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**INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** April 28, 2022

**TO:** City Council

**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development  
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director of Planning and Development  
Cat Kemmett, Planning Associate

**SUBJECT:** §5-58 of the City of Newton Ordinances, request for site plan approval for site and building improvements at 150 Jackson Road for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School

**CC:** Alejandro Valcarce, Public Buildings Department  
Design Review Committee  
Public Buildings Department

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Planning & Development Department conducted a Section 5-58 review of the proposed renovations to 150 Jackson Road for the Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School.

The plan proposes two major changes. The first is demolishing the existing convent and chapel space to construct a new addition that will include a gymnasium, main office, lobby, and support space. The second is a significant renovation and improvement of several sections of the existing building including the 3-story academic bar, cafeteria, and auditorium. Other planned improvements include a new parking lot, field, playgrounds, outdoor classrooms, half-basketball court, trees and plantings, and improved pedestrian and bicycle routes.

**History**

The existing structure is a brick school building erected in 1965 for the campus of the former Aquinas College, which was a Roman Catholic junior college for women. The college closed in 1999. The site was purchased by the city in 2015, and in 2016, all of the exterior curtain wall and windows were replaced on the classroom, and auditorium/cafeteria wings. Though Planning staff found the building to meet the requirements to be preferably preserved, the Newton Historical Commission voted unanimously to find the building not preferably preserved at their March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 meeting.

**Project Details**

This project proposes an addition to the existing structure totaling roughly 22,000 square feet. This addition will include a gymnasium, lobby, main office, media center, restrooms, and support spaces. The existing building will also be renovated to make classrooms bigger. All interior electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and fire protection systems will be replaced. Some finishes will be upgraded as needed, and the building will be insulated. Seismic

improvements will be made to meet structural code requirements. A new elevator will be installed, and the building will be made fully accessible.

New amenities proposed in this plan include new playgrounds, hardscape play space, fields, passive and active recreational site elements including lighting, and new trees and vegetation. The densely wooded area onsite, half an acre, will get minor pedestrian improvements but will otherwise be left as-is. A seat/sign wall will be added near the entrance from Jackson Road. No generator location is shown on the site plans because the project team has not yet determined whether emergency power will be provided by battery backup or by a backup generator.

The proposed new onsite parking lot will have 57 parking stalls in the main lot, 3 parking stalls at the service entrance, and 2 accessible parking stalls on Walnut Park to serve the 62 full and part-time staff. Ample street parking can be found on Jackson Road directly adjacent to the school site which will complement the onsite parking for both staff and visitors. The onsite parking shown in the new plans represents more than twice the parking provided for staff at 191 Pearl Street, the current (or former?) location of Lincoln-Eliot School. Several bike racks are shown as well.



Former Aquinas Junior College, 150 Jackson Road

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## I. SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCESS

Prior to construction at any municipal building, Section 5-58 of the Newton City Ordinance requires reviews of associated plans by the following:

- The Director of Planning and Development for consistency and compatibility with the *Newton Comprehensive Plan* and other applicable planning and analytical studies;
- The Design Review Committee for layout, construction, and relationship to surroundings;

- The Public Facilities Committee to provide a forum for public comments and discussion about proposed buildings and their locations, followed by City Council action.

Once the site plans are formally approved by these bodies, they become part of the final set of project plans and construction drawings and cannot be substantially altered without being resubmitted to the Design Review Committee and to the City Council. After the requirements of §5-58(a)(1) through (a)(6) have been satisfied, the City Council can appropriate funds for preparation of detailed construction drawings.

Work on the school is scheduled to be completed in 18-24 months, after a bidding process projected to last 8-10 months. All work, including the interior utility work, will be addressed in one phase. The project was presented by Arrowstreet Architects and the Public Buildings Department to the Development Review Team (DRT) on January 27, 2022. The project team subsequently met with NFD, Engineering Traffic, and NHC during the development of the Schematic design and Site Plans. Plans submitted by the Public Buildings Department were prepared by Arrowstreet Architects, dated April 15, 2022. Plans were reviewed by Planning Department staff at two DRTs, one on January 27, 2022 and one on April 20, 2022.

## II. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

The new addition is being constructed in the same location as the current convent and chapel. The massing will be similar, but the new building will be shorter. This addition is located on the north end of the site and is respectful of the neighbors and neighborhood. The total gross building area will be slightly less than what exists there today. The site will evolve to become far less impervious with significantly more open space and landscaping. Although some existing trees are shown to be removed, the tree planting plan is in line with the City of Newton Tree Ordinance from a replacement perspective. The building design and site plans represent a significant improvement in the physical asset for the Newton Public Schools and the community.

Site work will be completed on the entire lot. A new 57-spot parking lot will be constructed on the northwest end of the site, which will be wrapped by two independent and physically separated bus and van loops, with combined entrance and exits to and from Jackson Road.



### III. TECHNICAL REVIEW OF SITE PLANS UNDER SECTION 5-58

#### 1. Location and Existing Site Conditions

150 Jackson Road is in a predominantly residential neighborhood at the edge of Nonantum and Newton Corner. The site is bordered by Multi Residence 1 (MR1) and Public Use zoning and abuts the Jackson and Montessori Schools to the south. The parcel is approximately 248,884 square feet. The building is a former educational facility that is 98,576 square feet in area, with a 100,000 square foot parking lot, a 1-acre dense wooded area, and passive grounds and open space.

#### 2. Proposed Improvements

The Lincoln-Eliot School Project at 150 Jackson Road will include the demolition of the convent and chapel on the north end of the existing structure. In their place, a new gymnasium, media center, main office, entrance, and lobby, and support spaces will be constructed as part of the building addition. The renovation of the remainder of the existing building will include reconfiguration of interior spaces, accessibility improvements, replacement of all mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, and life safety systems. The envelope will be relatively untouched from the outside, but the entire interior envelope will be insulated. The roof will be fully replaced, with the expectation that solar panels will be installed upon completion of the project. Also included in the renovation are upgrades to the existing 850-seat auditorium.

Four accessible parking stalls will be provided in the parking lot at the northwest portion of the site, and two additional accessible parking spots will be provided at the southern end of Walnut Park directly adjacent to the original main entrance. Parking at the site will consist of 60 total spaces for automobiles, with 57 spaces in the staff parking lot on the northwest side of the parcel, and 3 spaces at the service entrance off of Jackson Road on the southern end of the site.

### IV. OTHER REVIEWS

- **Chief Environmental Planner.** The entire School property is located outside of riverfront areas. The Senior Environmental Planner indicated that no review is required for the improvements proposed.
- **Associate City Engineer.** Please reference the memorandum regarding this Lincoln-Eliot School project written by John Daghljan, Associate City Engineer (Attachment B). The proposed work will result in a net decrease in the amount of impervious surface on the site. The Engineering Division must review the proposed plans to ensure that drainage infrastructure is constructed according to City standards. The Engineering Division will also review soil testing and evaluations prior to the issuance of a building permit.
- **City Transportation Engineer.** A traffic engineering study of the site and neighborhood will be undertaken to study its broader traffic effects on the area, as well as potential improvements to the traffic equipment, crosswalk systems, blue zones, and general circulation patterns in the immediate vicinity.
- **Fire Department.** Fire suppression systems will be installed throughout the addition and

original facility, and the Newton Fire Department has already reviewed the early site and building concepts and the plans reflect their feedback. The Public Buildings Department should continue to coordinate with the Assistant Fire Chief to meet all applicable safety codes.

## **V. CONSISTENCY WITH NEWTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND OTHER PLANS/STUDIES**

The Newton Comprehensive Plan notes that Newton residents have made community cohesiveness and safety a strong priority. A new, Lincoln-Eliot School at the edges of Nonantum and Newton Corner is consistent with this vision.

The Newton Comprehensive Plan advocates for “creative consideration of future activity and facility configurations.” When addressing such changes, the Newton Comprehensive Plan encourages creativity in making continued use of existing structures, where possible. The convent and chapel could not be adapted to meet the educational program of the Lincoln-Eliot School. However, the majority of the former Aquinas Junior College is being renovated, and the visual appearance and context are being preserved. Preserving this historic building meets the preservation goals outlined in the comprehensive plan.

## **VI. SITE PLAN REVIEW CRITERIA**

In accordance with Section 5-58, the City has filed plans for Site Plan Approval. These are to be reviewed in accordance with the procedure outlined in Chapter 30: Article 6, Chapter 5, Section 5-58 of the Revised Ordinances. The following is a review of the submitted plans against the relevant criteria established in this section.

### **A. Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to the adjacent streets, properties or improvements**

Vehicular access to on-site parking will continue to be provided from Jackson Road only. Walnut Park and Waban Street will continue to be studied, but early indications are that these streets will help support walkability and bikeability, as opposed to relying on them for any increased vehicular demand resulting from this project. Jackson Road will see improved pedestrian crossings, curb cuts, a blue zone, and traffic calming through “bump-ins.” The overall parking count on site will support the current full-time employees. Approximately 17 part-time employees will utilize parking on Jackson Road. This will represent a significant increase in the onsite parking as compared to the 36 onsite parking spaces at 191 Pearl Street. The proposed parking lot appears to be adequate to support the full-time staff, with existing complementary parking on Jackson Road that provides adequate parking for the part-time staff and visitors. There are currently multiple bike racks shown throughout the site plan. Accommodations should also be considered for protected bicycle storage.

### **B. Adequacy of the methods for regulating surface water drainage**

Please reference the memorandum written by John Daghljan, Associate City Engineer (Attachment B). On-site monitoring and inspection by the Engineering Division is required and warranted at various phases before and during construction. A drainage analysis needs to be performed based on the City’s 100-year storm event of 6.5 inches over a standard period of time. All increased run-off needs to be infiltrated and accommodated on site. Dry well details also need to specify stone size and location beneath dry wells.



- C. Screening of parking areas and structures from adjoining premises. Location of parking between the street and existing or proposed structures shall be discouraged.

The proposal includes enhanced landscaping along the perimeter of the site. The parking areas will continue to be visible from Jackson Road, but landscaping and fencing on the site will be improved. Neighbors on the east and north sides should be consulted regarding their choices for possible screening where warranted. Out of respect for the residential abutters, new lighting fixtures that are proposed for the perimeter of the property should have shields to direct light onto the school property and away from abutting properties.

- D. Avoidance of topographic changes; tree and soil removal shall be minimized.

Some topographical changes are shown in the site plan, but plans show that there will be no anticipated adverse impacts to any areas outside of the parcel. The removal of large and mature trees should be avoided if possible.

Although final grading has not been determined, early indications are that topographical changes will be achieved through grading, site ramps, and stairs. No significant retaining walls are shown, nor does the current plan reflect the need for any. Minor retaining walls may be needed to optimize the site grading plan while creating a universally accessible facility.

- E. Consideration of site design including relationship to nearby structures.

150 Jackson Road is located in a neighborhood of mixed uses including housing, private educational institutions, and public land. The residential neighborhood to the north, east, and west is largely pre-War housing in an MR-1 zone, with construction dates ranging from the 19th, 20th, and 21st century. As the massing and angularity of the current building will be emulated in the new building, the design changes proposed will not result in substantial adverse visual effects on the neighborhood. Preservation and restoration of the majority of the former Aquinas Junior College building will contribute to the historical context of the neighborhood.

The Planning Department received conceptual elevations and material specifications, which are subject to change during the design process. Final specifications of materials, colors, and landscaping should be submitted to Planning Department for review prior to issuance of a building permit to ensure compatibility with earlier reviews.

## **VII. CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT**

The contractor should submit a Construction Management Plan (CMP) to the Director of Planning and Development, the City Engineer, the City Traffic Engineer, and the Commissioner of Inspectional Services for review and approval before any construction activities related to this project are commenced on the site.

This plan should identify the hours and expected duration of construction, location of proposed on-site contractor parking, and material storage and staging areas. This plan should also incorporate preferences and input from neighbors. If there are on-site activities during construction, the CMP should identify measures to be used to avoid conflicts. The CMP should also include the telephone number for the contractor's primary contact person.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Director of Planning and Development has determined that the site plans for the renovation and addition to the former Aquinas Junior College to become the new Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School are consistent with the Newton Comprehensive Plan and other relevant plans/studies, including the site plan review criteria listed in Section 30-23. It appears that the Public Buildings Department and the School Department have given serious consideration to finding the best plan to accommodate and adapt the existing building and site for the new Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School.

### **The Planning Department offers the following items for consideration:**

- Studying the systemic changes to the traffic, pedestrian, and bicycle flow in the neighborhood, modification and improvements should be implemented as needed to maintain a positive impact to the neighborhood.
- New directional signage for the accessible and visitor parking (preferably sited near the entrance to the property), and signage at the Jackson Road entrance road for service vehicles.
- New lighting fixtures located at the perimeter of the property should have shields to focus light onto the school property and not neighbors' property.
- Traffic mitigation should be a high priority during the construction phase of this project.
- The neighborhood should continue to be engaged by multiple means to provide direct input as the project and design evolves.
- Trash storage should be no less than 25' from the building, and properly enclosed.
- A parking management plan should be developed in partnership with the neighborhood, various City departments, and elected and appointed officials.
- Complementary blue zones and/or drop-and-go locations should be studied and implemented as appropriate to minimize the demand on Jackson Road.

### ***If the Council, Mayor and School Department choose to approve these plans, prior to applying for Building Permits the Public Buildings Department should submit:***

- 1) Revised plans showing any alterations to the site plan, parking or landscaping to the Planning Department, and Engineering Division.
- 2) An on-site soil evaluation, drainage analysis, and CCTV inspection witnessed by the Engineering Division.
- 3) Answers to questions posed in the memo written by John Daghljan.
- 4) Final material samples to the Planning Department.
- 5) A construction management plan to the Planning Department and Engineering Division

ATTACHMENT A: **Memorandum from John Daghljan, Associate City Engineer**