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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board  
From: CDD Staff  
Date: April 3, 2014  
Re: **Information Requested re: 75 New Street Proposal**

At the previous Planning Board hearing on PB #286, review of proposed residential development at 75 New Street, the Planning Board requested that CDD provide information on the following topics:

- Past planning efforts for this area
- Overview of new housing in the area
- Existing and planned pedestrian/bicycle connections from the proposed site to other key locations in the area such as the Alewife T, parks and shopping.
- Conditions of New Street including roadway width, sidewalk width and parking rules.
- Current ownership and future plans for the unused rail line behind the site.

These topics are addressed on the following pages. In addition, we have included maps of the Concord-Alewife Area that illustrate some of the data presented and the future planning goals that have been established for the area.

## **Planning/Zoning History of New Street and Surrounding Area**

### *Pre-1980 Land Use*

Through the 1970s, New Street was part of a larger industrial area that included the Concord-Alewife “Triangle” and “Quadrangle” and the present site of Danehy Park, which was the site of the City Dump until that time. New Street itself was primarily an access road serving the dump and other industrial sites along the railroad line, and was zoned for lower-scale industrial uses.

### *Alewife Revitalization Plan and Rezoning*

Significant changes to the area began with planning in the 1970s to extend the MBTA Red Line to the new Alewife Station. That project would not only create new rapid transit service in the area, it would provide the fill required to “cap” the City Dump to create what is now Danehy Park. The extension of the Red Line was completed in 1985 and Danehy Park was completed in 1990.

While planning for the Red Line extension was underway, the City engaged in a planning study resulting in the 1979 Alewife Revitalization Plan. The emphasis of that plan was to encourage research and development, technical office and related light manufacturing uses while discouraging the heavy manufacturing, extensive warehousing, major retailing and auto service uses that were predominant at the time. Housing was considered appropriate in some areas but not generally encouraged.

The rezoning associated with this plan, adopted in 1980, zoned New Street to Industry A-1, which was the first industrial zoning district to permit housing as a conditional use. Light industry, office and convenience retail were encouraged, and allowed heights were set at 45 feet.

Reflecting the more auto-centric views of the time, the plan recommended converting New Street into a four-lane “boulevard” connecting the Concord Avenue rotary through the Fresh Pond Shopping Center and into the Quadrangle. However, that plan was not implemented as the City shifted its priorities away from auto travel and toward pedestrian and bicycle connections.

### *Cambridge Growth Policy*

In 1993, the Planning Board published the Cambridge Growth Policy Document, *Toward a Sustainable Future*, which was developed following a series of community workshops. The document described its purpose as such:

*The Growth Policy document outlines the planning assumptions and policies guiding the physical planning of Cambridge. The Planning Board will use the document to help make clear, consistent and fair land use decisions. It is not a formula but a framework for decision-making, spotlighting the trade-offs necessary to meet a number of public goals. These include decent and affordable housing, a vibrant economy providing good jobs, an attractive built environment, plentiful and well-maintained open space and effective transportation networks which lessen dependence on the automobile.*

Although the Growth Policy did not directly result in rezoning, it established a framework of principles that would guide future area-specific planning studies, rezoning initiatives and project review.

One key issue discussed in the Growth Policy was the future of “evolving industrial areas,” a term used to describe the many parts of the city that were changing in character as the types of industries that had once made them inhospitable to other forms of development were becoming obsolete or leaving Cambridge. The following policies were created specifically for those areas:

*POLICY 10: In some evolving industrial areas multiple uses should be encouraged, including an important component of residential use in suitable locations not subject to conflict with desired industrial uses, to advance other development policy objectives of the city:*

- 1. To provide opportunities for those who work in the city to live here;*
- 2. To limit the use of the automobile to get to Cambridge and to travel within Cambridge;*
- 3. To encourage more active use of all parts of the city for longer periods throughout the day; and*
- 4. To limit the secondary impacts of new development on the existing, established neighborhoods. These impacts may be both economic, as in the increased demand placed on the limited stock of existing housing, and environmental, as in the increase in traffic on neighborhood streets.*

*POLICY 11: A wide range of development patterns should be encouraged in these evolving industrial areas at scales and densities and in forms which would be difficult to accommodate in the city’s fully developed districts and neighborhoods.*

Over time, the issues around compatibility of residential and industrial uses have become less of a concern as experience has demonstrated that conflicts can be mitigated and that residential uses can be desirable when older industrial types of uses are phased out.

#### *Citywide Rezoning*

After the Growth Policy, a community-driven initiative led to a planning process that adjusted zoning controls throughout the City. This process involved collaboration among CDD, the Planning Board and a Growth Management Advisory Committee of community members. The result was a comprehensive set of zoning changes adopted by the City Council in 2001.

The citywide rezoning changes that were most applicable to New Street include the following:

- Housing was made as-of-right rather than a conditional use in the Industry A-1 district. The permitted density for housing was increased slightly, from a maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 1.25 to 1.5. The maximum FAR for commercial use remained 1.25 and the maximum allowed building height remained 45 feet for all uses.
- Project review requirements were enacted citywide, including a Project Review Special Permit requirement for projects of 50,000 square feet or more. This allowed the Planning Board to review the transportation and urban design characteristics of large projects and impose conditions in order to mitigate adverse impacts.

### *Concord-Alewife Plan*

The most recent comprehensive planning process for this area was the Concord-Alewife Planning Study, which resulted in a plan and a set of zoning changes adopted by the City Council in 2006. Officially, the study area ended at the Watertown Branch rail line and did not include New Street, for which the IA-1 zoning did not change. However, because it is at the edge of the study area, it is reasonable to view the 75 New Street proposal in the context of the Concord-Alewife plan and guidelines.

One of the attached maps shows the conceptual overview of the Concord-Alewife Plan. The overall objective of the plan and rezoning was to support a more balanced mix of uses by allowing less commercial development and more residential development. A primary reason for this approach was to provide more opportunities to both live and work in Cambridge, which reduces reliance on single-occupancy auto travel over the long term. Higher-density mixed-use development was encouraged in districts with the best access to transit, with reduced densities in areas away from transit and closer to existing residential neighborhoods.

The rezoning created new special permit requirements and design guidelines for project review. The guidelines addressed issues such as the following:

- Breaking down development into smaller block sizes
- Encouraging architectural variation across the district
- Creating pedestrian-friendly facades at street level
- Supporting environmentally sustainable design principles
- Screening parking and loading activities
- For the specific area around the shopping center, improving pedestrian links to Danehy Park and Alewife Station

Along with design guidelines, the Concord-Alewife rezoning included development incentives that could be leveraged to create public connections, such as missing roadway connections, pedestrian/bicycle links and improved connections to transit.

### *Pathway Overlay District*

A part of the Concord-Alewife rezoning that was especially relevant to New Street was the creation of the Pathway Overlay District for the section of the Watertown Branch rail corridor north of Concord Avenue. The Pathway Overlay District facilitates the future conversion of that corridor into a pedestrian and bicycle pathway by prohibiting the construction of new buildings or parking within the corridor but allowing development rights to be transferred to adjacent lots. Additional development incentives are available in exchange for dedicating the corridor to public use.

Because the development incentives confer additional floor area but not additional height, it would be difficult to use those incentives along New Street, where the lots are narrow and heights are limited to 45 feet. A more likely scenario is that if the Fresh Pond Shopping Center were redeveloped, the redevelopment incentives could be spread across that larger site.

*Other Citywide Planning Initiatives*

Two other planning efforts have particular relevance to the proposed 75 New Street development:

- *Inclusionary Zoning.* Adopted in 1998, this citywide requirement allows increased floor area and dwelling units (but not increased height) for residential development in order to provide units that are permanently affordable to low-income and moderate-income households.
- *Green Building Requirements.* Adopted in 2010, all projects with at least 25,000 square feet of floor area must meet environmental design standards using the LEED rating system.

**Overview of New Residential Development**

As illustrated on the second attached map, there are 1,700 units of housing recently built or permitted since the Concord-Alewife study, both within the study area and in directly adjacent districts including New Street, Concord Turnpike (Cambridge Discovery Park and the FACES site) and Fresh Pond Parkway.

The table below compares the development permitted since the Concord-Alewife rezoning to the development that was projected during the Concord-Alewife study. Of the projected 2.8 million square feet of new development that was anticipated between 2004 and 2024, just over 1.5 million has been built or permitted as of 2014.

What is most interesting about permitted new development in this area is that it has been almost entirely residential, while there was not much residential development prior to the Concord-Alewife Plan. Assuming that the housing currently permitted will be constructed over the coming years, it will result in a much closer balance of commercial and residential uses than existed when the Concord-Alewife study was completed.

<b>Gross Floor Area (SF):</b>	<b>Commercial</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>Retail<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
Existing in 2004	3,257,200	710,900	508,100	4,476,200
Projected in Concord-Alewife	1,297,935	1,315,319	176,665	2,789,919
Permitted since Concord-Alewife	0	1,497,077	17,000	1,514,077
Permitted adjacent to study area <sup>(2)</sup>	498,000	303,999	11,450	813,449

<sup>(1)</sup> *Shopping centers only. Ground floor retail in mixed-use buildings is classified as residential or commercial depending on the principal use of the building.*

<sup>(2)</sup> *Includes New Street, Concord Turnpike (Cambridge Discovery Park), Fresh Pond Parkway.*

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ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE

**Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections**

Several recent improvements have been made to pedestrian and bicycle connections in the Concord-Alewife area, including the installation of cycle tracks on Concord Avenue along Fresh Pond and improvements to multiuse pathways through the Alewife Reservation, creating new connections from Alewife Station to Acorn Park and Belmont. More recently, the City and the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), working in partnership, acquired the rights to the unused Watertown Branch rail line south of Concord Avenue, which will become a future multiuse path.

The Concord-Alewife plan identifies many other desired pedestrian and bicycle connections, as illustrated on the attached map. The highest priority is the creation of a pedestrian and bicycle overpass connecting the “Quadrangle” subdistrict to the “Triangle” and Alewife Station. For the area near New Street, the following future connections were identified:

- A multiuse path along the Watertown Branch corridor north of Concord Avenue (see discussion of Pathway Overlay District above), connecting to the future City/DCR pathway to the south and eventually to Porter Square via the Fitchburg Line corridor. In the long term, a future pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the Fitchburg Line is also contemplated north of New Street.
- A public road connecting the northern end of New Street through the Fresh Pond Shopping Center area to Terminal Road, using the existing pass under Alewife Brook Parkway.
- A pedestrian and bicycle connection from the aforementioned extension of New Street to Alewife Station, via a connection to Alewife Brook Parkway or to the “Triangle” subdistrict.

These connections would most likely be achieved through a future redevelopment of the Fresh Pond Shopping Center into a more pedestrian-friendly mixed-use project. The zoning resulting from the Concord-Alewife study provides opportunities for such mixed-use development and incentives for the creation of public connections and improvements. Although there is no plan for redevelopment of the shopping center at this time, it is expected that as the area transforms, the potential development value of the site as a mixed-use transit-oriented center will outweigh its value as an auto-oriented strip mall.

#### **Current and Future Conditions on New Street**

Currently, New Street is a two-way public street with a road width of about 27 feet and 5-to-6-foot sidewalks on either side of the road. According to counts made in May, 2012, New Street carries 5,123 vehicle trips daily on average, including 291 trips during the morning peak hour (8am-9am) and 566 vehicles during the evening peak hour (5pm-6pm).

On-street parking is currently permitted on a portion of the eastern side of New Street. Given the comments made about the impact of this parking on traffic flow, the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) is planning to remove or time-restrict this on-street parking.

Because of the industrial history of New Street, there are several lots where surface parking abuts the street and the sidewalks are indiscernible (see attached aerial photo). This pattern is not permitted under current zoning, and therefore as lots are redeveloped, they would be brought into conformance with requirements to rebuild sidewalks and include landscaping and trees.

The City has recommended that the 75 New Street project be required to include the construction of a concrete sidewalk that would connect to the sidewalk previously built on the residential development to the north. This sidewalk, including street trees and other landscaping, is shown in the plans submitted to the Planning Board. The City will continue to review the details of the sidewalk design to ensure that it meets all relevant City standards. If the site directly to the south of 75 New Street, currently an active auto repair use, is redeveloped in the future, it would similarly be required to include sidewalk reconstruction, landscaping and street trees.

Because of the narrow width of lots on the western side of New Street, the eastern side of the street provides better opportunities for more significant roadway improvements if desired. The section between Bay State Road and Danehy Park has several large parcels with low-scale commercial buildings and surface parking lots. As those properties are redeveloped in the future, in addition to requiring sidewalk construction and landscaping, the City could negotiate further setbacks and easements in order to widen the street and allow for more configuration options. For instance, an additional 5 feet of width would allow two 11-foot travel lanes and two 5-foot bicycle lanes, along with sidewalks, similar to other mixed-use streets in Cambridge. The City could then continue this pattern on the section of the street adjacent to Danehy Park, possibly relocating the sidewalk to the opposite side of the existing row of trees.

Further to the south, Bay State Road is being reconstructed by the City as part of the Concord Avenue sewer separation contract. As part of this project, continuous sidewalks will be installed and the turning operations will be improved at the intersection with New Street.

#### **Ownership of Watertown Branch Rail Line**

As previously described, the section of the Watertown Branch rail line north of Concord Avenue is a preferred location for a multiuse (pedestrian and bicycle) path. The portion of the rail line south of Concord Avenue has been acquired by the City in partnership with DCR in order to construct a multiuse path along Fresh Pond Reservation and to the south, eventually connecting to existing paths in Watertown and the Charles River. The Pathway Overlay District zoning was enacted to protect the future pathway corridor and provide incentives for its dedication to public use.

The Watertown Branch section north of Concord Avenue remains part of the Pan Am Railways system (formerly Guilford Rail System). To the City's knowledge, there is no agreement to sell the property to any public or private owner. If an agreement were made to sell the land to a private owner in the future, the City would have the right of first refusal at the offered price per the state's policy on railroad land disposition.



# New Street

Cambridge, Massachusetts

54 units  
Completed

93 units  
Proposed

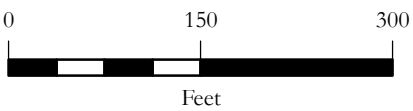
Danehy Park

New St

Bay State Rd

Concord Ave

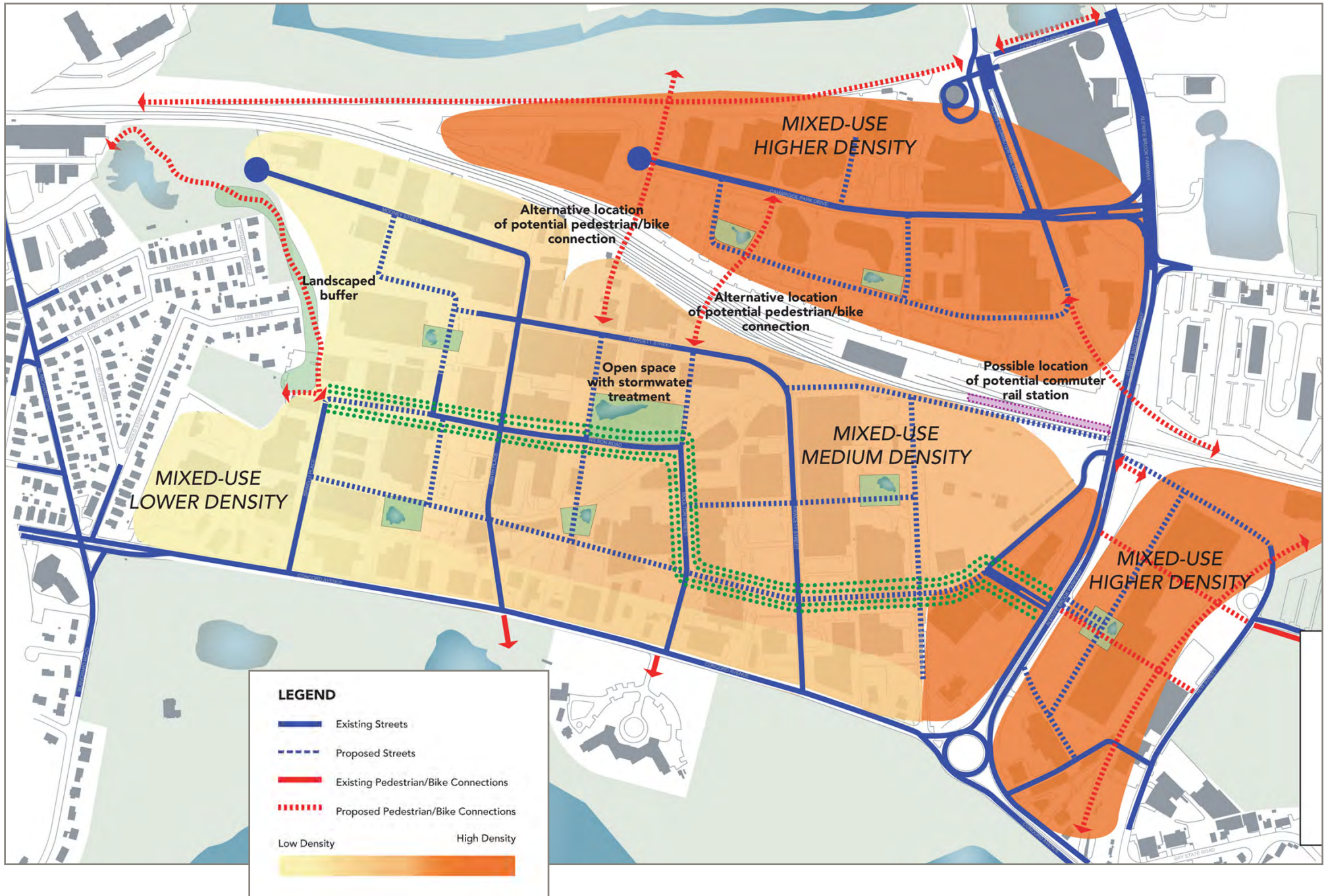
Concord Ln



2013 orthophotos from MassGIS.  
Parcel lines are approximate.



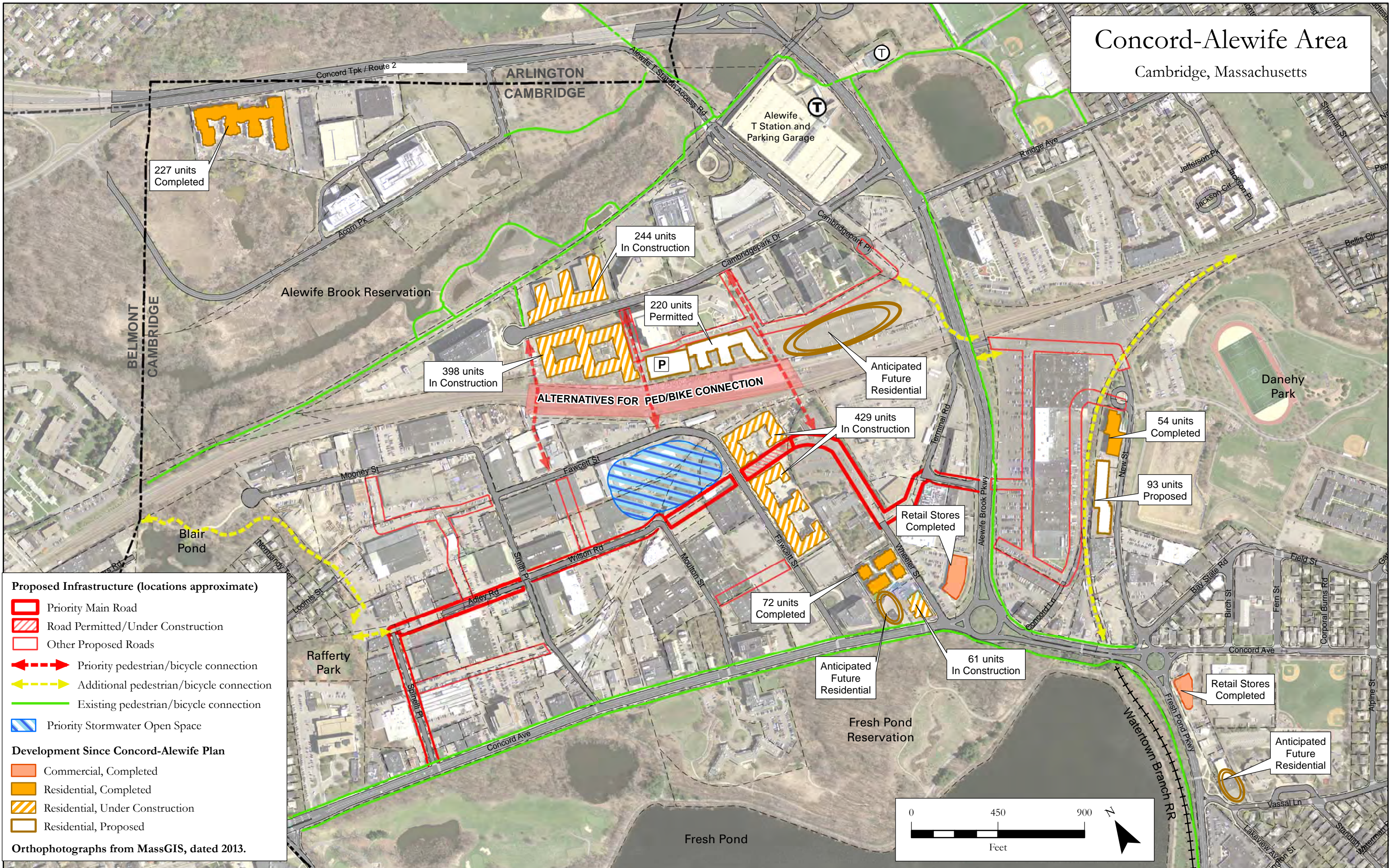
# 10 CONCEPT PLAN





# Concord-Alewife Area

Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Proposed Infrastructure (locations approximate)**

- Priority Main Road
- Road Permitted/Under Construction
- Other Proposed Roads
- ←→ Priority pedestrian/bicycle connection
- ←→ Additional pedestrian/bicycle connection
- ←→ Existing pedestrian/bicycle connection
- Priority Stormwater Open Space

**Development Since Concord-Alewife Plan**

- Commercial, Completed
- Residential, Completed
- Residential, Under Construction
- Residential, Proposed

Orthophotographs from MassGIS, dated 2013.

