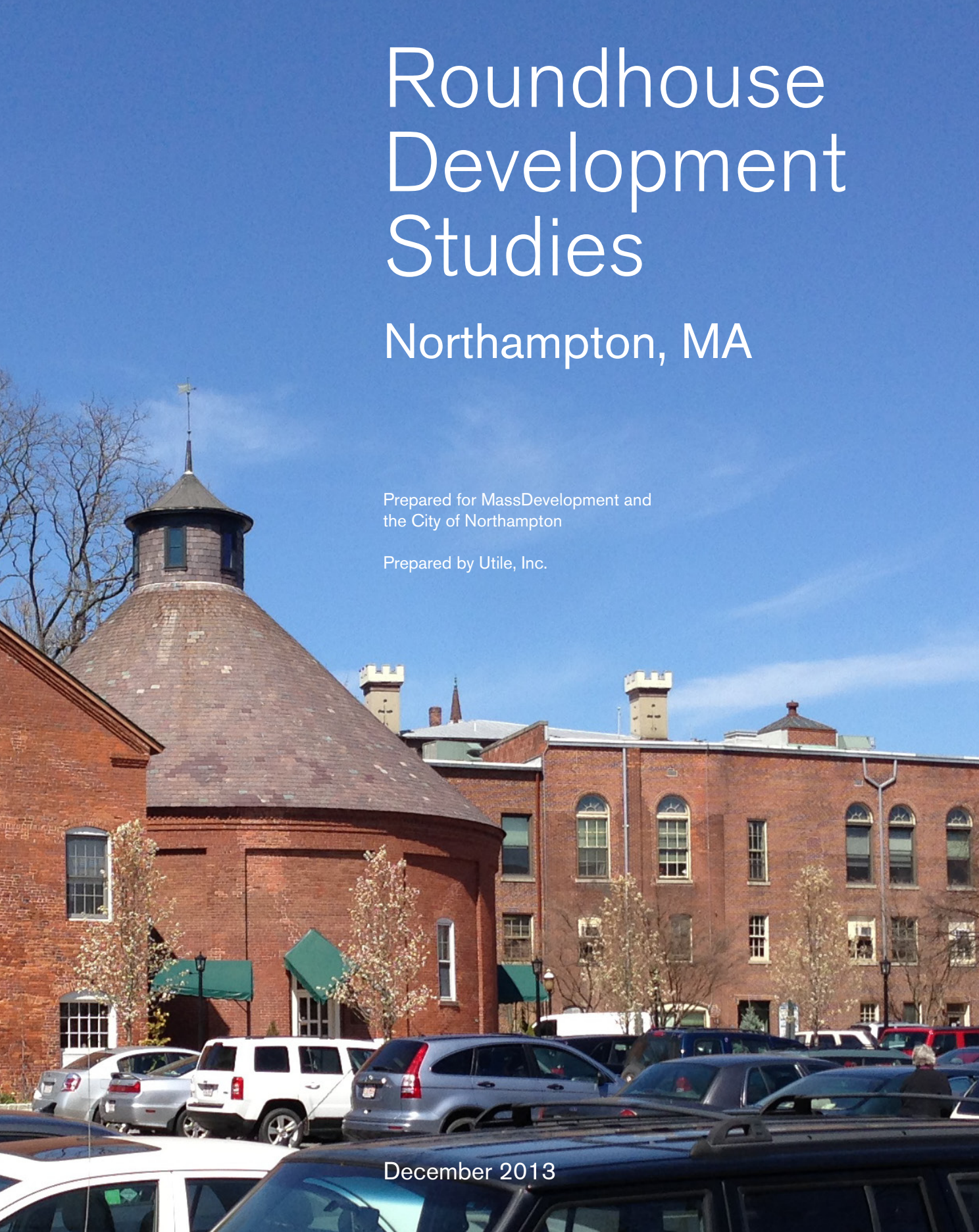
Roundhouse Development Studies

Northampton, MA

Prepared for MassDevelopment and the City of Northampton

Prepared by Utile, Inc.



December 2013

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Executive Summary

MassDevelopment, and their consultant Utile, have recommended to the Mayor of Northampton that additional analysis be done to better understand the feasibility and financing approach for a two building residential development of approximately forty-five to sixty (45-60) units, sitting on top of a two-level parking garage of approximately one-hundred-twenty (120) spaces.

The Roundhouse lot occupies a central location in Downtown Northampton.

The new parking garage provides parking displaced by the development project, parking for the residential development, and creates a new "ground level" for the residential buildings that is co-planar with Pulaski Park. Preliminary financial analysis by MassDevelopment, of this development scenario indicates that feasibility is marginal at best and the likelihood of attracting many developers to bid on the project is low at this time.

Recommended Additional Analysis

Analysis Step 1 – Determine strategy to finance the cost of the replacement parking

For the project to be viable, and thus warrant the disposition of the City-owned parcel, the City will need to identify financing sources to bridge the gap between the cost of the residential development and the cost of building replacement parking for the municipal parking lot and the Roundhouse. It is not realistic to expect a private developer to internally subsidize the cost of the parking not associated with the development through the revenue yielded by the development.

Analysis Step 2 – Refine development approach to inform development guidelines for the RFP

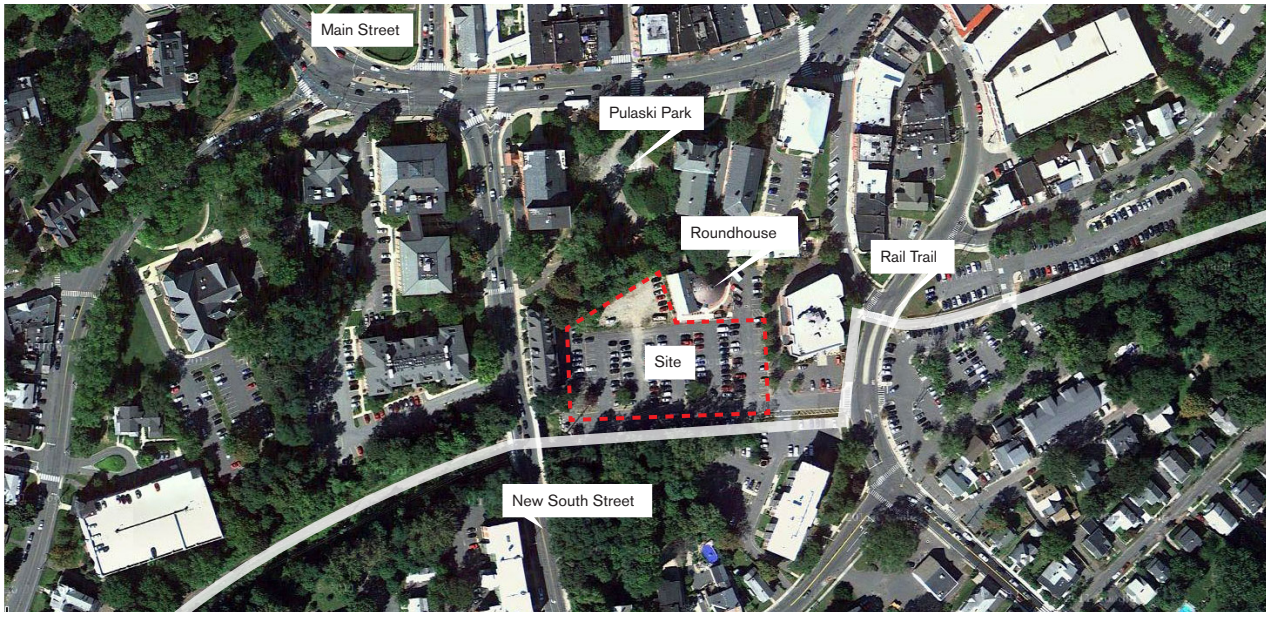
If a financing approach is identified, thus providing confidence that the City should prepare a developer Request-for-Proposals (RFP), MassDevelopment and Utile also recommend that a second round of urban design work be done to fine-tune the development guidelines that should be included as part of the RFP package. Several comments made during the meeting of the Ad Hoc Roundhouse Lot Development Advisory Committee, which was created by the Mayor, and the subsequent public meeting should be addressed (see page 28), including the need to treat the bikeway and parking lot sides of the development as "fronts" too.

Background

The Mayor of the City of Northampton asked MassDevelopment for technical assistance to study potential redevelopment scenarios for the municipal parking lot adjacent to the historic Roundhouse and down the hill from Pulaski Park, an important public space along Northampton's Main Street. The site had previously been offered for sale by the City in 2006. That RFP process resulted in a controversial final development plan for a 112-room Hilton Garden Inn and associated parking garage.

The City ultimately cancelled the land sale in 2010 after the economically-challenged hotel project failed to secure a required performance bond. A subsequent lawsuit by the developer was resolved last year; thus providing the City with an opportunity to reboot the disposition process—this time with more considered public input and a pre-development study that would look more closely at the relationship between financing mechanisms, the current appetite of the real estate market, and the public benefits that might be funded through a private real estate development.

The Mayor of Northampton approved MassDevelopment's recommendation that Utile, a Boston-based architecture and planning firm, be engaged to both do the study and lead the public discussion. (Utile is one of several on-call urban design consultants under contract with MassDevelopment.)

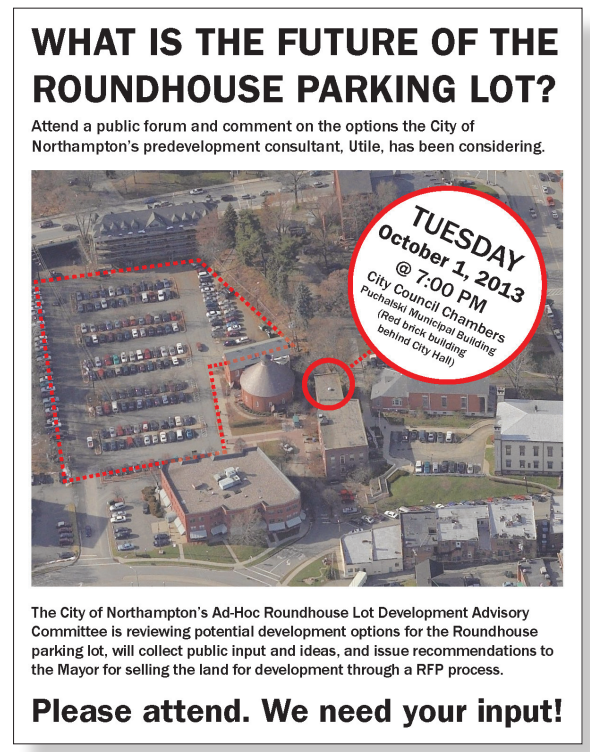


Methodology

Early Community Engagement

Once retained by MassDevelopment and the City, Utile recommended a process that started with a series of meetings with key stakeholders that both had a history with the previous process and included a range of interests. As a result, the Mayor enlisted a task force that included people with arts and culture backgrounds and interests, local architects and developers, Downtown merchants, and engaged community members that were respected by a relatively wide bandwidth of the City.[1] Meetings with this group identified the problems of the Hilton Garden scheme, provided insights about preferred uses (housing was mentioned by the majority of the participants), and stressed that the proposed redesign of Pulaksi Park should impact thinking about the future of the Roundhouse site.

1 Joel Russell (land use attorney, planning consultant), Gordon Thorne (Thorne's Market, A.P.E. artist gallery, visual artist), Michael Kusek (marketing coordinator for artists and performers), Peter Frothingham (Architect), Jordi Herold (former manager and booker of Iron Horse music venues, owner of Icarus Wheaten & Finch), Mary Kasper (former Northampton Arts council staffer, former Mayoral Chief of Staff, textile artist)



The public meeting was announced by flyers and postings on the City's website.

Meeting Dates

Community Task Force:
May 21, 2013

Advisory Committee:
September 3, 2013

Public Forum:
October 1, 2013

Testing Design Scenarios by Starting with the Pragmatics of Development

Rather than launch an open-ended visioning process, Utile and MassDevelopment recommended a process that would take into consideration key development issues early in the process.

❶ Parking

Starting with the requirements of the 2005 City Council land disposition order, the following replacement parking spaces needed to be accommodated:

- 182 public parking spaces in structured garage and reconfigured parking lot (same as current count)
- 22 dedicated replacement Roundhouse parking spaces
- In addition, MassDevelopment and Utile recommended the follow parking ratios for new construction development:
- 1 parking spaces/unit for residential unit
- 2 parking spaces/1,000 gross square feet for office space

Rather than see the required parking as a negative, this became an opportunity to use structured parking to raise the ground level of the development to the level of Pulaski Park, which is roughly twenty feet (20 ft.) higher than the existing parking lot.

In order to make the structured parking as efficient as possible (to minimize the cost of each parking space), a typical two-bay garage was tested with each garage sized at sixty feet (60 ft.) wide. With the template for a garage in place, Utile positioned the garage so that it was comfortably sited relative to the existing apartment building on New South Street and the Roundhouse.

❷ Defining the Boundaries of the Development Site

Early scenarios assumed that the northern boundary of the development site (as a subset of the City-owned property) was the same as the last disposition process. After testing the existing boundaries—which resulted in a parking garage with difficult-to-plan angles and a large amount of fill that would need to be brought to the site—Utile recommended straightening out the northern development boundary to balance the cut-and-fill and allow for a more efficient garage with completely orthogonal geometries.

❸ Downtown Residential Makes the Most Sense

Based on the feedback from stakeholders and perspectives on the current and likely future real estate market provided by MassDevelopment, downtown residential, with some active uses facing Pulaski Park, was chosen for the initial test-fit scenarios.

Pulaski Park, as it exists today, has no clear boundary at its southern edge.

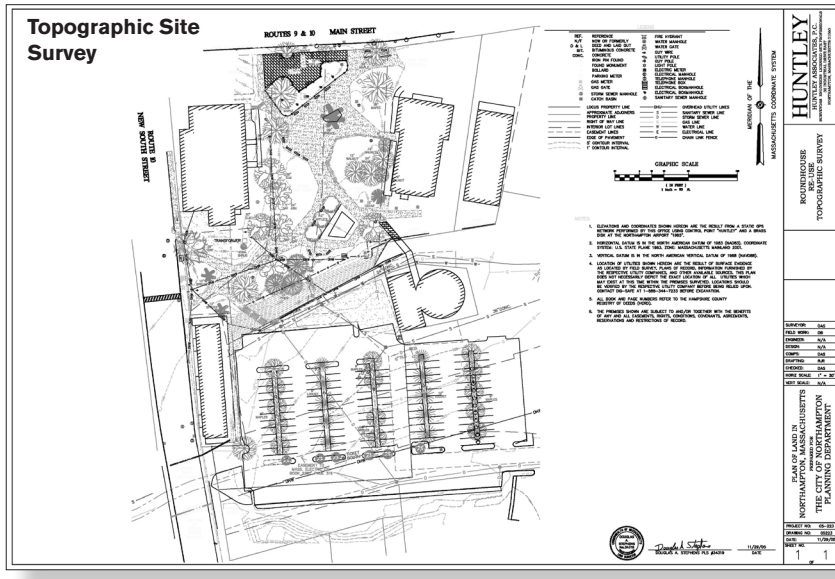
A steep grade change seperates Pulaski Park and the Roundhouse parking lot.

The existing Roundhouse parking lot is a combination of formal and informal spaces.

❹ Backing into Residential Development Scenarios by Starting with the Parking Numbers

For pragmatic, but not for philosophical reasons,[2] Utile started each development scenario by understanding the yield of residential units by working backwards from a) the total capacity of an efficient two-level garage and b) the number of spaces that need to be dedicated in the garage for replacement parking. The remaining spaces could then be dedicated to a residential component of a new development at 1 space per unit (see page 8 for additional detail about the parking assumptions).

Existing Parking	
Public metered parking spaces	182
Round House parking spaces	22



2 At the public meeting, participants raised questions about the process because it foregrounded the need to meet parking ratios for potential development sites. The methodology described above is not meant to be a prioritized list of issues—from an urban design, cultural, and/or social standpoint—but rather a process to arrive at realistic development scenarios that can be tested and discussed before the market is tested with a Request for Proposals issued by the City.

Testing Scenarios: An Iterative Process

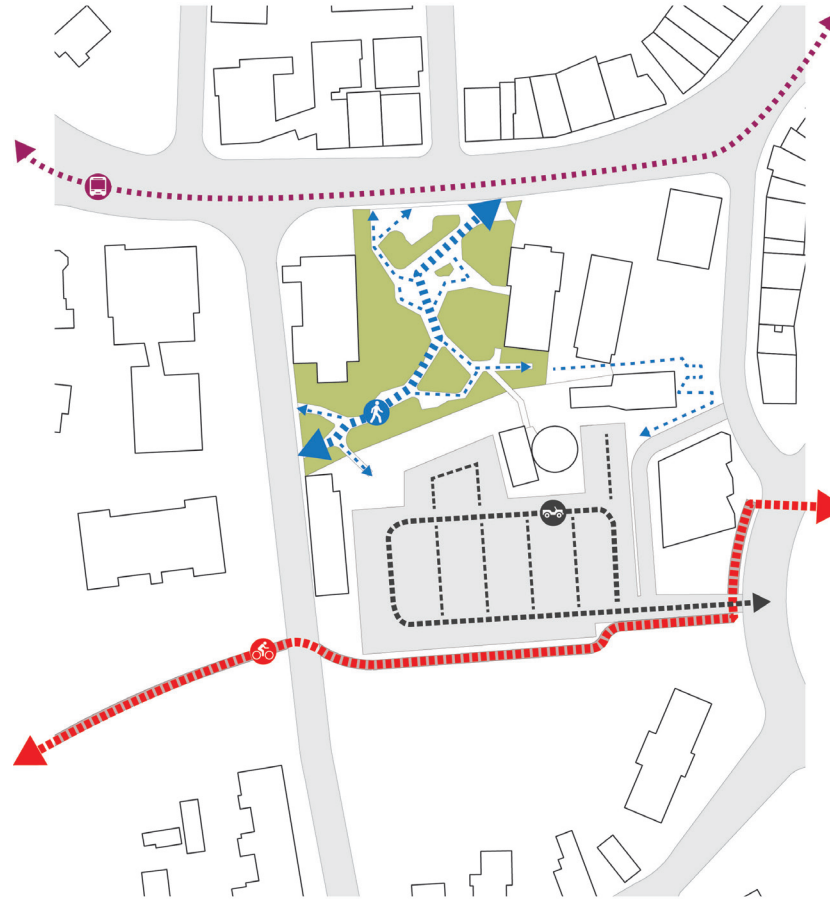
As mentioned, Utile started testing scenarios by testing a parking structure and a residential building that met the northern development parcel boundary defined in last disposition process and with the number of units yielded by backing out of the parking analysis (see page 8-9).

After reviewing the initial scenario, a series of iterative steps were made leading to the recommended scheme. The criteria and resulting program of each scheme is identified below. In addition to following the thread of a highest-and-best residential development, Utile also tested an office scheme. Given the market requirements for parking, MassDevelopment and Utile felt the resulting office scheme was not feasible and, given the increased number of parking spaces required, a non-starter from an urban design standpoint.

All of the scenarios were designed to respond specifically to the current plan for the redesign of Pulaski Park, including the alignment of pathways proposed by the landscape architect. In addition, the scenarios include a new bicycle connection between New South Street and the Manhan Rail Trail bikeway and a new broad set of stairs that connect the parking garage and remaining municipal parking lot with Pulaski Park at a location that is logical within the overall plan.

The Roundhouse parking lot is seperated from Pulaski Park, by a large topographical change and sparse landscaping.

Pulaski Park in its current form, is comprised of a series of circuitous pathways with intermittent landscape zones. Its configuration lacks direct connectivity from the Roundhouse parking lot and Main Street. Pedestrian circulation currently exists, via a steep staircase to the west and an indirect pathway to the east.



Existing Circulation

Development Scenarios

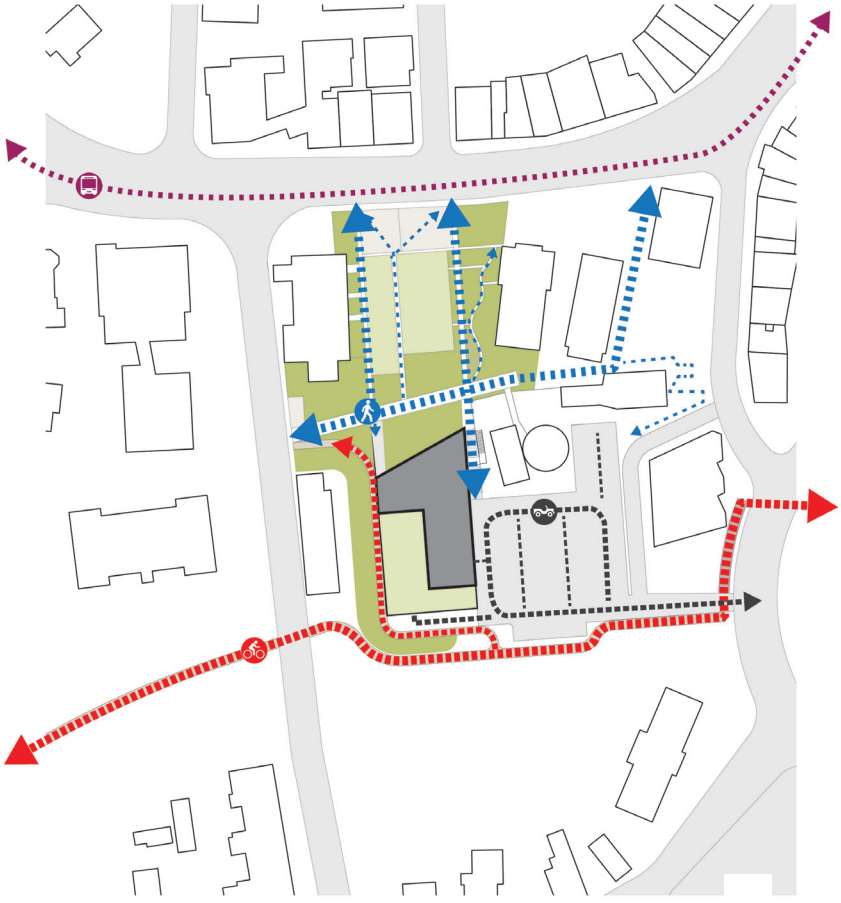
Residential Scenario 1

The first residential scenario was tested within the development boundaries of the last disposition process, resulting in a garage with an inefficient layout. In addition, the geometry of the existing development boundary line requires off-site fill to bring Pulaski Park to the building, and a set-back above the park-facing community space to create an efficient plan layout for the residential floors above.

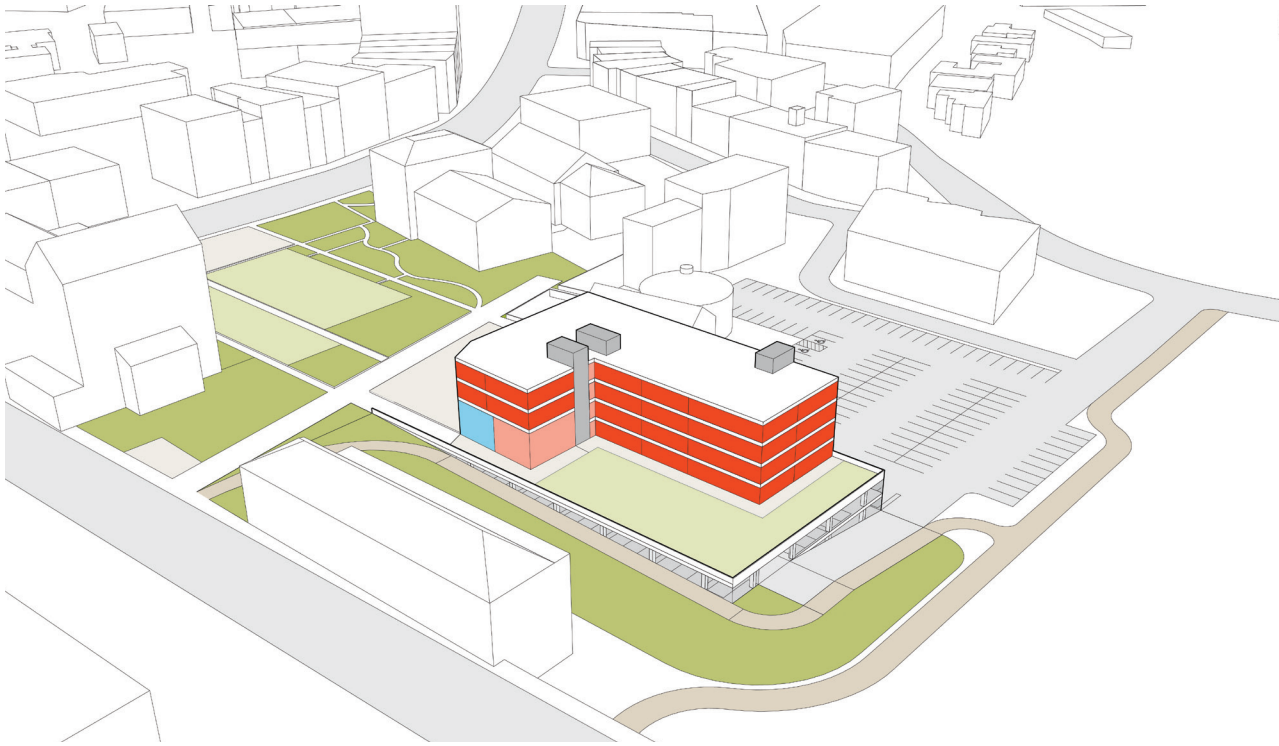
Residential Scenario 1 Facts

Replacement public metered parking spaces	126
Replacement public covered metered parking spaces	56
Replacement Round House covered parking spaces	22
Additional parking spaces	36
Residential units	36
GSF Gallery, community, or retail space	5,000

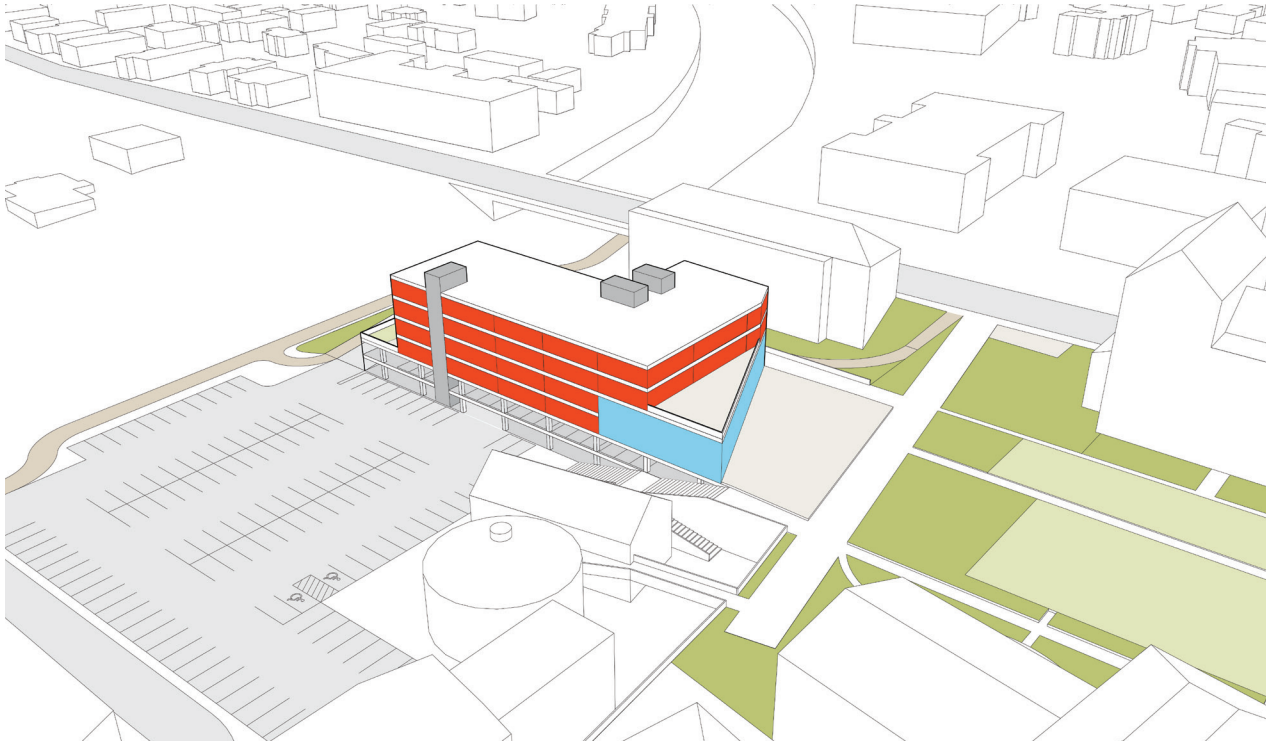
Residential
Residential Circulation
Gallery, community, or retail



Proposed Circulation

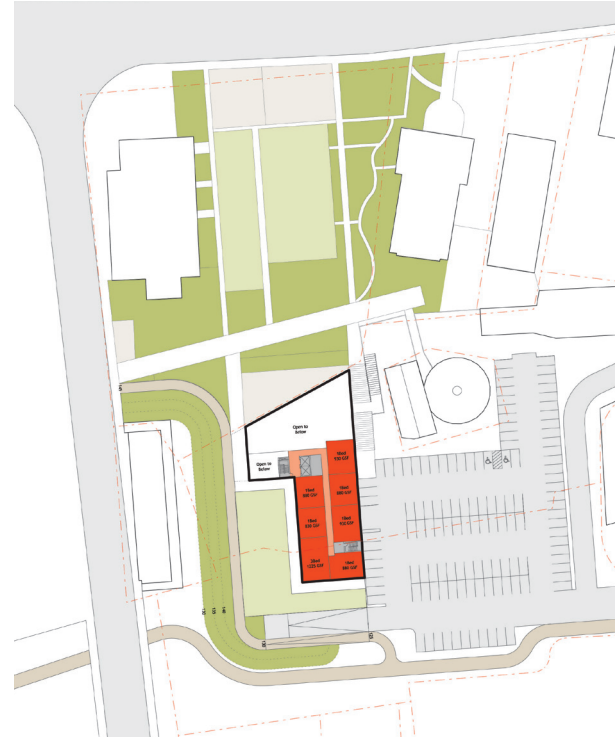


Aerial View - Looking Northeast

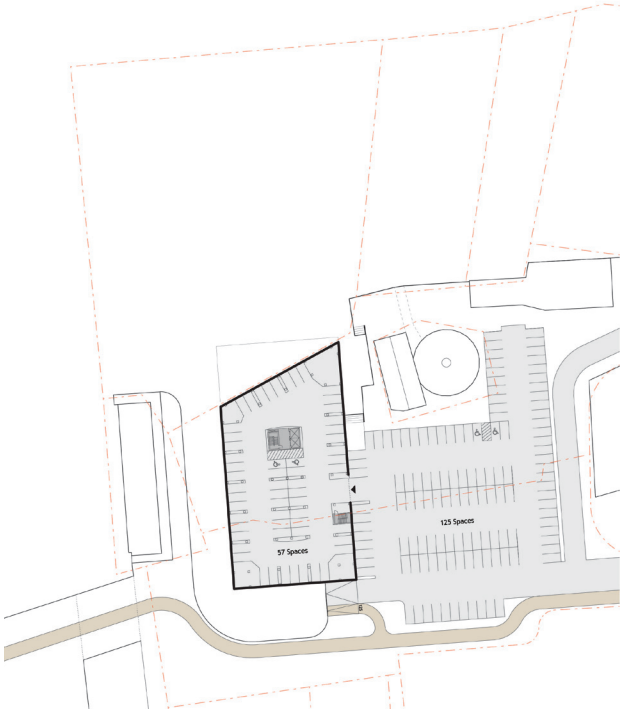


Aerial View - Looking Southwest

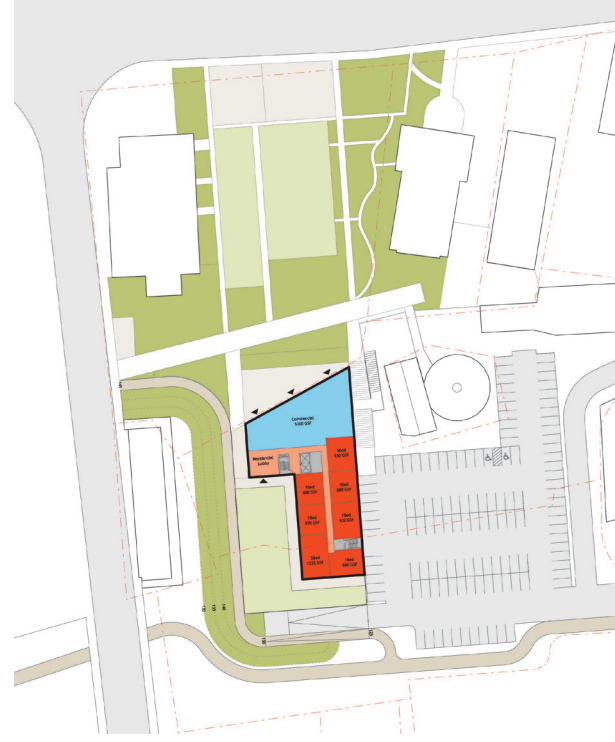
P2 - Parking Level 2



2 - Second Floor

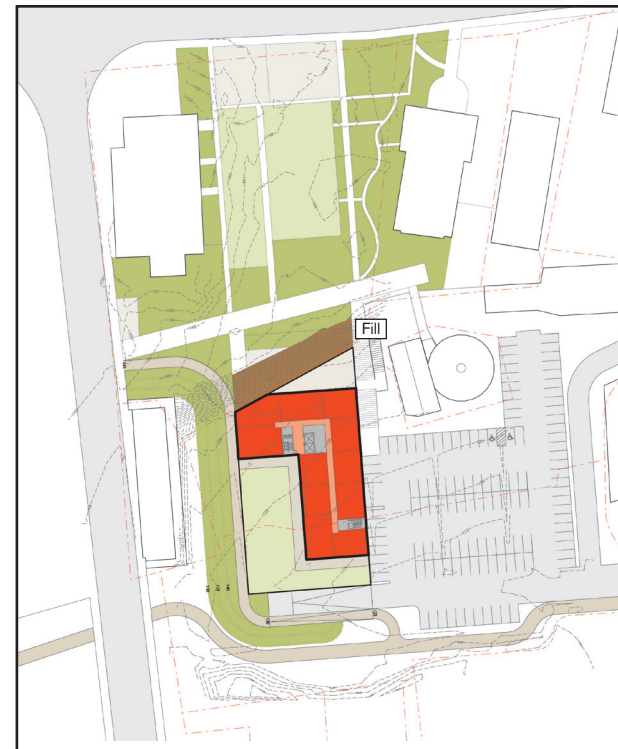


P1 - Parking Level 1



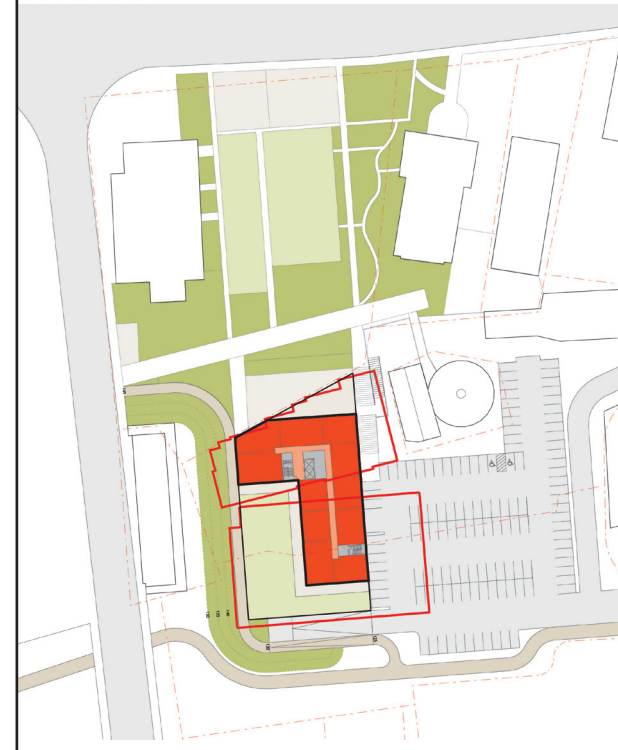
1 - First Floor

4 - Fourth Floor



Cut and Fill - Required cut and fill to meet existing park grade

3 - Third Floor



Comparison - Test-fit compared to previous hotel

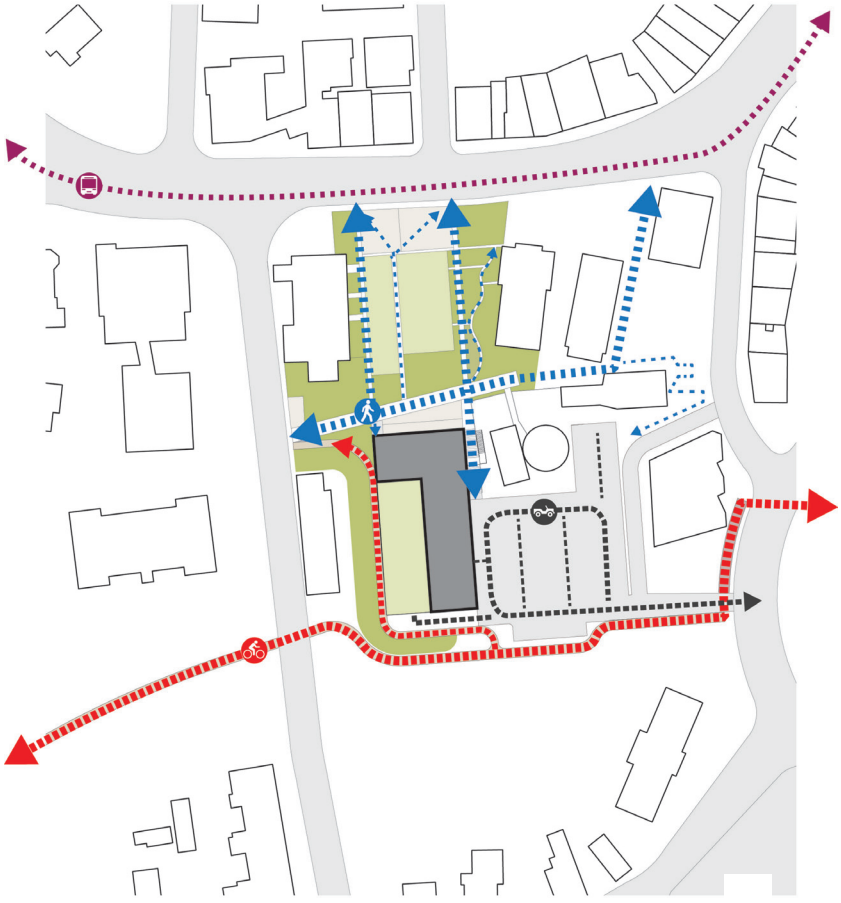
Residential Scenario 2

In response to Residential Scenario 1, the second scheme straightened out the northern boundary of the development area to create a much more efficient garage, yielding more residential parking spaces and thus more residential units above. The residential component of the scenario "spends" all of the available parking spaces, yielding the largest of all of the scenarios.

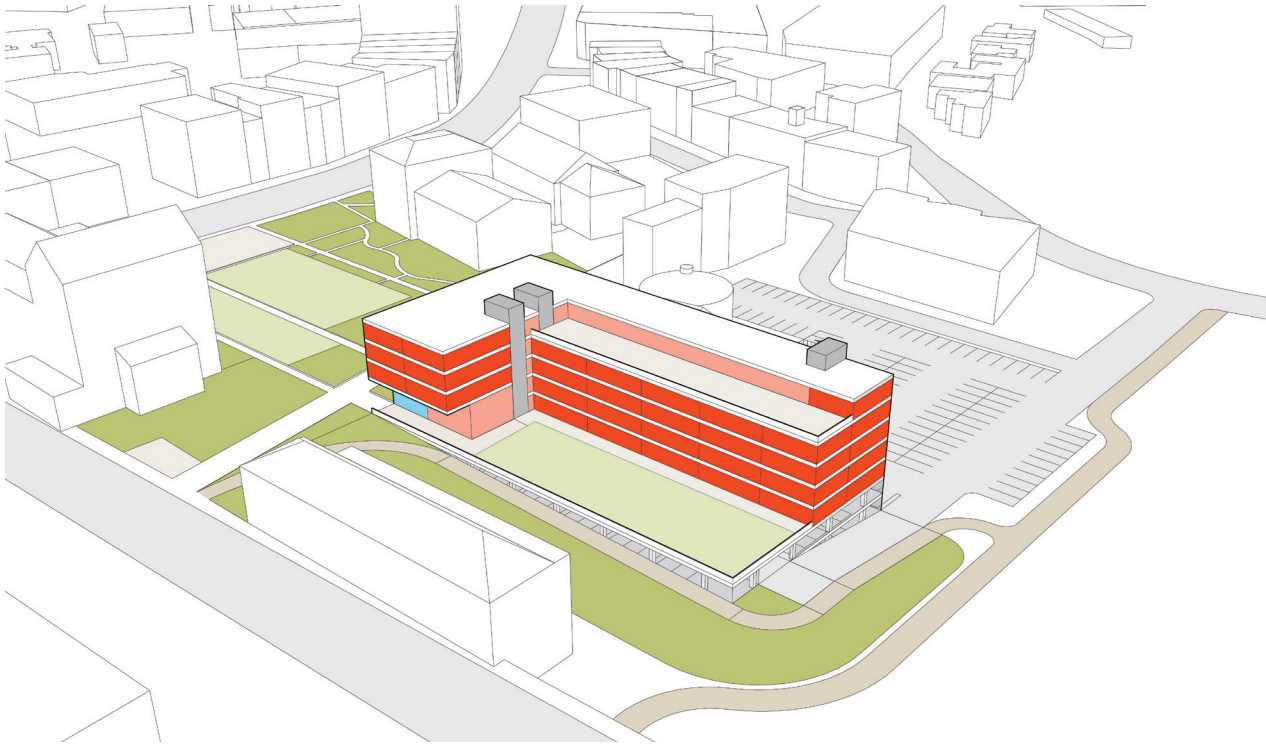
Residential Scenario 2 Facts

Replacement public metered parking spaces	126
Replacement public covered metered parking spaces	56
Replacement Round House covered parking spaces	22
Additional parking spaces	62
Residential units	62
GSF Gallery, community, or retail space	3,000

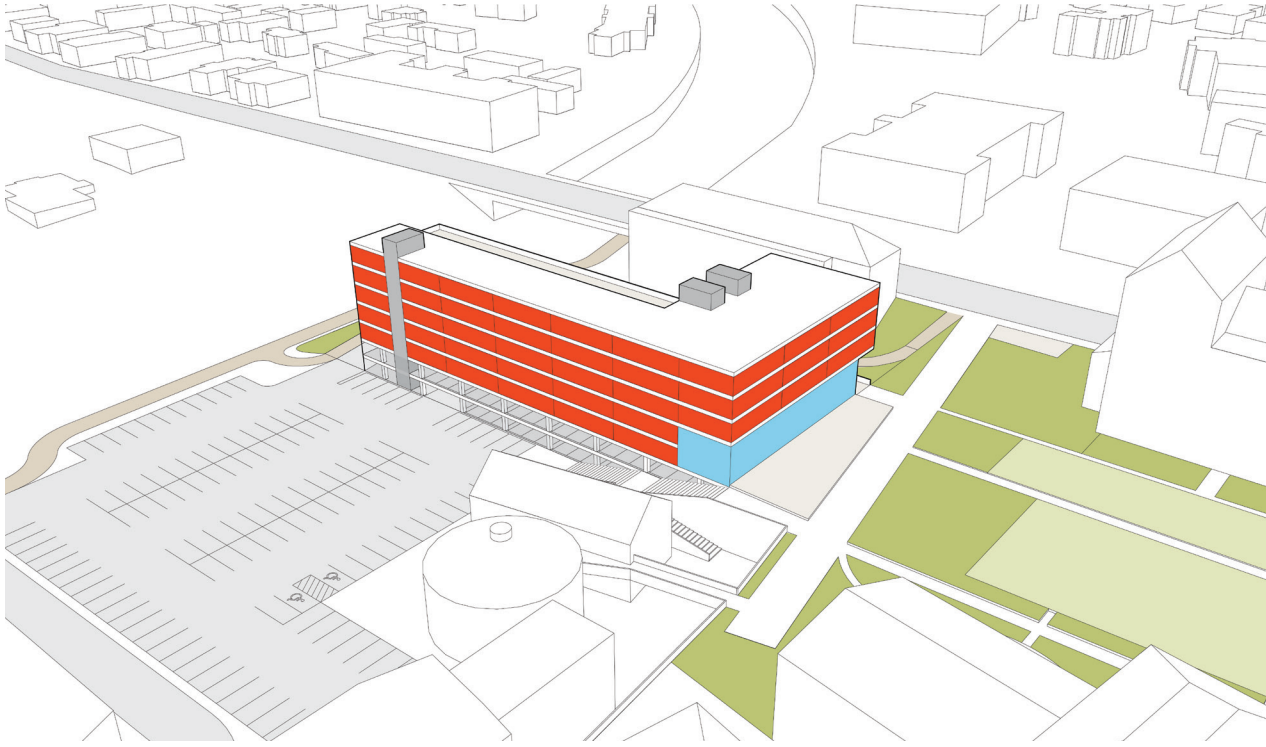
Residential
Residential Circulation
Gallery, community, or retail



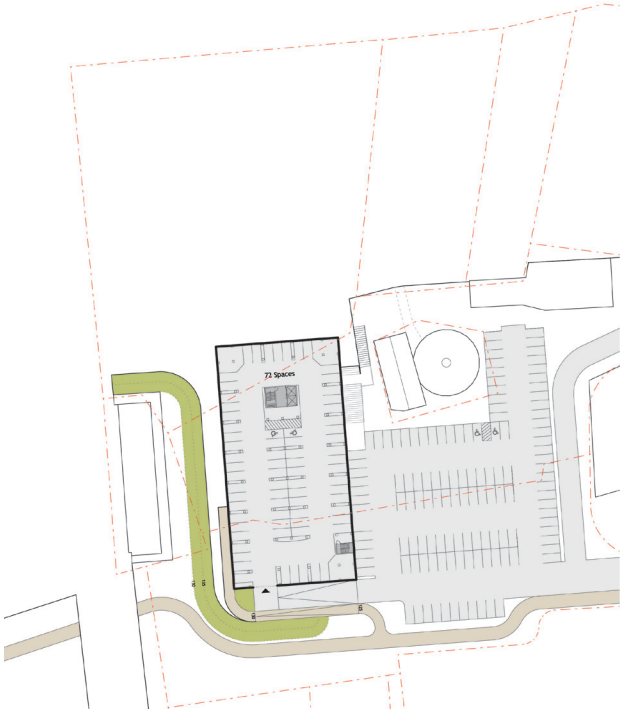
Proposed Circulation



Aerial View - Looking Northeast

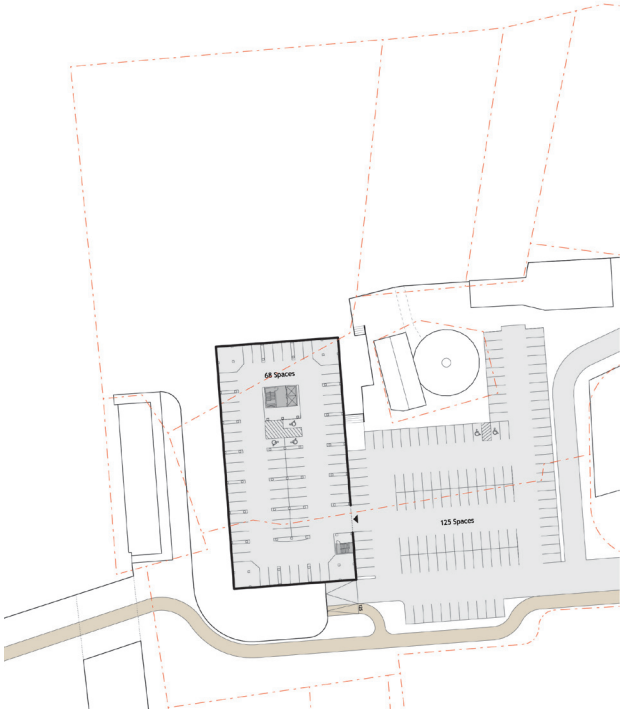


Aerial View - Looking Southwest

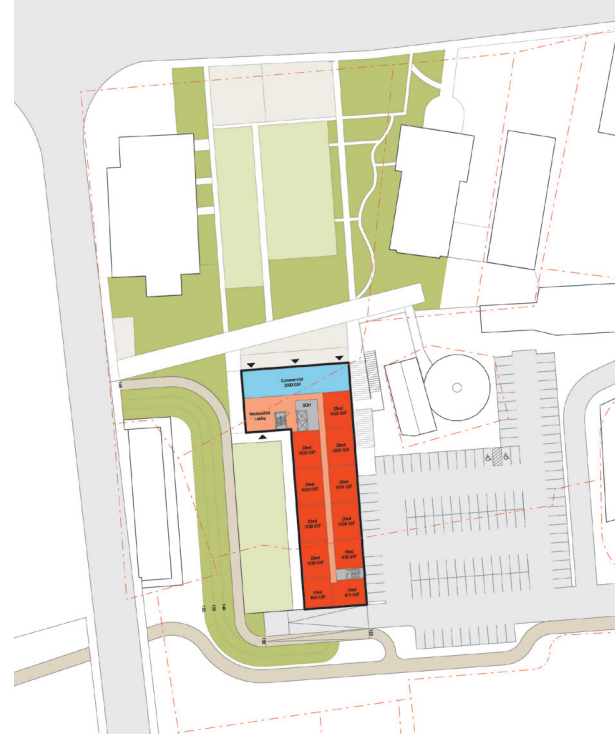


P2 - Parking Level 2

2 - Second Floor

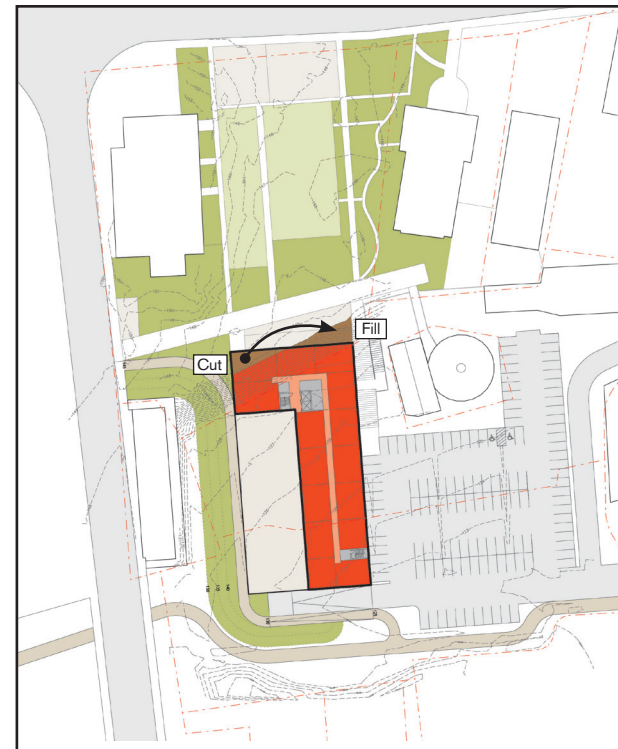


P1 - Parking Level 1



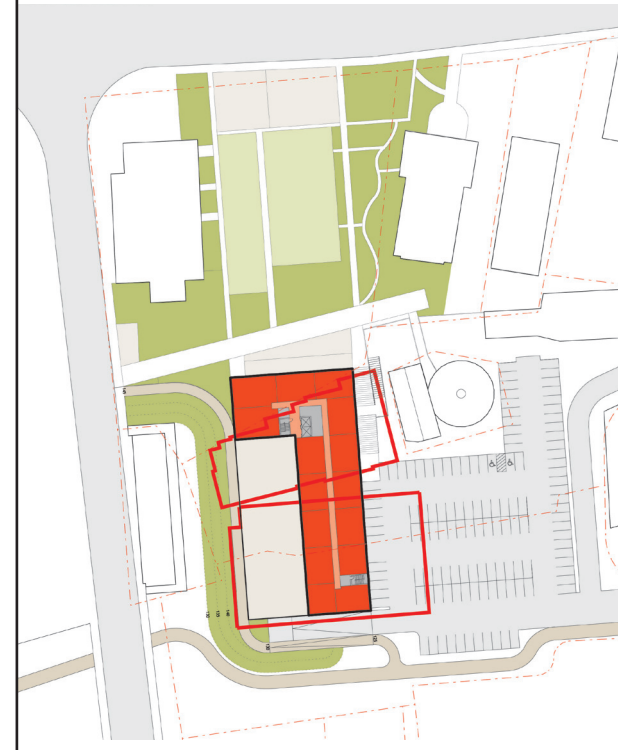
1 - First Floor

5 - Fifth Floor



Cut and Fill - Required cut and fill to meet existing park grade

3, 4 - Third and Fourth Floor



Comparison - Test-fit compared to previous hotel

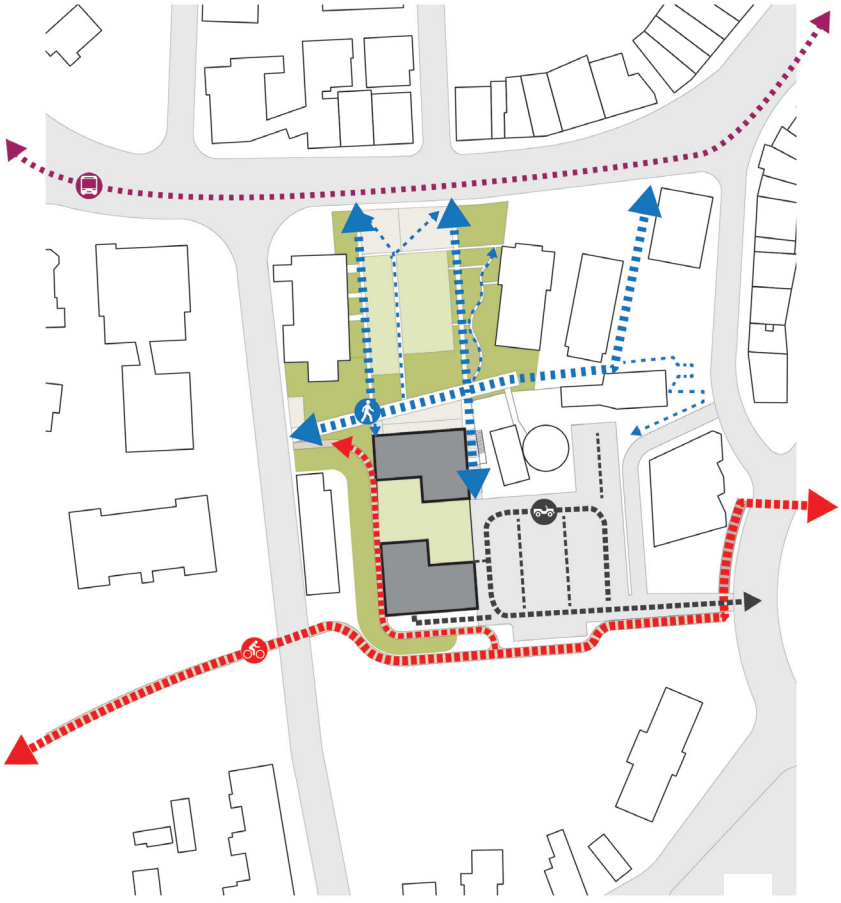
Residential Scenario 3

The unbroken length of Scenario 2, especially facing the parking lot, was considered out of scale with the existing buildings. In addition, the scheme blocked through-views from the apartment building towards the east. As a result, Utile tested a scheme that broke the development into two separate masses that better relate to the existing urban context and maintain views from the balconies of the adjacent apartment building.

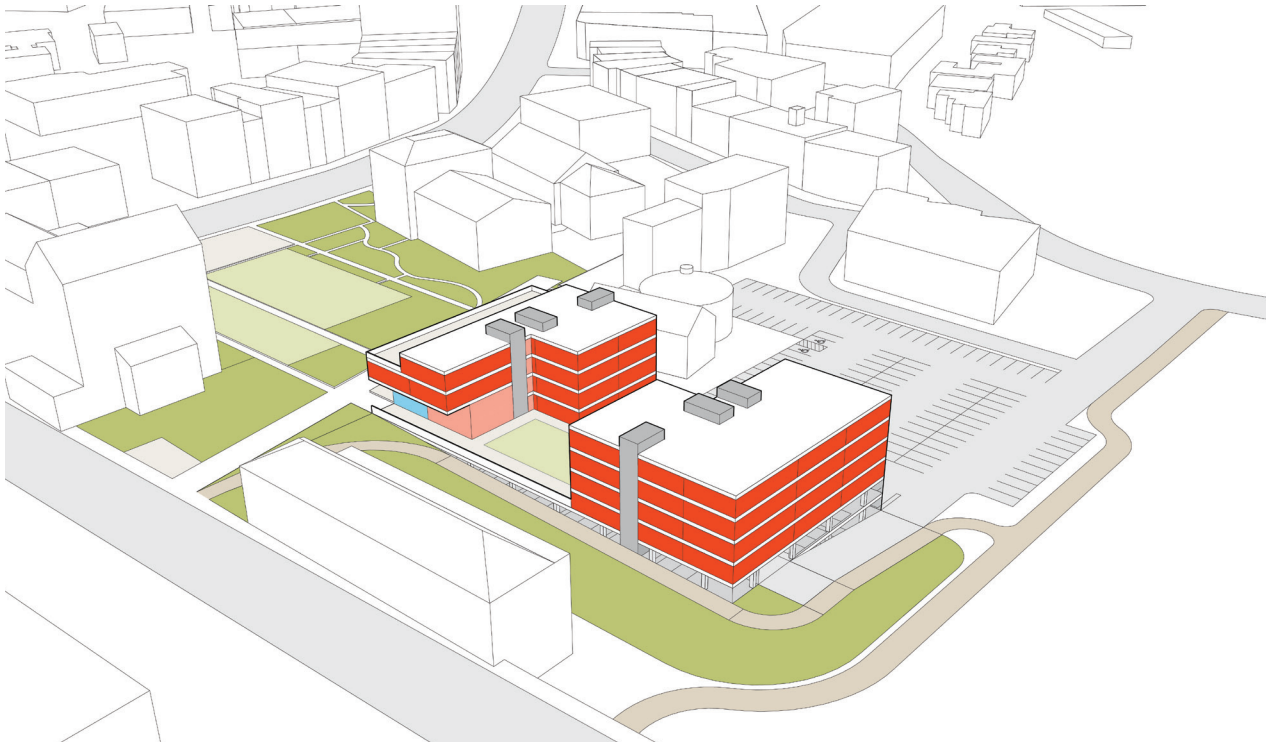
Residential Scenario 3 Facts

Replacement public metered parking spaces	126
Replacement public covered metered parking spaces	56
Replacement Round House covered parking spaces	22
Additional parking spaces	44
Residential units	44
GSF Gallery, community, or retail space	3,000

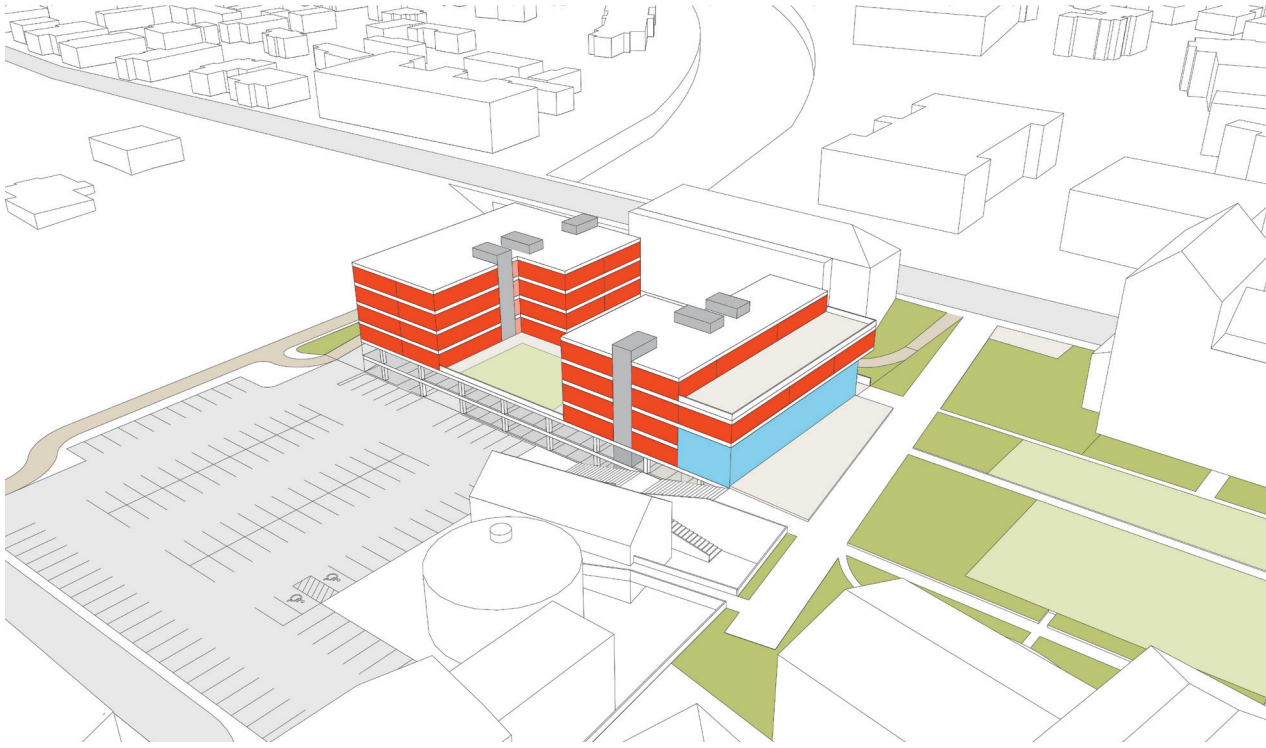
Residential
Residential Circulation
Gallery, community, or retail



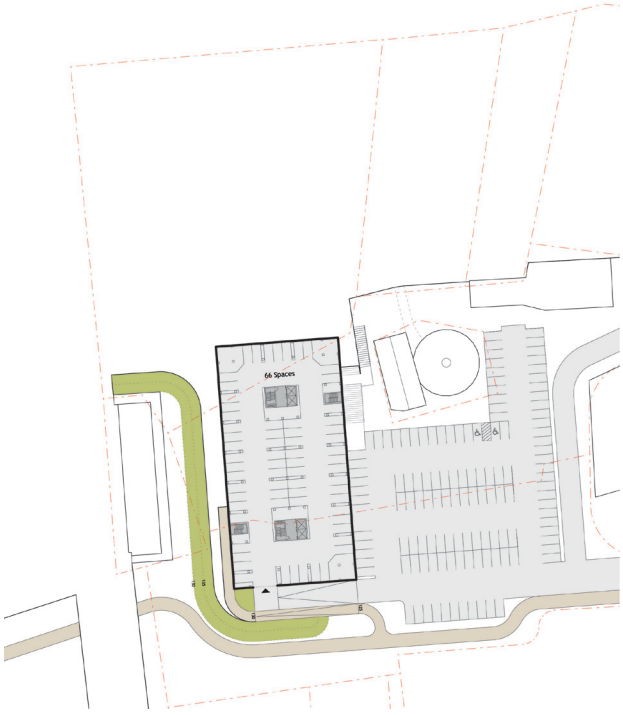
Proposed Circulation



Aerial View - Looking Northeast

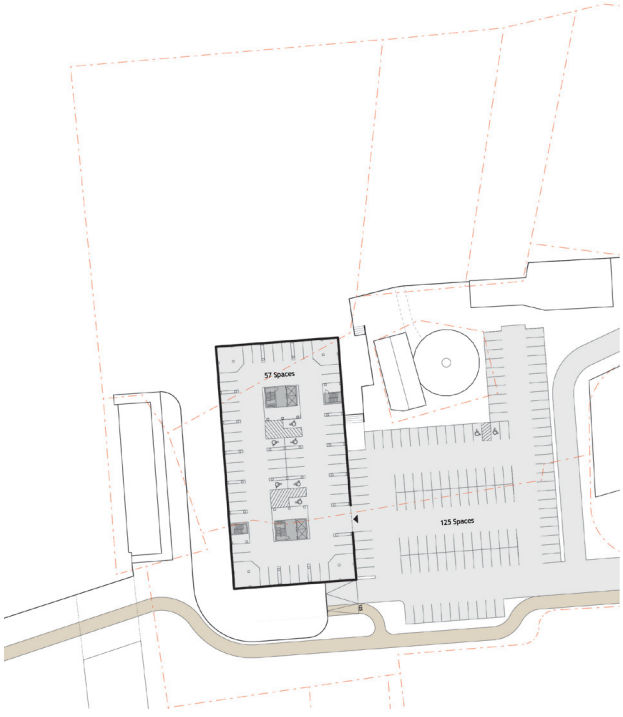


Aerial View - Looking Southwest

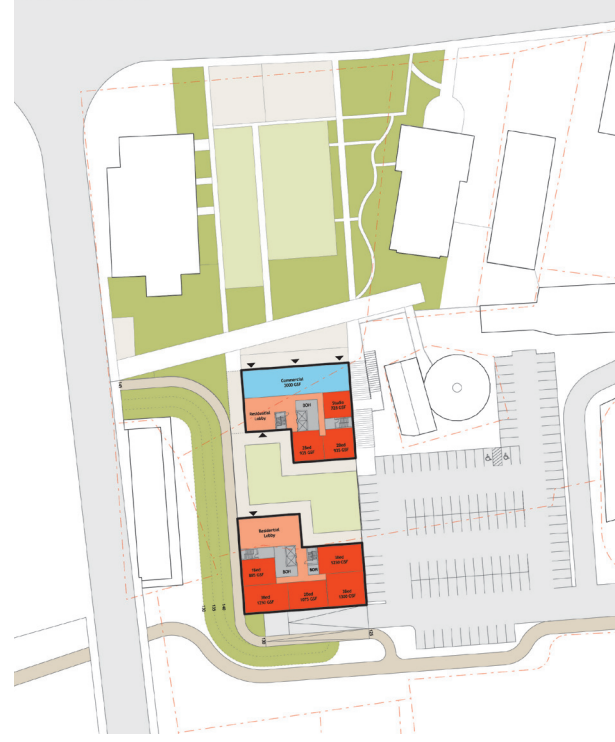


P2 - Parking Level 2

2 - Second Floor

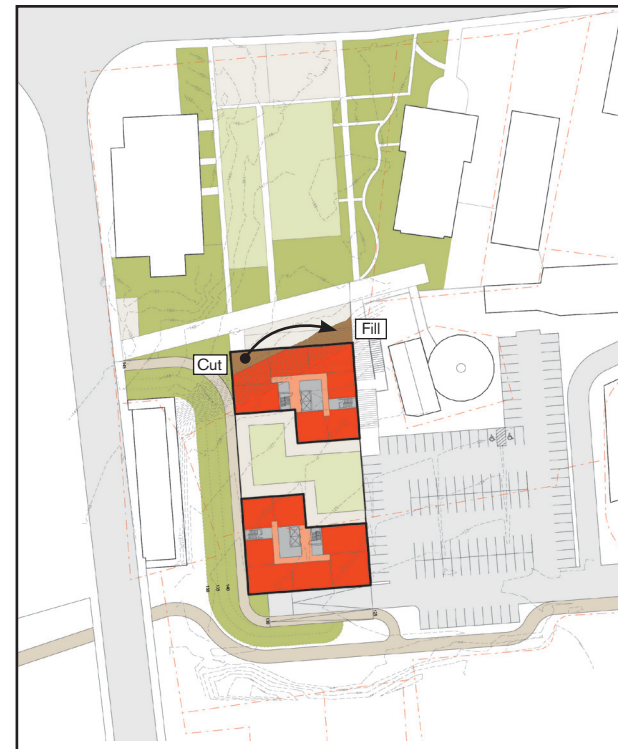


P1 - Parking Level 1



1 - First Floor

4 - Fourth Floor



Cut and Fill - Required cut and fill to meet existing park grade

3 - Third Floor

Comparison - Test-fit compared to previous hotel

Office Scenario

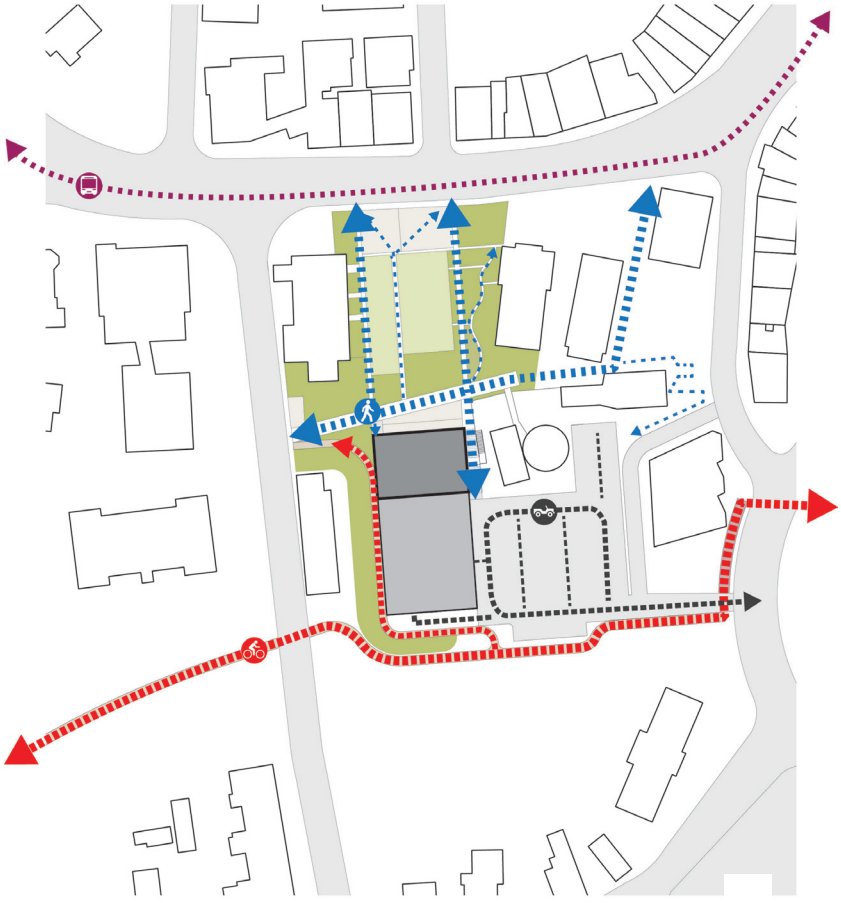
As a check on the logic of recommending a residential scheme, Utile tested an office scheme with a parking ratio of 2 parking spaces/1,000 gross square feet of area. The result was an unsatisfactory proposal from both a development feasibility and urban design standpoint.

Office Scenario Facts

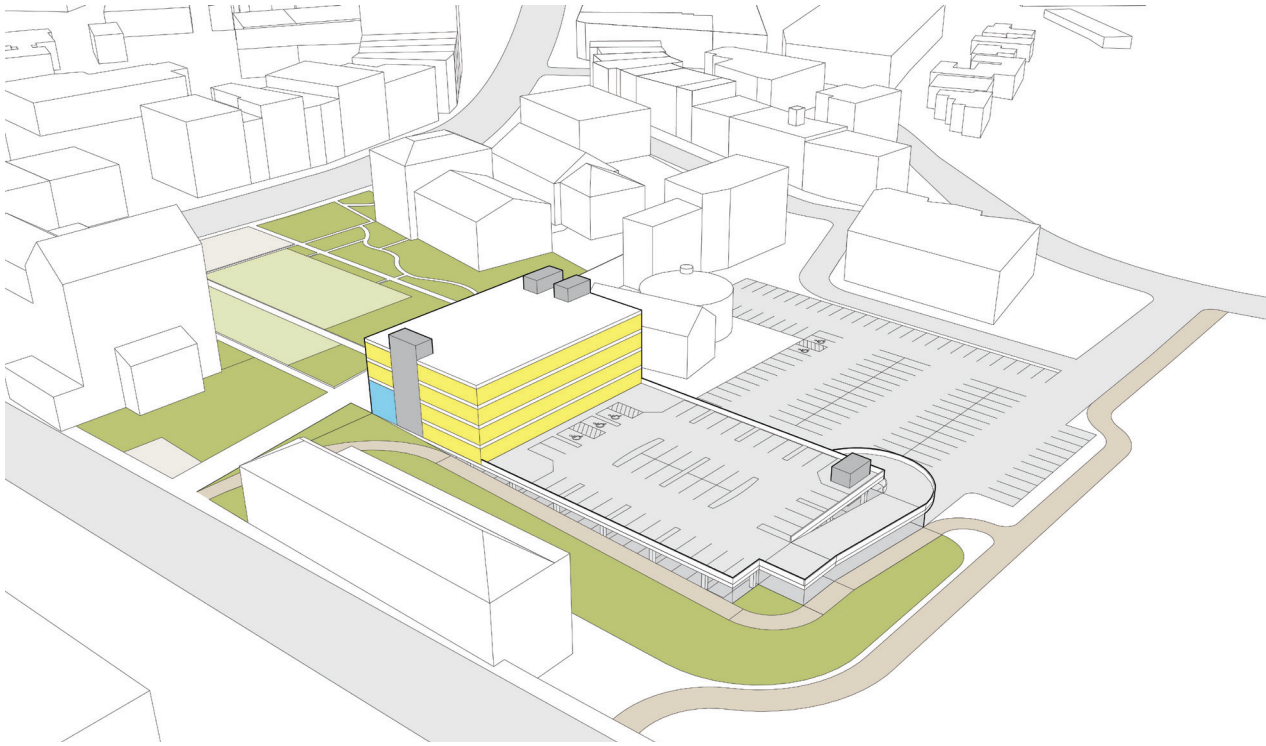
Replacement public metered parking spaces	126
Replacement public covered metered parking spaces	56
Replacement Round House covered parking spaces	22
Additional parking spaces	144
GSF Office space	38,000
GSF Gallery, community, or retail space	3,000

Office

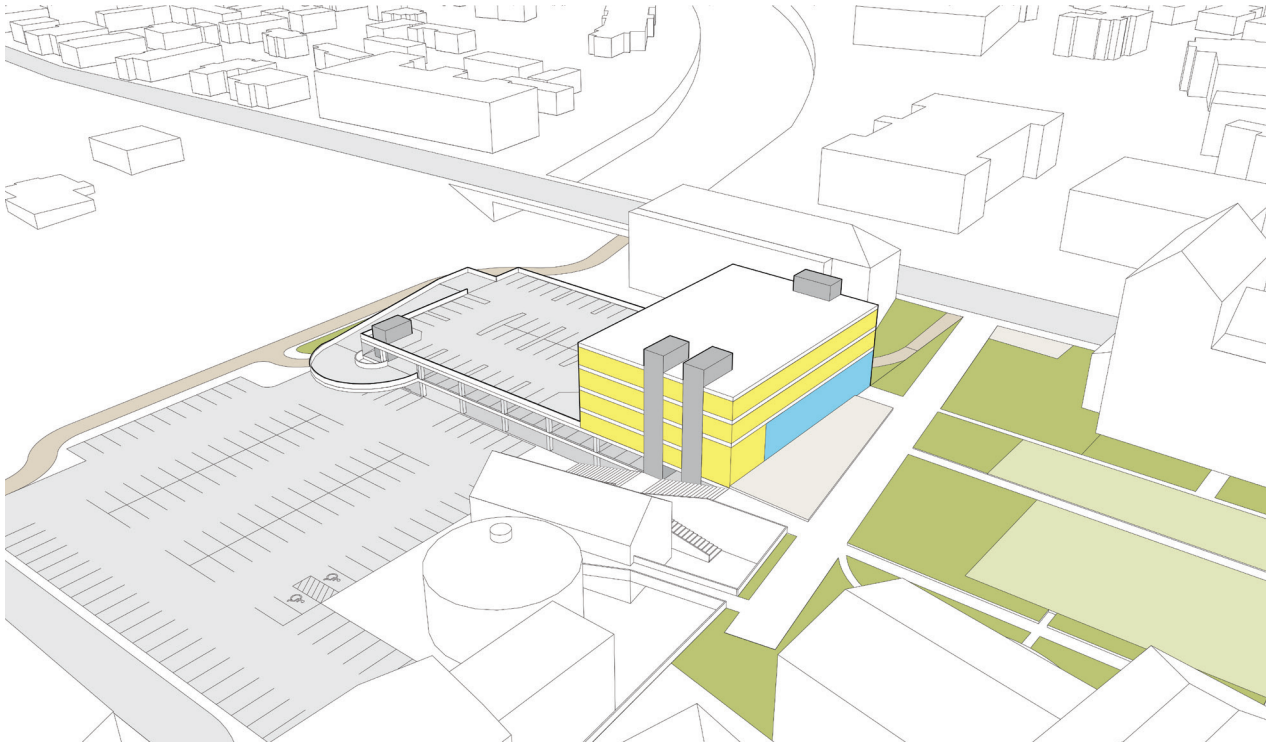
Gallery, community, or retail



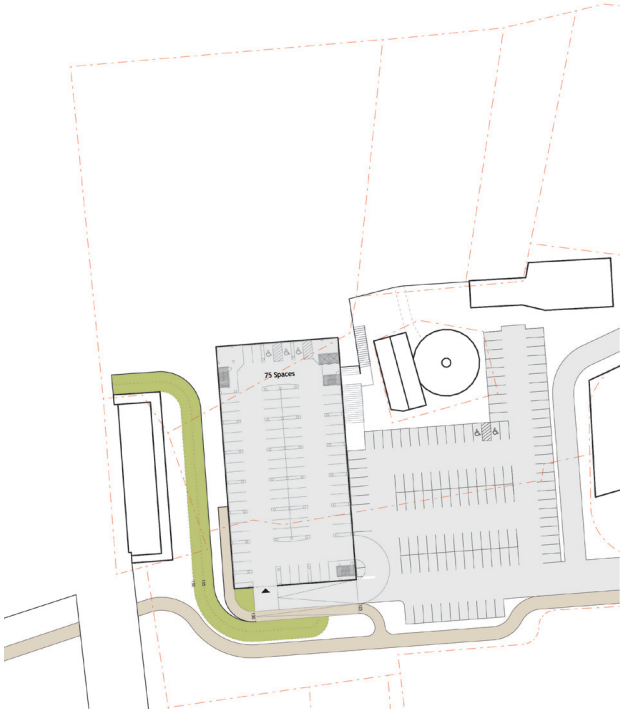
Proposed Circulation



Aerial View - Looking Northeast

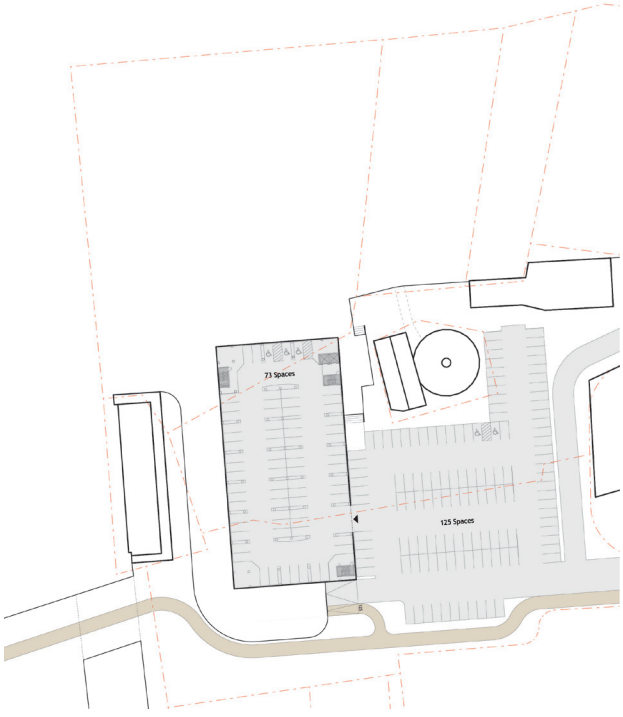


Aerial View - Looking Southwest

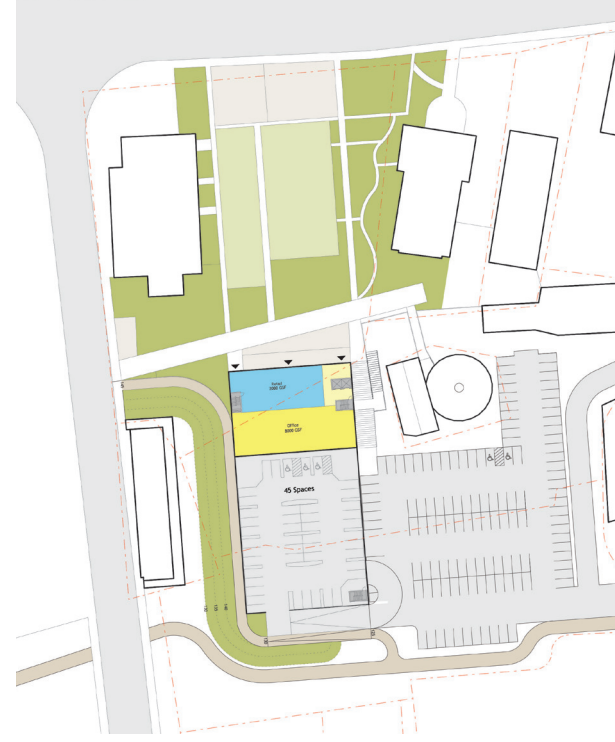


P2 - Parking Level 2

2 - Second Floor



P1 - Parking Level 1

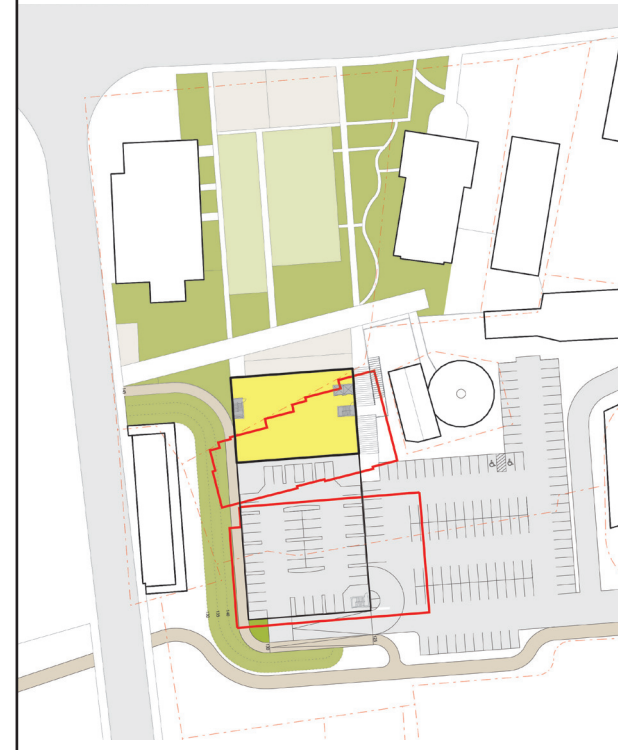


1 - First Floor

4 - Fourth Floor

Cut and Fill - Required cut and fill to meet existing park grade

3 - Third Floor



Comparison - Test-fit compared to previous hotel

Feedback

The methodology and scenarios were presented to the City of Northampton's Ad Hoc Roundhouse Lot Development Advisory Committee,[3] which was appointed by the Mayor, on September 3, 2013 and at a public meeting on October 1, 2013. The general massing and program mix of Residential Scenario 3 was positively received at the Advisory Committee meeting but with caveats about the process moving forward and the need to fully understand the financial implications of putting the parcel out to bid again. Advisory Committee members asked for an open and transparent public process to give the community an opportunity to discuss the options and weigh in on the larger issues.

At the public meeting, supporters of downtown housing on the site—a position held by approximately half the speakers—also preferred Residential Scenario 3. A significant minority of speakers did not support any development, but instead preferred an extension of Pulaski Park on top of the parking deck. Supporters of the recommended development approach (Residential Scenario 3) offered constructive criticism in several areas (see below). This feedback has had a significant influence on the recommended next steps outlined in the Executive Summary (pages 4-5):

1. Include significant pedestrian and bicycle connections between Pulaski Park and the Manhan Rail Trail bike network (thus improving the pedestrian connection between municipal parking and Pulaski Park).
2. Revise the recommended building diagram to make "fronts" facing both the Rail Trail and the remaining municipal parking lot.
3. If possible, slide residential units in front of the parking garage facing south (towards the Rail Trail) and east (towards the parking lot) to hide the garage and create the "fronts" mentioned above.
4. Make the open space between the residential buildings publicly accessible and provide a way down to the Rail Trail from inside the space (as part of a larger open space network).

3 See page 29 for the Advisory Committee members.

Acknowledgments

City of Northampton
Mayor David Narkewicz (Mayor of Northampton)
Corinne Philippides (Mayoral Aide)
James Thompson (City GIS Coordinator)

Ad Hoc Roundhouse Lot Development Advisory Committee
Councilor Paul Spector, Chair (Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and Land Use - EDHLU)
Councilor Owen Freeman-Daniels (EDHLU)
Councilor Pamela Schwartz (EDHLU)
Councilor Eugene Tacy (EDHLU)
Julie Cowan (Vice President, TD Bank; Member, Economic Development Advisory Committee)
Peter Frothingham (Registered Architect; Former Member, Central Business Architecture Committee)
Mary Kasper (Retired Executive Assistant to Mayor Ford; Former Co-Director, Northampton Arts Council)
William Turomsha (General Contractor and Project Manager; William J. Turomsha Design and Construction)

Community Task Force
Joel Russell (Land Use attorney and planning consultant)
Gordon Thorne (Visual artist and founder of A.P.E. Artist Gallery, built Thorne's Market in Northampton)
Michael Kusek (Marketing coordinator for artists and performers)
Peter Frothingham (Registered Architect; Former Member, Central Business Architecture Committee)
Jordi Herold (Owner of Icarus Wheaton & Finch, former manager and booker of Iron Horse music venues)
Mary Kasper (Retired Executive Assistant to Mayor Ford; Former Co-Director, Northampton Arts Council)

MassDevelopment
Richard Henderson (Executive Vice President Real Estate Development)
Elizabeth Murphy (Vice President Real Estate Development)
Italo Visco (Senior Vice President Planning and Development)

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