



## Newton Lower Falls IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

Contact: Randall Block  
Chair, LFIA Riverside Committee  
617-965-5911; [LFIAriverside@gmail.com](mailto:LFIAriverside@gmail.com)

EMBARGOED to March 29, 2019  
(special permit filing by developer)

### **Riverside Development Proposal Deemed Unacceptable**

**Newton Lower Falls, Mass.** – The proposal that has been presented by Mark Development and discussed in public meetings is totally unacceptable. It will cram 1.5 million square feet of apartments, offices, retail shops, and parking into the MBTA Riverside Station site and will overwhelm nearby villages with traffic and congestion, according to a long-standing non-profit neighborhood association advocating for appropriately sized development at the site.

The Lower Falls Improvement Association (LFIA) Riverside Committee (known as RightSize Riverside) urges the Newton City Council to reject this excessively dense and tall plan and to work with the developer, city planners, and residents to negotiate a project that meets the pressing need for affordable housing without straining the capacity of area roads, schools, and infrastructure or limiting future public transit growth at Riverside.

RightSize Riverside is dismayed that Mark Development has filed for a special permit *even before* the City's Riverside visioning process has concluded — indicating the developer's lack of commitment to heeding neighborhood input. Set to wrap up in late April, the process is aimed at developing design principles to guide planning for this valuable asset.

Mark Development's proposal would insert a privately owned, high-rise urban village — with two towers, 14 and 18 stories tall — between the low-rise historic villages of Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale and create a wall of brick buildings alongside two-lane Grove Street, a designated Scenic Road. This plan is more than *double the size* of a mixed-use plan the Council approved in 2013 and that ultimately fell through. Based on earlier traffic studies, RightSize Riverside predicts this project would generate 13,800 vehicle trips a day. The group also believes the plan would limit the site's ability to become truly transit-oriented, with enough room for expanded bus and rail services.

Along with many others who oppose this proposal, RightSize Riverside is concerned not only about the adverse impact of this massive development locally, but about the *cumulative* effect of Riverside and other major projects being planned or built in Newton, including Northland's development on



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Needham Street and Mark Development's various projects along Washington Street. RightSize Riverside urges Councilors and City Hall to take a serious, realistic view of how these projects will affect quality of life and services in Newton and demand accurate traffic, school, and other data.

RightSize Riverside is also deeply concerned about timing and the City's apparent interest in a City Council vote on Riverside before the end of 2019. Why the rush? Riverside offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to turn an unsightly parking lot into an appropriately scaled home and workplace with access to open space, small businesses, public transportation, and the Charles River.

"RightSize Riverside welcomes more affordable and inclusive housing in our neighborhood, but not at the price of staggering density, traffic, noise, and congestion," says LFIA Riverside Committee Chair Randall Block. The group supports sensible, sustainable development that:

- reflects **the scale** of the Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale villages
- is **limited to traffic** that local streets and highways can bear
- provides access **to efficient and reliable** transportation
- maintains the ability to build out **future transportation** options to reduce highway congestion and pollution.
- welcomes people of **ALL** ages, backgrounds, and abilities
- creates **affordable housing**
- preserves open and usable **green space** within the development
- links to nearby **trails** for recreation and transportation
- provides indoor and outdoor **community space**
- **connects, not isolates**, Newton's close-knit communities

At the City Council's Land Use Committee meeting on March 14, 2019, numerous residents voiced alarm about the scope and scale of this proposal. RightSize Riverside also expressed willingness to work with the City, advocacy groups, developer, and other stakeholders to achieve shared goals.

Says LFIA Riverside Committee member Liz Mirabile, "A 1.5 million-square-foot development that would have the two tallest buildings on 128 and double local traffic is not the right size for Newton. We are ready to work with Mark Development and the city to bring down the scale of this project so it provides its benefits without harming two existing and vibrant neighborhoods. Our neighborhood is not against development at Riverside. But any development needs to be the **RIGHT SIZE**."