

# Allston Continues its Rise, Stacks of Projects Coming Down The Pike

BY MIKE HOBAN

**A**LLSTON — The neighborhood of Allston has undergone multiple transformations over the last century-and-a-half. From a community once sustained by railroad and livestock operations to one of industrial uses and auto showrooms, populated by a combination of working-class families, students, and later artists, the neighborhood is about to see massive commercial and residential redevelopment - driven in part by Boston's rapidly expanding life science industry.



Jim Halliday

The redevelopment of the neighborhood was the subject of a NAIOP Massachusetts program entitled, "Allston On The Rise", which gathered representatives from five development teams that will deliver over a million square feet of lab/office space, 1,700 mixed-income housing units, and a substantial amount of retail and greenspace to Lower Allston, with much of it being built along the Mass Pike.

The program featured Jim Halliday, president of NB (New Balance) Development Group, whose construction of the Boston Landing commuter rail stop opened the door to further commercial development in the community; Risa Meyers, project manager for Allston Yards, the 1.23 million square foot project being developed by New England Development; Dave Bracken, CEO of Bracken Development, which is developing the mixed-use 119 Braintree Street project in partnership with the Frank family; Morgan Pierson, director of development for Berkeley Investments, which is proposing an 800,000 square foot plan that will transform the long-vacant parcel at 176 Lincoln St. into a mixed-use residential/lab/office complex; and Jason Tilley, VP of development for The Davis Companies, who will add over 600 housing units, a hotel, and retail at the site of the former Skating Club of Boston at 1240 Soldiers Field Road.

Michael Buckley, principal at Avison

Young and current NAIOP program chair, gave a brief background and history of Allston (including a tidbit that Allston was once home to the Charles River Speedway harness racing track in the first half of the 20th century) before handing the reins over to Halliday. New Balance had established its global headquarters adjacent to

WGBH on the Allston-Brighton border in 1976, but the transformation of the adjacent industrial parcels into what is now known as Boston Landing didn't begin in earnest until 2011 when New Balance acquired the properties for \$26.5 million. They broke ground on their new global

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## Allston On The Rise

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headquarters in 2013, and in a particularly innovative move, anchored two of their office/lab buildings with practice facilities for the Boston Bruins (2016 occupancy) and Boston Celtics (2018).

“In evaluating the economics of these deals outside of the real estate, there was a great brand value connection that helped Jim Davis and New Balance absorb some of the down economics of creating these deals that really weren’t market rents at the time with the Bruins and the Celtics,” said Halliday. The lab and office space at the practice facilities were soon filled by life science tenants and Bose, which took 100,000 square feet at the Celtics location, and both buildings are now fully leased.

“

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”

DAVE BRACKEN

*CEO of Bracken Development*

New Balance added a 295-unit apartment building and a 175-key hotel, and next spring will complete a world-class track and field facility, complete with a 3,500 seat music performance venue that Halliday describes as “the jewel of what we’re doing here. It’s a legacy project that’s near and dear to (former CEO and current chairman) Jim Davis, and it’s a brand value project.”

But the real value for developers now building their projects in Lower Allston came in the form of the \$20-million Boston Landing Commuter Rail Station on the Framingham/Worcester Line. Privately financed by New Balance in a public-private partnership with the state, the station was opened in May of 2017, unlocking devel-



The Track at Newbalance (Rendering)



176 Lincoln St.

opment and transit opportunities within the Allston-Brighton market.

“The MBTA Commuter Rail stop has transformed not only 119 Braintree Street but the overall community as well because this area had been surrounded by infrastructure, trains and the Mass Pike, but there was no real access,” said Bracken. “So when you had the commuter rail platform come in, it was a huge transformation for the neighborhood.” Early ridership was anticipated to be light, but Bracken added that projections have been surpassed by threefold. The 119 Braintree Street development will raze the existing structure and replace it with a 401,000-square foot office and lab building, along with 97

mixed-income apartments (20% affordable), which also includes artists space. The project will also provide a new connection to the commuter rail platform that ties into the Everett St. Bridge, and by setting the building back 30 feet from Braintree St., the developers will create a walkable plaza in front of the entrance.

A literal stone’s throw from 119 Braintree, Allston Yards is a multi-phased, 1.23 million square foot redevelopment of the current Stop & Shop Plaza and its extensive parking lots. In 2012 the state produced a planning study for the area which recommended developing a walkable neighborhood with substantial open

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# Allston On The Rise

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space, centered around transit-oriented development principles. “We really wanted to continue to invest in the Allston community by realizing the goals of the planning study and to build off the strong infrastructure already in place set in motion by Boston Landing and New Balance with the construction of the commuter rail station,” said Meyers.

Phase One will deliver a new 67,000-square-foot flagship, state-of-the-art Stop & Shop supermarket, and one-acre community green. When complete, the four-building project will feature up to 868 apartment and condominium residences, 352,000 square feet of Class-A office/research space, 50,000 square feet of restaurant/retail space, up to 1,300 parking spaces on the 10.6-acre site, and include 10,000 square feet of community and/or art uses located at 60 Everett St.

At the site of the former Skating Club of Boston, The Davis Companies has scaled back their initial proposal to include approximately 500 apartments, 100 condos, a 175-key hotel, 14,500 square feet of retail, and 405 parking spaces. The firm is also working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to replace the existing dilapidated bridge over Soldiers Field Road to the Charles River with a 12-14 foot wide pedestrian bridge. The centerpiece of the development will be a 1.5-acre park/courtyard of green space facing Western Ave. “We’re really trying to find a way to invite that 18-hour environment (to this development)



1240 Soldiers Field Road (Rendering)

as Allston continues to grow into its next phase,” said Tilley. “By developing the residential component of this (wave of redevelopment), we really see ourselves as a complement to the life sciences and commercial development.”

And at long last, 176 Lincoln St., which runs parallel to the Mass Pike, may finally see some life at the Boston Tech Center (which never materialized) site after lying dormant for nearly 30 years. Berkeley Investments filed a proposal with the BPDA in December to construct an “innovation village” consisting of two lab/office buildings totaling 700,000 square feet of lab-ready office space along with 20,000 square feet of retail space and 300 residential units. All of the parking will be underground, which will allow Berkeley to include two acres of open space (that will include performance stages) on the

5.2-acre parcel. And given Allston’s reputation as an arts and music community, Pierson said that Berkeley and Harvard (from whom Berkeley is leasing the land) are building out a new space for the non-profit Artisan’s Asylum in a building adjacent to 176 Lincoln. “Harvard has played a big role in (the incorporation of arts elements) and has contributed to this really strong arts community,” said Pierson. The Artisan’s Asylum currently occupies a 40,000 square foot space in Somerville and is one of the largest maker spaces in the world.

While none of the projects has yet broken ground, there is plenty of construction underway in the Allston and Brighton neighborhoods – particularly multifamily projects – as the neighborhood of Allston begins its latest transformation. ■

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