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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

## New Balance seeks to build new HQ, sports complex, hotel across 14 acres in Brighton

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 2, 2012 11:24 AM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

A photo taken in March 2011, from atop a New Balance parking garage in the Guest Street complex, a view of the shoe company's current headquarters building (left) and a large adjacent and successive property -- 38-180 Guest St., which the company bought 11 months ago -- that continues down the roadway until it reaches a Stop & Shop.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

New Balance is planning a major development project across nearly 14 acres along Guest Street in Brighton that would include a new world headquarters, sports complex, boutique hotel, and up to three office buildings along with retail and restaurant space.

Saying that it hopes to create Boston's "health and wellness district," the footwear and apparel company outlined the plans yesterday in a [letter hand-delivered to city officials](#).

The project would encompass two sites neighboring the company's 10-story, decade-old headquarters. The sites are 77 Guest St., which comprises about three acres, and across the road 38-180 Guest St., which comprises about 15 acres and runs along the Massachusetts Turnpike's eastbound side.

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The development plans call for projects across 608,969 square feet or 13.98 acres of that land. Both commercial properties are currently occupied by surface parking lots and low-level warehouse buildings.

A sub-entity of New Balance, New Brighton Landing, LLC, “seeks to create an anchor for renewed activity along the Guest Street corridor, focused on job creation, health and wellness, sporting activities, public open space, and vast improvements to public infrastructure,” the letter to the Boston Redevelopment Authority said.

The project would need to go the city's review process for large projects.

Under the plans, the sports complex would house a 200-meter track and field facility, a regulation hockey arena, plus other amenities for health/wellness and sporting activity, and a boutique hotel. As many as three office buildings would be built and used by “like-minded entities that will share our vision,” according to the filing.

“Interspersed within the new development will be restaurants, and a variety of retail and service facilities, including sports-related retail,” the letter says.

The area where New Balance hopes to develop is a key section of [an about 100-acre area](#) of Brighton that the city, in conjunction with local residents and various representatives from local business stakeholders including New Balance, [has been studying](#) for the past year.

A final report for the long-term, general vision of development scenarios created through the “Brighton / Guest Street Planning Study,” process is scheduled to be released this month.

"We continue to see great opportunity for future development in the Guest Street area," New Balance spokeswoman Amy Dow said in a statement today. "As a member of the Allston-Brighton business community for more than 30 years, New Balance supports thoughtful development that benefits the community through job creation, open public space and improvements to public infrastructure."

"We believe this proposed [health and wellness] district has the unique potential to promote a healthy lifestyle through exercise and healthy eating opportunities

that build upon the Mayor's vision to make Boston the healthiest city in the country," she added. "We have actively participated in the BRA Brighton Planning Study and will continue to work closely with the BRA, the City of Boston and the local community to ensure this proposed project benefits our neighbors and our city."

Alana Olsen, executive director of Allston Village Main Streets, is one of 13 members of the Brighton planning study's advisory group that includes representation from New Balance, attorney Lawrence Kaplan, who authored the letter of intent submitted to the city this week.

"I feel like New Balance was such an active part of the study and they were such a good neighbor during that process," Olsen said. "What's in the letter is not a surprise [to those who have been involved with the planning study process]. The letter of intent really just furthers what we are doing with the study ... It's going to allow us to say, 'OK, this is New Balance's intention,' now where do we go from there."

"They are really committed to our community. I'm excited at their mention of improving existing infrastructure," she said. "There are few areas in the city left that have such huge development opportunity," she added. "I'm excited for what's going to happen in Allston and Brighton in the next 50 years."

Mark Ciommo, a native of the Allston-Brighton area he represents as District 9 City Councilor for Boston, said he's, "excited that there's going to be some proposals that will go through a rigorous community process and anxious to see and hear more of the details."

"That whole corridor has some potential for great uses for the community and for economic development," he said.

New Balance is also seeking construction of a new commuter rail station near Everett Street, although a spokeswoman [told the Globe](#) today that part of the project is still under discussion with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Many in the community, including two key neighborhood land-owners and developers: New Balance and Harvard University, have long pushed for the idea of adding a train stop along or near the section of Brighton where the shoe company plans to develop

Company plans to develop.

The Framingham Line commuter rail tracks run adjacent to the stretch to where the shoe company wants to build its new complex and there were once two stops in Allston-Brighton along that railway.

However, due to scarce public funding, reviving direct railway access to the Allston-Brighton area without major private financial support is likely to be a decade to two decades away from being achieved, city development officials said at meetings last year.

Still, "That would be such a great benefit for our neighborhood to have a commuter rail stop in Allston-Brighton," Ciommo said. "For so many years, it's run right through our community and we've just had it pass by us multiple times a day."

New Balance did not disclose the size, height or design of the planned new buildings, and a spokeswoman for the company declined to provide the Globe with a cost estimate for its new development proposal.

The company will spend the next several months meeting with community groups and city officials to craft a more detailed vision for the site, [the Globe reported today](#). New Balance will need several permits from the Boston Redevelopment Authority and other city agencies before it can start construction.

### **Company's acquisition of properties for proposed complex**

The development plan New Balance outlined this week comes two years after the company [publicly unveiled a similar vision](#) for that area – despite not owning the property to build it on and that another company, Lowe's, was going through the city's review process after it had filed plans to build a home improvement store there.

Announced in Feb. 2010, New Balance's plan called 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.

Two months after New Balance had broadcast that development idea [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 [proposal was denied](#) two months later by the city's redevelopment authority as being "inadequate" following the city's denial of Lowe's initial plans in Sept. 2007.

In moves that grew the company's landholdings along Guest Street five-fold within seven months, New Balance purchased the commercial properties, including the large area Lowe's wanted to develop on, spending a total of \$33.8-million in three separate deals – [two last March](#) and the [third in October](#).

Shortly after New Balance bought 38-40 and 180 Guest St. in March, the Newton developer that had worked with Lowe's to draft its home improvement store proposals to be built on part of those properties 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 38-40 Guest St. property sold for \$21,250,000 in March. It is currently home to the vacant Barry Controls and Briggs New York warehouse buildings and parking lots.

The 180 Guest St. property sold for \$5,350,000 in March. It is adjacent to a Stop & Shop and is home to the Massachusetts Electric Construction Company Industrial headquarters. The national electric contractor, founded locally in 1928, divided into two districts in 2007. MEC Industrial is based in Brighton and MEC Transportation is headquartered in Irving, Texas. Company officials did not return calls seeking comment.

The 77 Guest St. property sold for \$7.3 million in October. Across from a five-story parking garage New Balance owns at the corner of Guest and Life streets, the site is presently occupied by low-level warehouse buildings.

Counting its existing headquarters and a five-story parking garage, New

Balance's 22.4 acres of property along Guest Street were assessed by the city in 2011 at a combined \$60.5 million. An additional property on nearby Everett Street and another on North Beacon Street put the company's total land neighborhood footprint at 26 acres assessed by the city in 2011 at a combined \$65 million.

The [Globe](#) reported today, citing New Balance's website, the sneaker company employs more than 4,000 people around the globe and reported 2010 worldwide sales of \$1.78 billion.

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