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New Balance eyeing more Brighton property, development plans

Posted by Matt Rocheleau July 26, 2011 01:27 PM

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(Courtesy: Boston Redevelopment Authority)

A slide from Monday's presentation shows areas within the study area that are both likely and unlikely to see new development within the near future.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

In an section of Brighton where New Balance owns around 23 acres assessed at a combined \$63 million, the shoe manufacturer is looking to buy more property near its headquarters on Guest Street and is working on development plans there that may be released this fall, according to a company lawyer.

Both the sought-after property and the company's development planning are located within an about 100-acre area the city's redevelopment authority is midway through studying in order to establish preferred development scenarios.

At the first meeting of a 13-member advisory group for that city study, New Balance attorney Lawrence Kaplan told a small crowd Monday night that the shoe manufacturing company hopes that between September and October it will be able to announce possible new land acquisitions around its

headquarters as well as development plans.

"We'd be happy to share our plan," Kaplan, a member of the study advisory group, said. But, "It's not quite ready yet."

He declined to provide further detail about the ongoing development planning and about which area the company is looking to purchase.

Earlier this spring, the [company acquired a large stretch](#) of commercial property adjacent to its headquarters for a combined \$26.5-million in two separate deals, according to state and city land records of properties listed under sub-entities of New Balance.

Those purchases came around one year after New Balance [unveiled its vision](#) for a \$250 million mixed-use development along 15 acres there that would feature a sports complex, hotel, park, movie theater, office buildings, and community space, along with a commuter rail station and access to the adjacent Massachusetts Turnpike.

In the week after the property purchases, Ty Hanlan, vice president of New Balance entity NB Guest Street Planning and Development LLC, [told Boston.com](#) that the company intends to develop the tract, but said the group will not "go forward with [or discuss] a concrete plan" until the city has come

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back with recommendations from the ongoing study of that area.

Developers often visit with city redevelopment officials to discuss their plans prior to officially filing them with the city for the public review process. The redevelopment authority said Tuesday New Balance has not yet approached the city agency to discuss plans.

About half of the acreage New Balance purchased in mid-March was previously under agreement for home improvement retailer Lowe's to build a store.

Several months after New Balance had announced its \$250-million development idea despite not owning the property to build it on, the [Boston Herald reported](#) the shoe company's chairman and former CEO James S. Davis was "running up a big bill to halt development of the home improvement store adjacent to his Brighton headquarters," and had "hired a team of engineers and attorneys to refute Lowe's traffic estimates."

Lowe's proposals were [denied](#) by the city's redevelopment authority last June as being "inadequate" following the city's denial of Lowe's initial plans in Sept. 2007.

After New Balance bought the land, the Newton developer that had worked with Lowe's to develop its home improvement store proposals e-mailed a statement to Boston.com.

"We are very disappointed that Lowe's Guest Street project was not approved by the City of Boston," the statement from Marathon Realty Corp. said, in part. "Unfortunately, certain influential forces aligned themselves against Lowe's and ultimately succeeded in derailing its permitting efforts."

The recent acquisitions expanded New Balance's property ownership along Guest Street to 19.4 acres assessed by the city at a combined \$58.6 million. A review of public records show the company owns an additional 1.5 acres on nearby Everett Street and 1.98 acres more on North Beacon Street.

The study's advisory group is comprised of eight residents, the directors of Brighton Main Streets and Allston Village Main Streets, the New Balance lawyer, along with representatives from two other major property owners within the study area, WGBH and Stop & Shop.

The media entity owns around 2 acres where its animated headquarters overhangs the turnpike. The grocer owns 9 acres in and around where its supermarket sits in the study zone's center.

The BRA initially dubbed the study, the "[Brighton Planning Study](#)," and now calls it the "Brighton / Guest Street Planning Study."

The city selected Sasaki Associates Inc., and its consultant team partners, Hacin + Associates and GLC Development, to design the study. The city hopes to complete the study, announced last summer, around the between by early 2012.

At Monday's meeting, Janne Corneil of Sasaki called the Guest Street corridor within the study area, "the only piece left that hasn't been worked out," development-wise in Allston-Brighton.

"There's significant capacity for new development," she said.

City redevelopment officials as well as study consultation officials also said Monday that while New Balance's development ideas will likely be a part of

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the study's discussion, the study will have a broader focus than any individual proposal. It's a process is designed to explore many possibilities in order to provide guidelines to potential area developers like New Balance.

"We're here to participate," in the study process, Kaplan, the New Balance lawyer said, adding that the study's focus "is not just on the land New Balance owns."

Two advisory group members, including resident Sal Pinchera, each said during the meeting, that "what's going to happen here is huge."

He added later that he had some concerns about the study work done so far because "Everything we hear is how to benefit tax dollars ... I didn't hear much about preserving the residential community on either side."

The advisory group discussed ways to improve railway access to the study area, which once contained two commuter rail stops along the Framingham Line, as well as the A Line.

Officials said a commuter rail stop could be added along the Framingham Line either at Everett Street, Cambridge Street or a stop near the Allston-Brighton tolls unofficially called "West Station," which Harvard University has advocated for. Only one stop could be added because of the length and acceleration rate of commuter rail trains.

The idea of establishing a lighter, faster railway, using smaller train cars or "Diesel Multiple Units" – similar to the T's subway lines – was also presented. That alternative could allow for multiple stops along the study area's northern boundary, officials said.

However, due to a lack of public funding for such projects, officials said they have been told such railway additions to the Allston-Brighton area are likely to be a decade to two decades away from being achieved.

Another topic at the meeting centered on exploring ways to improve access from the study area to the nearby Charles River Reservation, which sits north and outside of the study area. Only one percent of the study area – the Penniman Road Play Area – contains green space; the majority is zoned as a local industrial sub district.

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