

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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August 3, 1987

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Reports No. 9 and 18 the following information is provided relative to the construction of a pedestrian crossing over the railroad tracks in the area of the proposed New Street Park.

The City and its consultant recognize the importance of public safety and the need to provide safe and convenient ways to cross the railroad. Presently, residents from Rindge Towers and Jefferson Park must cross the railroad tracks utilizing the Route 2 - railroad overpass, at-grade utilizing Sherman Street or illegally through holes in the fence along the railroad right-of-way. Even prior to the final Master Planning for New Street Park, resident groups from Rindge Towers and Jefferson Park requested a pedestrian overpass for access to Fresh Pond Mall. The park site when fully developed will create significant recreational opportunities for the adjacent neighborhood and the City as a whole. Adequate parking will be provided for those who drive to the park. In addition, several pedestrian access locations have been identified. However, the railroad tracks along the northern border of the site create a barrier between the housing areas and the park.

The construction of a pedestrian overpass will require a significant expenditure of funds by the City and will not be a simple task. The overpass over the tracks will require an easement be obtained from the MBTA and possibly from the B&M Railroad, depending on the location. In addition, the design will need to be reviewed by several local boards and state agencies in addition to the MBTA, B&M, and Amtrak who presently control the railroad right-of-way. Based on discussions with the State Architectural Barriers Board, the overpass will need to be designed to be accessible to the handicapped which adds significant length to the crossing as well as costs to construction.

As part of the Master Plan development, the consultant team was asked to evaluate opportunities and limitations associated with providing pedestrian access across the railroad tracks. Based on field observations and discussions with various potential users, it is very clear that a single pedestrian overpass cannot be located to serve all desired uses. This finding is based on the fact that Rindge Towers and Jefferson Park (the two primary potential users) are not connected and an industrial area separates the two sites along the tracks. In addition, some residents are seeking access to the Fresh Pond Mall while others will seek entry to the park which are separated by a track.

The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) is presently developing plans for a new vehicle bridge over the tracks as part of the scheduled Route 2 improvements. The new bridge will include sidewalks for pedestrians and will replace the old bridge structure. As an interim measure, the MDC plans to construct a temporary pedestrian overpass adjacent to the existing bridge. In discussions with MDC, alternatives to a temporary pedestrian bridge were explored including the construction of a permanent bridge to the east of the Route 2 overpass adjacent to Rindge Towers. MDC indicated that this was not possible for several reasons. An easement would need to be obtained from the MBTA and B&M which could delay the roadway project. The cost of a permanent structure which must be handicapped accessible, would be significantly more than the proposed temporary structure. The project is well into design already and changes could cause the project to be delayed. Based on MDC comments, an alternative approach was recommended. To reduce the distance people would walk from Rindge Towers to utilize the new Route 2 bridge, it has been suggested that a stairway be built from the new bridge to the southwest corner of the Rindge Towers parking lot. The new overpass sidewalks will provide for the handicapped access. In discussions with the MDC, it does not appear that the stairway will be installed by the MDC. This would be a much more cost-effective crossing for the City to install than a full pedestrian bridge which would require an easement from the MBTA. The City will need to discuss this option further with the MDC and coordinate design and construction activities for this potential pedestrian connection. This solution would serve Rindge Towers, but not Jefferson Park.

The consultant team also reviewed the potential for use of an existing haul tunnel under the railroad tracks for a pedestrian crossing. The existing tunnel is presently buried and filled with refuse. The tunnel location does not provide access to either Rindge Towers or Jefferson Park since its outlet is in the industrial area. The high groundwater in this area would require continuous pumping to keep the the tunnel open and public safety in an 80 - 100 foot tunnel, even if lighted, would be questionable.

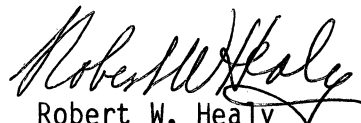
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As shown in the Master Plan, a pedestrian overpass has been proposed to connect the proposed park with Jefferson Park. The exact location and design requirements were not addressed as part of the design effort. The proposed overpass must span four sets of railroad tracks and have a clearance over the tracks of approximately 20 feet. This will require significant stairways and over 600 feet of ramps (the length of two football fields) since the access must be provided to accommodate handicapped persons. (See attached concept sketch.) The overpass will also need to be pile supported due to its location. Additional study will be required before an overpass could be designed and constructed in the area.

The park, when initially constructed, cannot be excessively used, since the site has significant environmental constraints for establishing good turf. The vegetation installed on top of the landfill will require special care, maintenance and time to establish. As the site matures and can support increased uses, the need for a pedestrian overpass in this area can be further evaluated. Since it is estimated that the cost of a pedestrian overpass in this area would be approximately \$1.5 million (in 1987 costs), the City must be sure such a cost can be justified. The Phase I Site Improvements are designed to vegetate the site, provide areas for active and passive recreation, and create the potential for future uses. Phase II Site Improvements will address problems encountered in operation and maintenance of the site, develop more intense active and passive recreation facilities and could potentially include a pedestrian overpass if the need is shown. Delaying the construction of the pedestrian overpass will allow the City to seek additional federal and/or state funding for overpass design and construction should it prove feasible and desirable. In the interim, technological advances might also provide alternative means for handicapped access and bridge crossings.

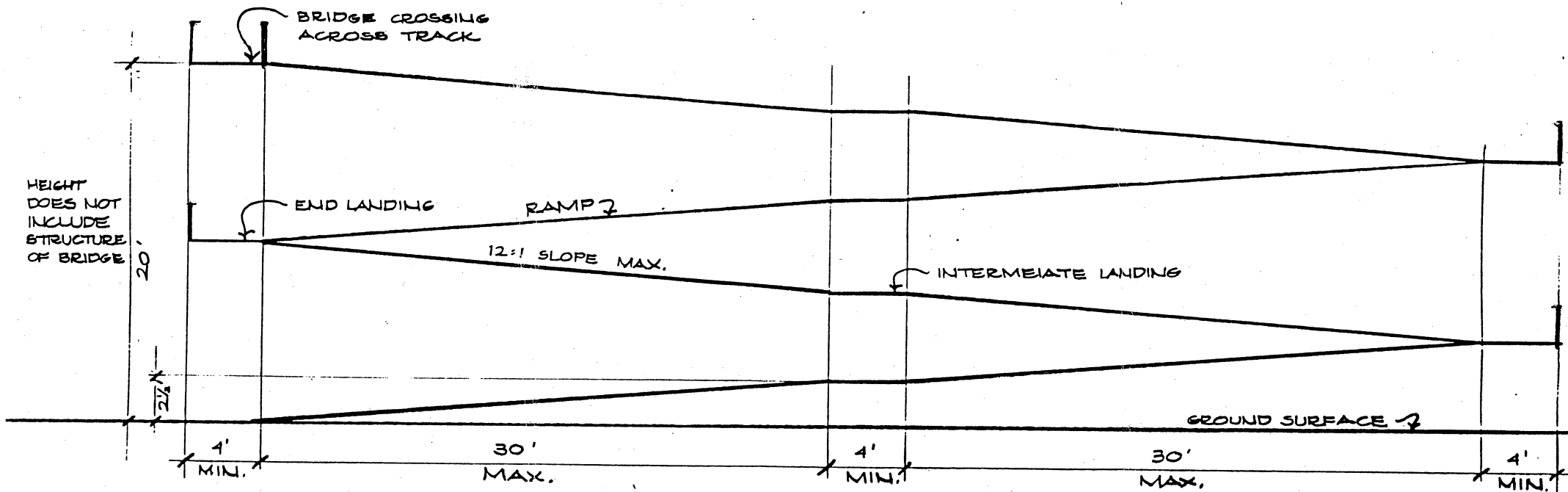
We hope you find this information of assistance.

Very truly yours,


Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH:g
Attachments

(IV-45)



HANDICAPPED ACCESS:

RAMP LENGTH (8 RAMPs, 30' LONG)	240'
INTERMEDIATE LANDINGS (1 @ 4')	16'
END LANDINGS (4 @ 8')	32'
SUB-TOTAL: EACH ACCESS	288'
SUB-TOTAL: UP AND DOWN	566'
LENGTH OF CROSSING	80'
TOTAL LENGTH OF OVERPASS	646'

STAIR ACCESS

*STEPS UP:	35±
*STEPS DOWN:	35±
LANDINGS @	4'
80' CROSSING	

* (ASSUMES 7" RISERS)

PEDESTRIAN OVERPASS - CONCEPTUAL ELEVATION

Agenda Item No. 6 *S-485*

Re: response to Awaiting Report Items 9 & 18
on the footbridge over the railroad tracks in
the vicinity of Jefferson Park & Rindge Towers.

In City Council,

August 3, 1987

Placed on file