

FAQs

HIGHLAND INNOVATION CENTER

557 Highland Avenue
Needham Heights, MA 02494

On December 15, 2021, 557 Highland, LLC, an affiliate of The Bulfinch Companies, Inc., (“Bulfinch”) purchased the property at 557 Highland Avenue formerly owned by the Muzi auto dealership and carwash. Bulfinch completed the demolition of all of the former Muzi buildings in February 2022. Bulfinch now proposes to redevelop the property by building approximately 500,000 square feet of office/laboratory/R&D space in two new buildings, with approximately 10,000 square feet of retail/restaurant/amenity space, and a standalone parking garage (the “Project”). These FAQs provide answers to many of the questions that have been asked of the Project team during the course of introducing this Project to town officials, neighbors, the community at large.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION QUESTIONS

1. ***How many buildings are being proposed?***

There will be two principal office/lab/R&D buildings. The principal building along Highland Avenue, which Bulfinch is calling the South Building, will be three stories tall. The other principal building, set back from Gould Street, which Bulfinch is calling the North Building, will be five stories tall. These buildings will be connected by a two-story glass atrium with a planted green roof. The South Building also will include approximately 10,000 square feet of retail/restaurant/amenity space to activate the Highland Avenue/Gould Street corner. Additionally, there will be a freestanding five-story parking garage with two levels of underground parking. With the requested zoning relief, all of these buildings will comply with the Highway Commercial 1 District’s zoning requirements.

2. ***Does Bulfinch have any tenants for the Project; what types of tenants do you hope to attract?***

Bulfinch does not yet have any tenants for the Project, nor are we in negotiations with any potential tenants for the Project. It will take several years to complete the permitting process, finalize design, construct the buildings, and design and construct the interior tenant spaces. In today’s market, it would be premature to begin marketing space for lease without having any of the permits and approvals required for buildings. The buildings are being designed to accommodate either a single tenant, such as corporate headquarters or a larger office/life sciences/R&D tenant, or multiple office or laboratory/R&D tenants. Even if the buildings are occupied by a single life sciences or other R&D tenant, Bulfinch expects that a minimum of fifty to sixty percent of the gross floor area would be used for office space, with the

remainder used for laboratory, R&D, and support space, consistent with the typical mix for most office/life science tenants.

3. ***Do laboratory/research uses pose any unique risks or challenges to the neighborhood or to Needham in general?***

The buildings are designed for office and life science tenants. Because we do not know who the tenants will be, life sciences are a potential use. As stated in the Needham Board of Health's Biotechnology Registration Regulations, "use of modern biological techniques for industrial purposes do not pose unique risks to public health or the environment when the activities are conducted in accordance with accepted best scientific practice."

Bulfinch has extensive experience constructing, managing, and operating state-of-the-art laboratory/R&D buildings, including at Osborn Triangle, Cambridge (Central Square); Cambridge Discovery Park, Cambridge (Alewife at the Arlington/Belmont line); 117 Kendrick Street, Needham; 60 First Avenue, Waltham; 1560 Trapelo Road, Waltham; 3 Forbes Road, Lexington, and, recently acquired, 53 and 115 Fourth Avenue in Needham. The Project's architects (Stantec) and consultants (Environmental Health & Engineering (EH&E) and Safety Partners), have vast experience designing state-of-the-art laboratory/R&D buildings. The Project team members have decades-long proven track records.

Bioscience laboratories are classified under a four level biosafety system created by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These levels of mandatory precautions are known as Biosafety Level 1 (BSL-1) through Level 4 (BSL-4). The applicable biosafety level is determined based on the nature of the microorganism or other biologic agent being studied and the type of work being conducted. BSL-1 work is limited to biologic materials that pose little or no risk, *e.g.*, DNA sequencing, protein extraction, or work with *E. coli* bacteria, for which no additional biosafety equipment is required. BSL-2 work includes materials that may pose risk to the individual laboratory personnel involved but pose little or no community risk, *e.g.*, human blood, *Salmonella* bacteria, and most gene therapy research. Work that could produce aerosols must be done inside containment areas such as biosafety cabinets. BSL-3 work may involve larger quantities of bloodborne pathogens or infectious diseases that may cause serious illness if inhaled, *e.g.*, influenza virus or the SARS-CoV-2 virus. All BSL-3 work must be conducted in a facility specifically designed to prevent the release of aerosols. In facilities that do BSL-3 work, the BSL-3 lab is typically less than one percent of the overall laboratory space. BSL-4 work involves the most serious pathogens, *e.g.*, the Ebola virus, and requires the highest level of containment with special engineering requirements, respirators for all lab personnel, and other precautions. The only BSL-4 laboratory in New England is at Boston University. This Project will not include any BSL-4 space.

Bulfinch will require any laboratory/R&D tenants to comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations. A typical laboratory/R&D tenant has one or more environmental health and safety (EHS) personnel on staff (or for small lab space or a start-up company, contracted to the company). In many cases, the regulations require that there be a qualified person, such as a biological safety officer, chemical hygiene officer, etc., to oversee work in the lab, to ensure public safety. Our leases will require that tenants comply fully with all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations. Bulfinch expects that laboratory uses will be limited to Biosafety Levels 1 and 2. Depending upon the ultimate tenant(s), there might be a need for an extremely small BSL 3 lab research area. Again, this Project will not include any BSL-4 space.

4. ***What types of retail/restaurant/service tenants do you anticipate?***

Bulfinch is in the early stages of evaluating retail opportunities. The Project probably will include some form of food purveyor, which could be a coffee shop, a sandwich shop, or a full-service restaurant. If Needham amends the Zoning By-Law to allow a brewpub at this location, that also would be an option. The retail use(s) will be small scale, providing goods and services to tenants' employees and the neighborhood. These could include a dry cleaning drop off storefront, a convenience store, a newsstand, a cobbler, etc.

5. ***Why aren't you including a residential component?***

Residential, as a component of the Project, is not practical due to the cost of acquiring the property, the implications of environmental remediation and ongoing environmental monitoring, coupled with the cost of construction on a steeply sloped site. Commercial redevelopment will generate significantly more annual real estate and personal property tax revenues for Needham without the greater increases in demands for municipal services and school services that would accompany a residential project.

6. ***Why are the square footage numbers and parking space counts smaller in the Planning Board special permit application than in the MEPA ENF filed a week earlier?***

The conceptual project described in the MEPA ENF assumes slightly larger buildings and no relief from Needham's default (standard) parking ratios. This conservative approach ensures that the Project's mitigation measures will be more than adequate for the smaller actually proposed Project. The square footage numbers and parking space counts in the special permit application reflect further refinement by the Project's design team and the requested zoning relief.

7. *How long will construction take?*

Construction of the parking garage and the core/shell of the two principal buildings and the atrium should take approximately 24 months to complete. Construction of tenant spaces should take approximately one year. Depending on when tenant leases are signed, it may be possible to overlap the core/shell and tenant work to reduce the overall construction schedule to ~30-32 months.

PARKING QUESTIONS**8. *How many parking spaces will be provided?***

The Project will include ~1,408 parking spaces, to be provided in one level of parking under each of the principal buildings and the atrium (~343 spaces), in the standalone parking garage (~1,021 spaces), and in a modest surface lot (~44 spaces) near the retail/restaurant space in the South Building and the atrium (which will provide the principal entrance to the North and South Buildings). The former car dealership and carwash uses had approximately 532 parking spaces.

9. *Why can't you put more of the parking underground?*

There will be one level of parking under the North and South Buildings and the atrium, and two levels of parking under the standalone parking garage. Bulfinch explored the feasibility of constructing two levels of parking under the principal buildings, but that could involve significant blasting of ledge, which would be unnecessarily disruptive to the neighborhood, and would pose other complexities due to the site's sloping grade.

10. *Is the proposed parking sufficient for the proposed uses?*

The Needham Zoning By-Law's parking ratios reflect a higher employee density than is typical for today's laboratory/R&D users. The By-Law's parking ratios anticipate a worst case scenario in which each employee commutes alone, by car. Bulfinch is proposing an extensive transportation demand management plan to incentive reduced single-occupancy vehicle trips and increase the use of alternative forms of transportation. These measures include (i) facilitating and encouraging carpooling, (ii) shuttle bus service in conjunction with the 128 Business Council or another provider, (iii) upgrading area bicycle facilities and providing on-site bicycle parking, and (iv) requiring tenants to subsidize their employees' public transit costs, all of which will reduce the number of vehicles that need to be parked on-site. Based on our experience with other corporate headquarters offices and office/lab buildings, Bulfinch believes that the proposed number of parking spaces will be more than adequate for the Project's proposed uses and size.

PERMITTING QUESTIONS

11. *What zoning relief does the Project require?*

The proposed uses—professional, business, or administrative offices and laboratory—are allowed by right, as is the proposed retail component, so long as no single retail establishment contains more than 5,750 square feet of floor area. The Project will require special permits from the Planning Board:

- to increase the ratio of building floor area to lot area (the floor area ratio or FAR) above the 0.70 allowed by right to 1.25. This is less than the 1.35 maximum allowed by the recently-adopted Highland Commercial 1 District regulations.
- to reduce the number of required parking spaces from ~1,689 to ~1,408.
- to increase the maximum building height from 35 ft to 42 ft for portions of the South Building, from 56 ft to 70 ft for the North Building, and from 44 ft to 55 ft for the parking garage, all as allowed by the recently-adopted Highland Commercial 1 District regulations.
- to increase the maximum number of stories from 2.5 to 3 for the South Building and from 4 to 5 for the North Building, both as allowed by the recently-adopted Highland Commercial 1 District regulations.
- Site Plan Review

The Site Plan Review special permit will be required because the Project involves the creation of more than 10,000 square feet of gross floor area and the creation of more than 25 new parking spaces.

Additionally, Bulfinch is seeking special permits for restaurant use and for a single retail tenant to occupy 5,750-10,000 square feet of gross floor area. These are being requested to provide flexibility in leasing the retail space to tenants that will enhance the Project and benefit the neighborhood. Finally, the Project requires a special permit to deviate from the design requirements for retaining walls (facing the Route 128 exit ramp, where the steep slope makes retaining walls a necessity).

12. *What state permits does the Project require?*

The Project will require permits from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for work immediately adjacent to the state highway layout, and to modify the state layout of the intersection of Gould Street and Highland Avenue.

Bulfinch also will file to have the Project covered under the Massachusetts programmatic general permit under the National Pollution Discharge

Elimination System (NPDES) permit for construction site stormwater management.

13. ***Why are you seeking special permits for a restaurant and a larger retail use now, when you do not have any specific tenants in mind?***

To induce retail/restaurant tenants to lease the retail space, Bulfinch will need to be able to demonstrate that the overall Project has been approved, *i.e.*, that we can deliver the retail/restaurant space in time to accommodate the potential tenant(s). Rather than having to go back to the Planning Board after overall Project approval, and after Bulfinch finds retail/restaurant tenants, we included those special permits in the overall application. This will allow Bulfinch to identify retail/ restaurant tenants more quickly, and to then build out their spaces so that they can begin serving the Project, the neighborhood, and the general public contemporaneously with completion of the office/lab space.

NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACTS QUESTIONS

14. ***What traffic mitigation measures are being proposed?***

Bulfinch will implement all the traffic mitigation measures suggested by the “Traffic Impact Study, Muzi Motors Redevelopment”, prepared by Greenman-Pederson, Inc. (“GPI”), as the Town’s traffic consultant, in connection with the recent Highland Commercial 1 District rezoning. GPI’s study assumed the full redevelopment to the maximum FAR allowed by special permit (1.35) of the entire Highland Commercial 1 District, *i.e.*, included the Channel 5 properties north of TV Place that Bulfinch does not own and for which there are no current redevelopment proposals. Bulfinch is not proposing to redevelop the entire district and is proposing an FAR of only 1.25 for our site. Nonetheless, we will implement all of GPI’s proposed traffic mitigation measures. These measures will include:

- a new traffic signal and crosswalks at the intersection of Gould Street and the Wingate driveway/ site entrance, which will be coordinated with improved signals at the intersection of Gould Street and Highland Avenue that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation is implementing as part of its Highland Avenue improvements program.
- the geometry of the Gould Street/ Highland Avenue/ Hunting Road intersection will be improved significantly with additional vehicle turning lanes and dedicated bicycle lanes.
- Gould Street between Highland Avenue and north of the Project site will be widened to include dedicated turn-in lanes to the Project site on the northbound side, and two dedicated left turn, one dedicated through (straight across), and one dedicated right turn lane on the southbound side.

- a new, fully-actuated traffic signal will be installed at the intersection of Gould Street and Central Avenue.
- there should be little, if any, construction period impacts on the neighborhood, as most contractors and materials deliveries will occur via Route 128. Construction hours will be limited to between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, during the initial phases. While this traffic will access the site via the southern end of Gould Street, construction-related vehicles will almost immediately turn off Gould Street into the site.

15. ***Will noise from the Project's rooftop mechanical systems bother neighbors?***

No. Sounds from the Project's rooftop mechanical systems will be less intense than the pneumatic tools, body shop exhaust fans, vehicle backing warnings, and other noises associated with the former car dealership use. The Project's rooftop mechanical systems will be surrounded by screens or located inside mechanical penthouses that will block equipment sounds. Any laboratory HVAC units will discharge upward rather than horizontally, meaning that their sound will be directed skyward.

The Project will comply with all applicable noise regulations. For example, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection regulates noise as an air pollutant. Under those regulations, new noise sources, *e.g.*, the Project's rooftop mechanicals, require mitigation measures if they are projected to increase the broadband sound levels at the property line by more than 10 dB(A) over the ambient background levels.

16. ***How will the Project impact the use of Mills Field for little league games?***

The Project will have little direct impact on Mills Field. Bulfinch understands that weeknight games frequently occur between the April school spring break and the end of the spring semester, and that team busses travel to Mills Field during rush hour. The Project's mitigation measures include widening Gould Street from Highland Avenue to north of the Project site, and the installation of new traffic signals at the intersections of Gould Street and the Wingate driveway/site entrance and Gould Street and Central Avenue. These improvements will increase Gould Street's rush hour carrying capacity and reduce delays experienced by anyone travelling to or from the Mills Field area, from either direction.

We are exploring measures or improvements that would enhance the experience of those using the Mills Field facilities, which could include field upgrades, new sidewalks, bicycle lanes, "share the road" signage, accessible sidewalk entrances, and other experience-improving enhancements.

17. *What neighborhood amenities will the Project provide?*

The Project includes a walking path around the circumference of the property, with exercise stations, and a viewing pond/water feature with a wooden bridge built from recycled/sustainable materials. This path will be open to the neighborhood and the general public. The Project's retail/restaurant uses also will be available to the general public and, in particular, will benefit neighbors who are in close enough proximity to walk to and from those amenities.

The Project will widen Gould Street to include two dedicated turn-in lanes to the Project site on the northbound side, and two dedicated left turn, one dedicated through (straight across), and one dedicated right turn lane on the southbound side. Bicycle lanes and a sidewalk along the eastern side of Gould Street also will be added. The Project also will install a new traffic signal at the Gould Street/Wingate Residences/ Project site intersection, which will be coordinated with the existing signals at the Gould Street/ Highland Avenue intersection. Restricted hours signs are proposed for Noanett Road, prohibiting cut-through traffic between the hours of 7-9 a.m. and 4-6 p.m. A police detail will be provided as needed after the Project's opening to further control cut through traffic.

Bulfinch has offered to contribute toward the cost of funding the analysis required to convert the nearby former MBTA right-of-way into a pedestrian connection to the Town.

Bulfinch is discussing with a variety of stakeholders other ways in which the Project might contribute to improving or facilitating the creation of other neighborhood amenities.

The neighborhood recreational amenities program will include a walking trail around the site perimeter and a pickleball court and/or volleyball court. During the winter months, consideration will be given to creating a small "ice skating" rink in the recreational zone, if allowed by the Town. The perimeter fitness path will have interpretive exhibits spotlighting Needham heroes, recognizing their accomplishments.

PUBLIC BENEFITS QUESTIONS**18. *How will the Project be of overall benefit to the Town of Needham?***

The Project will bring several hundred high paying job openings to the site, many of which could be filled by current or future Needham residents.

The Project will generate in excess of \$5 Million more in annual property tax and personal tax revenues for the Town of Needham than did the former auto dealership and carwash. The fiscal impact analysis report prepared by Barrett Planning Group, LLC in connection with the adoption of the Highway

Commercial 1 District rezoning projected greater tax revenue increases for commercial projects such as this, but greater increases in demands on municipal services and school services for residential projects at this location. These additional tax revenues can be used to support Needham’s educational and recreational programs, housing initiatives, community and open spaces, and other town priorities.

Traffic infrastructure improvements to Gould Street and its intersections with Highland Avenue and Central Street will benefit any Needham residents travelling by vehicle in the vicinity of the site.

The addition of bike lanes, new sidewalks, additional vehicle travel lanes, and other street upgrades will improve traffic flow. The Project will replace dated buildings and a sea of surface parking lacking stormwater treatment with a state-of-the-art, world-class, eco-friendly, LEED certified project, undertaken by a distinguished local developer, which will create a magnificent new gateway entrance from the City of Newton to the Town of Needham.

The Project will implement construction and operational Best Practices, enhanced stormwater management including a stormwater detention pond, remediation and removal of hazardous wastes, and fully-sprinklered buildings using the latest in renewable energy efficient equipment and recycling methods.

19. ***Can you create a walking path on the MBTA rail spur north of the Project site?***

Bulfinch recognizes the longstanding interest in transforming the disused MBTA rail spur into a walking path, to provide a missing connection in the Needham-Newton trail network. Although Bulfinch cannot commit absolutely to creating the path—we do not own the property and the project will require third party approvals—Bulfinch has offered to help fund a study of that project and assist where we can.

CLIMATE CHANGE QUESTIONS

20. ***How will the Project deal with climate change?***

Bulfinch has applied the Resilience Massachusetts Action Team (RMAT) Climate Resilience Design Standards which indicate that the Project site is not exposed to expected sea level rise, storm surge, or riverine flooding from climate change. The Project site does have a high risk of extreme precipitation/urban flooding events and of extreme heat events. Overall, the Project’s RMAT score is “Moderate.” To address the flooding and heat event risks, the Project will significantly reduce the amount of impervious area covering the site and implement comprehensive stormwater management systems. Extensive landscaping, including trees around the site perimeter, will reduce heat

impacts. The Project will utilize the latest LEED v4 BD+C standards for the buildings' core and shell components, with a goal of achieving at least LEED Silver certification. Available roof space will be used for solar panel arrays, and the project will include several other renewable energy technologies.

21. ***How will you reduce the Project's carbon footprint?***

The North and South buildings will have high performing designs, utilizing MassSave programs to maximize energy efficiency and minimize carbon emissions. Energy modeling will be used to evaluate several emissions mitigation measures including hybrid electric/gas heating with electric heating being the first to operate whenever capacity allows; a high efficiency glycol heat recovery loop; a high efficiency chilled water plant; reduced laboratory exhaust through exhaust monitoring; electric water heating; improved envelope insulation without thermal bridging, with reduced air infiltration; and high performance lighting and controls. The Project will be Energy Star certified, pending the final tenant mix and building type limitations of the Energy Star program. We are also exploring the feasibility of participating in the sustainability-focused SITES Rating System.

Bulfinch also will seek WELL and Fitwel building certifications for the Project. These standards take a holistic approach to health in the built environment, addressing behavior, operations, and design. WELL Building is a performance-based system for measuring, certifying, and monitoring features of the built environment that impact human health and well-being, through air, water, nourishment, light. It is grounded in a body of medical research that explores the connection between the buildings and the health and wellness of their occupants. Fitwel offers strategies for developing and maintaining optimal health-promoting environments. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. General Services Administration created the Fitwel standard, and the CDC remains a research and evaluation partner for Fitwel. WELL and Fitwel certified spaces can help create improved nutrition, fitness, mood, and performance for their occupants. Collectively, the LEED, Fitwel, and WELL Building certification, together with renewable energy, rooftop solar panel arrays and these other proposed measures will reduce the Project's carbon footprint and strengthen the health and wellbeing of the buildings' occupants and the community.

Construction materials will be sourced locally, both in fabrication and construction. The buildings will use low-flow faucets with metered devices. Building systems will be computer controlled using measuring software to track performance. The Project design incorporates recycled water for irrigation and waste flushing. A comprehensive program of Transportation Demand Management measures will be implemented to reduce the number of single occupant vehicle trips to and from the site and promote mass transit usage. EV

car charging stations will be available. The buildings' systems will be designed to monitor progress, measure performance, and benchmark our results.

22. *Will the Project include solar power generation?*

Yes. The North and South Buildings will have solar panel arrays on their roofs. Bulfinch is investigating the option of adding solar panel "covers" atop the standalone garage. Whether this is possible will depend in part on how such covers would be treated under the zoning bylaw. We also are investigating mounting solar panels on the side of the garage to charge batteries that would power the garage's internal lighting. The location and design of these batteries will require approval by the Needham Fire Department, with whom Bulfinch is currently in discussions about this option.

23. *Will the Project include Electric Vehicle charging stations.*

Yes. EV charging stations will be provided on the parking level beneath the North and South Buildings and atrium, in the standalone garage, and in the surface parking area near the retail/restaurant space. We have planned on approximately 300 electric vehicle charging stations with locations in the parking level beneath the buildings, inside the standalone garage, and at the small surface parking lot by the retail/restaurant/amenity space. The chargers will be at least Level 2 stations. Bulfinch is investigating whether and how many higher voltage Level 3 charging stations might be included in the mix. The parking areas will include the infrastructure required to install additional charging stations if and when there is demand for them.

24. *How will the Project reduce water usage and wastewater generation?*

The former carwash used large volumes of water, most of which was immediately discharged to the sewer system. By contrast, the Project is being designed to minimize demands on Needham's water supply and to minimize sanitary sewer discharges. A cistern integrated into the standalone garage will store captured stormwater, for use in irrigation, as makeup water for the HVAC cooling towers, and elsewhere in the buildings. Within the buildings, water will be recycled to the extent feasible, with graywater used for flushing toilets and urinals. The buildings' water faucets, toilets, urinals, and other water fixtures use high-efficiency, low-flow designs.

These FAQs are meant to provide general answers to some of the more frequently asked questions about the Project, and to provide a brief overview of what is being proposed. Any further questions or comments not adequately addressed above can be directed to questions@557highland.com. If you would prefer to speak directly to any of our team members or have questions relative to the various disciplines, please let us know and we would be happy to arrange for a one-on-one discussion.