & Development has completed three site plans for potential reuse of the property currently occupied by the St. James the Great Church on Route 9 in Wellesley, near the Natick town line. The three site plans reflect land uses that were chosen largely based on the input of the public forum held on February 11, 2010. Each takes into consideration the best use of the site for the given land use, given the site constraints and the various zoning regulations that are likely to be applied to redevelopment of the site. In two cases, existing zoning districts are utilized, and in the third, a new district is recommended. This memo describes the site conditions, each of the three site plans, what needs to be done to allow implementation of each plan, and a brief discussion of financial considerations for each plan.

The site is 7.85 acres and lies between Morses Pond and Route 9, bordered to the west by Dale Street and to the east by the Wayne Office Park. The site is currently occupied by a 9,353 square foot church, a _____ square foot rectory, and a 2.51 acre parking lot. See Figure 1. There are three access points to Route 9: one at the eastern boundary, one in the center of the site, and one to Dale Street at the western boundary. Route 9 in this areas is a four lane divided road, and currently there is access from the westbound lanes only at the center access point; the other two entrances are only accessible from the eastbound lane (see Figure 2). There is no traffic signal at the central access point, and anecdotal indication is that it can be very difficult to cross the two lanes of eastbound traffic to enter the site. Redevelopment of this site will require MassHighway approval and there is a substantial potential for improvements to be required to be made to Route 9 to facilitate safe ingress and egress.

Given the traffic conditions on Route 9, Concord Square set aside a 30 foot buffer area along the Route 9 frontage for substantial landscaping and potentially a berm. To the west and south of the site lie single family residential neighborhoods, the one to the south is at the top of a 30 foot hill. The site has a 70% slope at the rear boundary; this area is not developable. A .29 acre wetland lies at the base of this slope; combined with the 100 foot buffer (1.24 acres) this area comprises 1.53 acres. The western por-

Figure 1: Aerial view of the site, 2008 (Source: MassGIS)

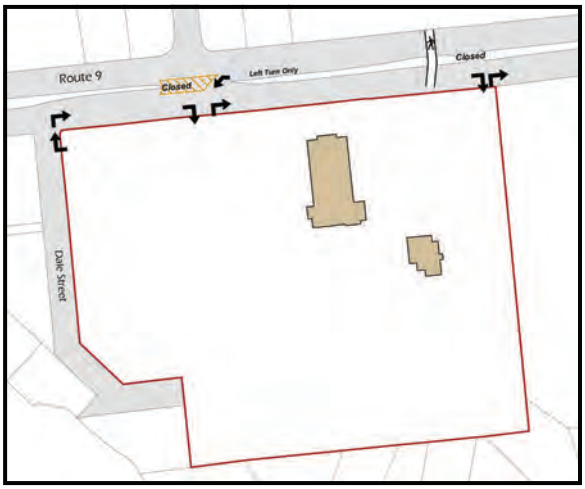

Figure 2: Access points from roadway system.

tion of the site is within the 1% Annual Chance flood zone (a.k.a. 100 year flood zone); this area comprises 1.87 acres and is almost entirely covered with the existing parking lot. The steep slopes, wetlands, wetland buffer, and Route 9 buffer, all of which are considered undevelopable, total 2.27 acres. The floodplain has significant restrictions but is not as restricted as these other area. There is a .17 acre area where the undevelopable areas and floodplain overlap. A total of 50.6% of the site has some level of development constraints, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Development constraints (Sources: MassGIS, Town of Wellesley, CSP&D).

While the wetland buffer is considered to be undevelopable, there is potential for approval by the Wetlands Protection Committee to encroach this buffer, particularly in the area where the existing pavement already encroaches (see Figure 4). As mentioned above, the floodplain area has limited development potential - structures are prohibited but existing parking can be retained and open recreational fields can be located within the floodplain, as long as their construction does not alter the flow of flood waters or the storage capacity of the site for flood water. Concord Square's three site plans maintained the "no development" principal for all structures within the entire 3.97 acre restricted area, and limited any encroachment with parking lots (into the flood zone) or fields (into the flood zone and wetland buffer) to the greatest extent possible with the goal of creating sensible developments that maximize the potential of the site while minimizing impacts to these environmentally sensitive areas.

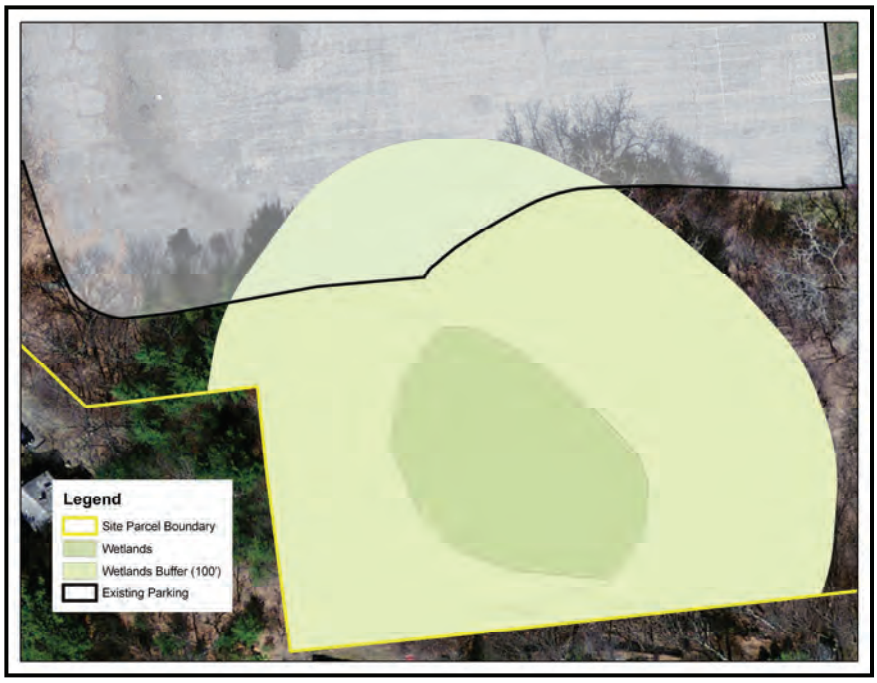

Figure 4: Area of existing wetland buffer encroachment (Sources: MassGIS, Town of Wellesley).

The base value of this site has been estimated at 4 to 5 million dollars. This is based on a 12 lot subdivision with 9 market rate homes and 3 affordable (in compliance with the

Town's Inclusionary Zoning provision). The subdivision as designed by Concord Square and shown in the sketch plan prepared for this project (Figure 5) retains the existing curb cuts to Route 9, but would need a waiver from the Planning Board for width of right-of-way (from 54 to 40 feet). Concord Square believes this is achievable given the modest size of the development and the sizeable area for new street landscaping along Route 9. This sketch plan does not include a potential lot with frontage on Dale Street, given the requirement for upgrading the private road to subdivision standards in order to subdivide a lot in that location.

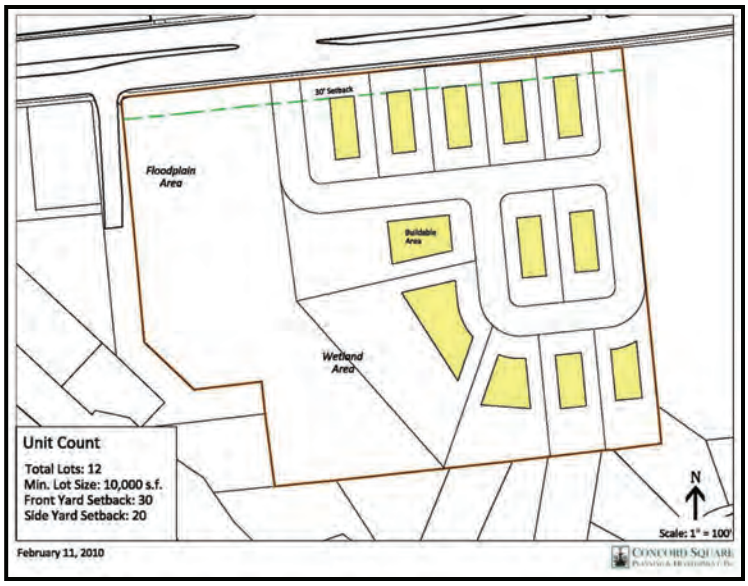

Figure 5: Sketch of potential subdivision, maximizing the site in compliance with current zoning regulations.

Site Plan 1: Recreation

The land use that received the overwhelming majority of support from the participants at the February 11th public forum was recreation. Both the outdoor (playing fields) and indoor (ice rink, pool, basketball) uses were highly desired. Thus, Concord Square has prepared a site plan showing maximum use of the property for recreational uses. While the assumption is being made that this complex would be publicly owned and operated, it could just as easily be a private endeavor, or a public-private partnership. The site plan itself is disconnected from this issue.

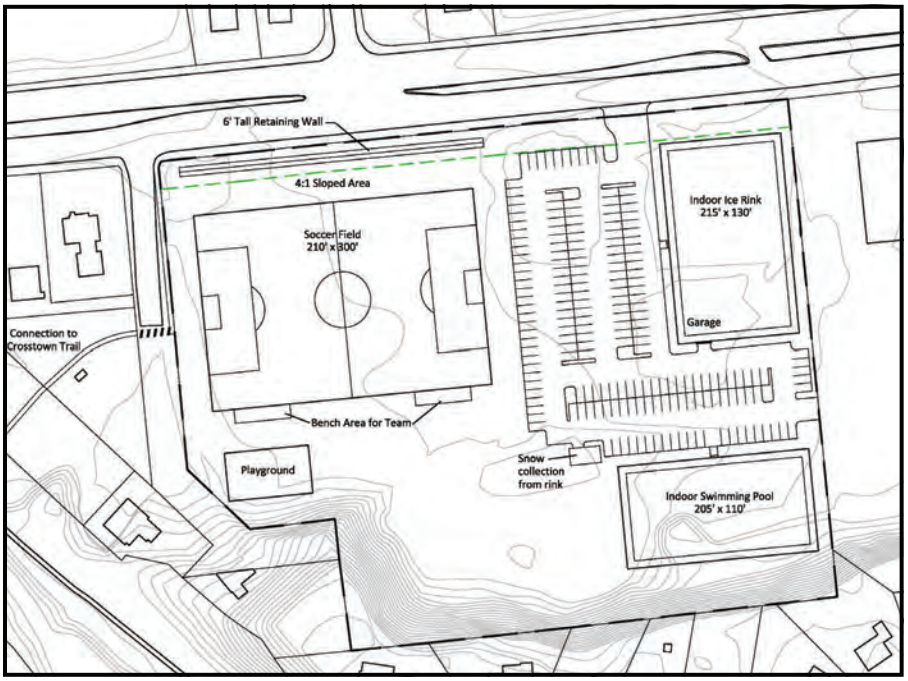

Figure 6: Site plan showing a recreational land use scenario.

Based on input received at the public forum, Concord Square chose to include a soccer field (U12 and up), an ice rink, and a swimming pool (see Figure 6). A small playground area is also included, geared toward the younger children of families with participants in the soccer, ice skating, and swimming activities. A trail connection to the Crosstown Trail is also included. All existing parking and buildings would be removed for this scenario, and the existing access points to Route 9 would be closed and a new one opened.

We also provided a driveway access to the adjacent parking lot at the Wayne Office Park, although no assumptions should be made that such access would be constructed and used without a formal written agreement between the owners of the two properties for shared access and parking rights. As mentioned above, the layout Concord Square has designed preserves the undevelopable areas with the exception of a slight encroachment into the wetland buffer along the side of the soccer field, in the area where the existing parking lot encroaches the buffer.

The soccer field is a full size field measuring 70 yards wide (210 feet) by 100 yards long (300 feet). There is approximately 20 feet around the perimeter of the field for "off field game activities" such as linesman, coaching, and team benches. On the Route 9 side of the field, there is a six foot high retaining wall and berm shown, which will provide buffering from the roadway as well as a sloped area for spectator seating (no bleachers or other formal seating arrangements are anticipated for this field). The retaining wall has two "steps" which would be landscaped to not only increase the buffering capacity of the berm, but also to create a pleasant streetscape on the Route 9 side. The top of the berm/retaining wall would also be landscaped with small trees and shrubs, preferably of species that will grow to a height of at least 15 feet and including a mixture of evergreens (for buffering) and deciduous trees (for texture and interest). The side facing the field would be open lawn to serve as a seating area for spectators. Concord Square recognizes that the space provided behind the goal lines is tight, but this was the maximum attainable given the other requirements for the site. Figure 7 shows a cross section of this berm and retaining wall.

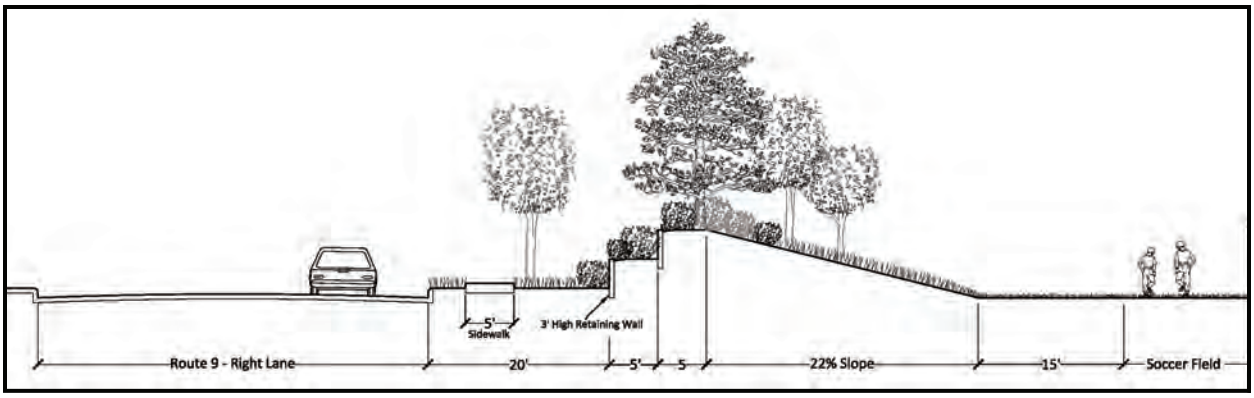

Figure 7: Cross section showing landscaped retaining wall and berm at soccer field.

The building housing the ice rink is 230 feet by 215 feet, sits 10 feet from the property line abutting the Wayne Office Park, and set back 32 feet from Route 9 (edge of the right-of-way). The main entrance to the building is located on the west side of the building, facing the parking lot. A garage entrance for the ice resurfacing machinery is located on the south side of the building, and an area designated for storage of the ice scrapings is provided off the parking lot. The ice rink itself is 85 by 200 feet, which is a full size hockey rink size. There is a walkway along the outside of the entire rink, and 40 feet along the one side of the rink for upper level spectator seating and ground level facilities such as locker rooms, concession stands, and restrooms. Again, given the goal of maximizing the number of facilities on this site, the dimensions of the building are smaller than ideal for a facility devoted solely to ice rink sports.

The third facility shown on this plan is an indoor swimming pool. This building is 110 feet by 205 feet, and is 10 feet from the side lot line at the base of the hill. The pool itself is a standard "long course" of 50 meters (164 feet) long, and has six lanes that are about eight feet wide, for a total pool width of about 50 feet. Additional space is provided for locker rooms, rest rooms, and spectator seating. This building would not exceed 25 feet in height, thus would fall below the crest of the adjacent hill.

Concord Square obtained parking ratio information from a variety of sources on the internet, although such information is scarce. The assumption was made that all three of these facilities could be in use at the same time, although not all with tournaments or other competitions at the same time. The Wellesley Zoning Bylaw only requires one space per 1,000 square feet of floor area for space for recreational buildings, which we felt was too low – it resulted in only 51 spaces for the two indoor uses. Based on our research, Concord Square determined that parking needs would be closer to 30 spaces for the soccer field and 80 each for the swimming pool and the skating rink (for figure skating competition; hockey games would be around 40). Without knowing the actual users of the facilities (i.e. what programs) it is impossible to put an exact figure on the number of parking spaces needed for the complex. The site plan shows 190 parking spaces. In addition, if an agreement can be made within the Wayne Office Park for shared parking during non-business hours, any additional parking can be accommodated on that adjacent site. As mentioned previously, an access drive has been included in this plan to allow people to access that site without driving back out onto Route 9.

The proposed use of this site as shown in this plan would require rezoning of the parcel to a Business District, where side setbacks are not required. While the use itself would be permitted by special permit under the existing Single Residence district (Section II, paragraph A8 i), and the dimensional requirements of paragraph A3 (for educational purposes, which is a bit of a stretch but most closely resembles the type of use) could be adhered to, the site is too small to accommodate all three of the facilities included in this plan and still comply with those setback requirements. Thus, it is recommended that the site be rezoned to the Business district, where there are no side setbacks. A special permit would be required for this site plan, given the fact the site is entirely within the Water Supply Protection District.

The other implementation issue for this site plan is the funding of the project, if done either as a public project or in a public-private partnership. The most difficult hurdle will be the acquisition of the site, given the assumed value of $4-5 million. However, as was clearly expressed at the public forum, use of this property for a public recreational complex would have much greater value in non-monetary terms than the loss of tax revenue or the cost to acquire the land. Should the site be proposed for all private recreational facilities, the intrinsic value to the public could be reduced.

Site Plan 2: Residential

Given the comments and discussion on various uses at the public forum, residential use of the site was chosen as the second site plan for this study. Concord Square examined a number of alternatives for residential use on this site, ranging from single family detached homes to multi-family buildings. After listening to the comments at the public forum held February 11, we concluded that a moderate number of units in a pleasant and relatively uncrowded setting would provide a housing product more palatable to the Town and more sought after by potential buyers – and would produce a value in excess of a single family subdivision which is permitted as-of-right under the current zoning. The site plan prepared for this study is shown in Figure 7.

Concord Square recommends reusing the existing buildings on the site; we believe the church building can be converted into 14 housing units – 6 on the lower floor and 8 on the upper (sanctuary) floor – and the rectory can be converted into two units. The windows on the lower level may need to be enlarged to create good quality living spaces and to comply with the state building code. The sanctuary floor has roughly 35 to 40 feet of height and can easily accommodate 2½ stories with the addition of dormers in the upper two stories, and with the square footage it would be cost effective to create 8 units in this space. The rectory has roughly 5,000 square feet of living space, and could easily be converted into two housing units. There is also an attached two car garage with two rooms above, which

Figure 8: Site plan of potential residential development.

could be incorporated into the living space of one of the units, or used as a home office or studio space separate from the main living area.

All other units on the site would be new construction, and all are townhouse or single family detached units. Concord Square has designed the site with an 18 foot wide loop roadway with a 5 foot sidewalk on one side. While an unconventional road layout which clearly does not meet the subdivision standards, it is the best way to maximize development on the site given the desired type of units. Along with the units in the church and rectory, the site plan has a total of 40 housing units. Under Wellesley's inclusionary zoning, 8 of these would be affordable.

In total, there are 8 single family homes on the site; 7 within the main area of development and one fee simple lot on Dale Street. This lot meets the zoning requirements for the current Single Residence 10 district, but would require waivers from the subdivision standards for improvements to Dale Street, which is a private (unaccepted) road. The townhouse buildings consist of 4 duplex buildings (8 units) and two quadplex buildings (8 units) for a total of 16 units. There are a total of 90 parking spaces shown on this site plan:

- 16 spaces in two car garages for the single family homes
- 18 spaces in single car garages for the townhouse units (including converted rectory)
- 31 spaces in parking lots for townhouse resident and guest parking
- 25 spaces in the large parking lot for the units in the converted church building
- Average of 2.3 spaces per unit for the whole development
- 1.8 spaces per unit for the multi-family in the church building
- 2.7 spaces per unit for the townhouse units (including converted rectory).
- The street design is a narrow low impact development type street, and does not accommodate on-street parking.

Clearly, this plan does not conform to the current zoning designation of Single Residence 10. Concord Square has reviewed the other existing zoning districts in Wellesley and has found that none are suitable for the site plan created. The Residential Incentive Overlay has some provisions that would work for this site, but other provisions that don't make any sense for this site. It may be possible to modify the RIO to broaden its applicability and eliminate or clarify some of the problematic language. The alternative would be to create a new overlay zone to allow development of a plan such as shown in Figure 7. The key provisions of this district would be:

- maximum density of 6 du/a, based on all land area (do not discount the undevelopable portions); this would allow 47 units on this 7.85 acre site;
- allowed uses would be single family detached, townhouse (including duplex), and multi-family housing;
- minimum parcel (or tract) size would be 2 acres;
- minimum open space of 30% of total site, 50% of which would be enhanced;
- minimum building setbacks would be 30' for the front and 20' for the side and rear, unless the abutting district is single residence 30 or 40 in which case the side and rear setbacks would be 30';
- maximum building height would be 3 stories, 36';
- structures to be redeveloped, if any, would be eligible for waivers to the above provisions, at the discretion of the Planning Board;
- approval would be by special permit.

This development would require a special permit under the Water Supply Protection district, and would also require approval from MassHighway for altering the curb cuts on Route 9.

[Ed. note: the financial analysis will be completed prior to the public forum on March 4th.]

Site Plan 3: Office/Retail

While this use was not well received at the public forum on February 11th, it was felt by the Planning Board members in attendance as well as the staff that such a use should be included, partly to provide a balance of uses for the overall study. While there are a myriad of ways to design a site with office and retail uses, Concord Square's goal was to maximize development on the site in compliance with the provisions of the Business zoning district, yet provide for an aesthetically pleasing streetscape along Route 9. Concord Square's design is shown in Figure 9.

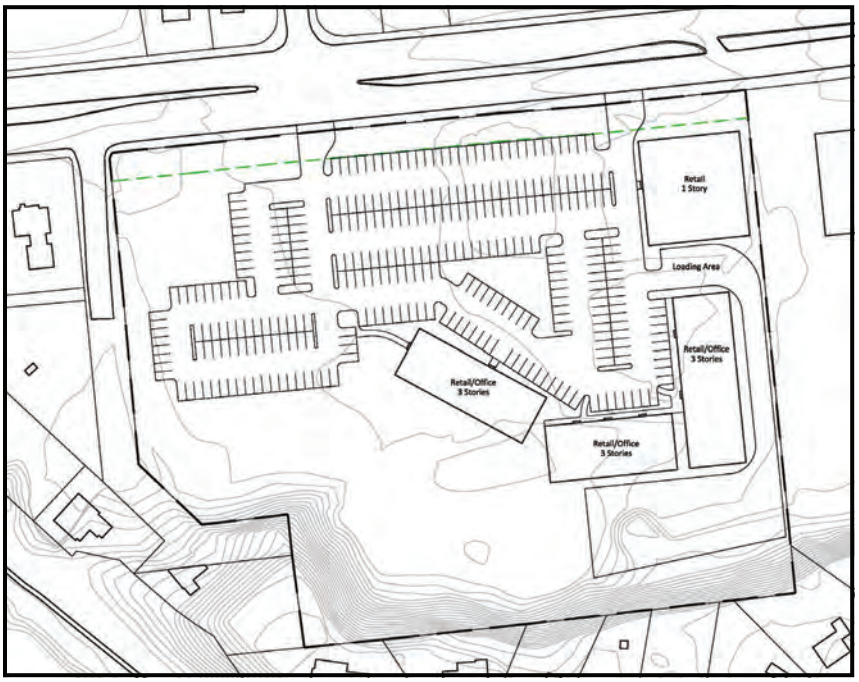

Figure 9: Site plan of potential retail and office development.

Given that the current parking standards are the same for both retail and office uses, Concord Square felt it best to assume flexibility in the ultimate use of the buildings. Our design has one single story building located at the front of the property which would be best suited for retail use, and three buildings with three stories each. The first floor of these buildings could be used for either retail or office and the two upper floors would be for office space. There is a total of 94,021 square feet of building space, which is 8,563 square feet less than the maximum permitted and amounts

to a Floor Area Ratio of .28. A total of 300 parking spaces are required for this space, and are provided on this plan.

A portion of the existing parking lot which lies within the flood zone would be removed, including a strip along the edge of Dale Street where additional landscaping would help to buffer the adjacent residential neighborhood. The majority of the existing parking area to be removed (in the northwest corner of the site) could be planted with trees, shrubs, and flowers in a small park like setting which could serve as an example of "gateway" landscaping. The remaining frontage on Route 9, in front of both the parking lot and the retail building, would be landscaped with trees and shrubs in such a way as to present a pleasing streetscape yet not completely hide the buildings.

As was stated earlier, this plan was designed to be in compliance with the existing Business district, requiring a rezoning of the site to the Business district. Concord Square is concerned about the potential for building more parking than is needed; most parking standards call for one space per 400 to 450 square feet GFA for offices, while Wellesley's current standard is one space per 312.5 square feet. As with the previous two site plans, this development would also require a special permit under the Water Supply Protection district as well as MassHighway approval for the revised curb cuts on Route 9.

[Ed. Note: The financial analysis will be completed prior to the public forum on March 4th.]