Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Clearinghouse Review Report

Final Comments
March 5, 2008

SUBJECT:	**North Adams Plaza Redevelopment**
EOEA#:	**14180**
LOCATION:	**North Adams**
ESTIMATED COST:	**$12 million**
REVIEW TYPE:	**EENF**
PROPONENT:	**North Adams Property Development, LLC**
COMMENTS DUE:	**March 7, 2008**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

North Adams Property Development, LLC proposes to redevelop a vacant and underutilized strip plaza (previously referred to as the "North Adams Plaza") on an approximately 13.4-acre parcel located on the west side of Route 8 across from the Robert Hardman Industrial Park in North Adams, Massachusetts. The site is within the North Adams General Industrial Zone (I-1) and is surrounded by mixed commercial, sand and gravel pit operations and light industrial land. The redevelopment involves demolition of the existing structure and construction of a Lowe's Home Improvement Store and a separate drive-through bank or retail facility. Previously there was a proposed Lowe's development on a site north of the proposed site. That site is no longer under consideration.

The current site was previously cleared of vegetation and developed as a strip mall, which has remained underutilized for approximately a decade and vacant since summer 2006. An approximately 95,712 square feet (SF) vacant structure that formerly housed a cinema and a mix of retail and restaurant uses remains as well as approximately 630 parking spaces. The site currently has two access points with the main driveway at an existing traffic signal opposite the Robert Hardman Industrial Park access drive and a second, right-in driveway located approximately 210 feet to the north of the traffic signal.

The proposed Project will include the construction of an approximately 126,500 SF Lowe's Home Improvement Store with an associated 28,630 SF garden center (for a total of 155,130 SF) and an approximately 3,600 SF out-parcel in the southeasterly corner of the Site adjacent to Route 8 that will house a bank with three drive-through lanes. Approximately 630 parking spaces will be provided Project-wide (590 spaces associated with the Lowe's and 40 spaces associated with the bank/retail facility) representing no net new parking spaces. This is 98 spaces less than what is required under local zoning. Access to the site will be provided via two driveways: (1) the existing signalized driveway opposite the Robert Hardman Industrial Park access drive will be retained and will serve as the primary access and egress point for the site; and (2) a secondary right-in/right-out driveway is proposed approximately 500 feet north of the existing traffic signal. The existing right-in driveway will be closed. The right-out portion of the driveway is necessary for on-site deliveries to exit onto Route 8 southbound.

There are no known rare or endangered species, vernal pools or historical or archeological resources on the site. The site is not in an Area of Critical Environmental Concern nor does it involve conservation land or farmland.

A number of sustainable design principles have been incorporated into the Project both into the structure and at the site itself.

The Project meets and/or exceeds a MEPA regulatory threshold for transportation and requires a Highway Access permit from the Massachusetts Highway Department. The Project requires the preparation of a Mandatory Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The proponent is requesting to submit a Single EIR.

The Project requires a Special Permit from the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals as well as an Order of Conditions from the North Adams Conservation Commission. As of February 21, 2008, the Project had received its Special Permit from the Planning Board and had received a permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals to reduce the parking requirement. Still to be obtained was a permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals related to signage. A Notice of Intent has been filed with the Conservation Commission.

CONSIDERATIONS AND POTENTIAL ISSUES:

Alternatives Analysis

Alternative development programs for the site were considered, including a No-Build Alternative, a development alternative allowed as-of-right (other retail commercial uses), and the Preferred Alternative. The No-Build Alternative was deemed to leave the site in a degraded condition and introduce no new economic opportunities to the area. The Preliminary Alternative that was considered was the re-occupation of the existing site for general retail and restaurants. It was evaluated to result in more water and wastewater impacts. It was also evaluated to be not supported by market conditions.

The proposed Project, the preferred alternative, was evaluated to best meet the economic development goals of the City of North Adams, while minimizing or mitigating environmental or traffic impacts.

Wetlands Impacts and Permits

The proposed Project does not meet any MEPA review thresholds for wetland impacts. However, the Project does require an Order of Conditions from the North Adams Conservation Commission.

There are three wetlands on or affected by the Project site. According to the EENF, work will occur in the buffer of Wetland 1, which is located 30ft south of the southern property boundary. Impacts to the buffer of Wetland 1 will not significantly alter the existing limit of pavement and consists primarily of improvements to existing developed and disturbed areas. No mitigation is proposed for work conducted in the buffer of Wetland 1. Wetland 2, which is located on the northern portion of the property, will be altered due to the proposed access to Route 8, parking lot, detention basin and associated grading altering 185±SF of BVW from Wetland 2. Wetland 3 (1,466±SF) will be entirely filled. A letter from the North Adams Conservation Commission dated 7/31/07 stated that Wetland 3 is a closed depression not connected to a waterway or a waterbody and therefore is not subject to the Wetland Protection Act. No mitigation is proposed for Wetland 3. (The EENF states that Wetland 2 will be entirely filled. During a conference call with the proponent on February 19, 2008, it was confirmed that this is a typo and should refer to Wetland 3.)

A BVW replication area is proposed to be constructed to mitigate impacts to 185±SF of BVW at a greater than 2:1 replication ratio. A 500±SF BVW replication area will be located between the BVW and the detention basin. The BVW replication area will physically adjoin and maintain a hydrologic connection to the altered BVW. After grading is complete and wetland hydrology has been established, the wetland replacement area will be hand-planted with native wetland shrubs and herbaceous materials.

Stormwater

Proposed infiltration on the site is limited. The proposed development has been designed to direct rooftop runoff through an independent closed pipe system directly to a detention basin that will be constructed at the north end of the site. Runoff from the remaining impervious areas on the site will be collected in a closed drainage system by catch basins with 4-foot deep sumps and oil/debris traps. Prior to being discharged to the detention basin, the stormwater will be treated by water quality units to reduce total suspended solids. Eventually stormwater enters into the Hoosic River to the east of the project and on the easterly side of Route 8.

During a conference call with the proponent's representative / consultant on February 19, 2008, it was confirmed that soil borings have been conducted throughout the site. The results of the borings indicate that Low Impact Development techniques utilizing infiltration are not possible due to poor soils and high water table.

The rainfall-runoff response of the site under proposed conditions was evaluated for storm events with recurrence intervals of 2, 10, 25 and 100 years. There will be no increase in peak discharge rates between the pre- and post-development conditions. The proposed Project fully complies with the total suspended solids (TSS) removal requirement of the Massachusetts Stormwater Management Policy and will achieve a better than 80% removal of average annual TSS. A Long Term Operation and Maintenance Plan has been developed to insure that the BMP's are maintained to function as designed. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be developed in accordance with the NPDES Phase II requirements of the USEPA.

The EENF outlines a plan to minimize and mitigate construction period impacts. Components of the plan include locating trailers and staging areas to minimize impacts on natural resources and refueling of any vehicles outside of the 100ft wetlands buffer and not in proximity to sediment basins or diversion swales. The EENF contains a Sedimentation and Erosion Control Plan. Sediment and erosion controls, including silt fencing and hay bales, will be installed to protect nearby water resources and off-site drainage systems. The proponent has agreed to use straw bales or other alternatives to hay bales to reduce the potential introduction of invasive species. Erosion control barriers will remain in place until all surfaces have been fully stabilized. All disturbed surfaces will be stabilized within 14 days of construction, unless additional construction is intended to be initiated within 21 days. If necessary, the contractor shall construct temporary diversion swales, settling basins, or use a settling tank. All erosion control devices will be regularly inspected, maintained and repaired as necessary.

Water Supply and Waste Water

Water will be supplied by North Adams via a 10-inch municipal line located on the southbound side of Route 8. A total of 8,829 gallons per day (gpd) is required by DEP's guidelines. Actual use, based on other Lowe's stores is approximately 2,650 gpd. Fire flow protection will be supplemented to comply with Lowe's own requirements by a 210,000 above ground water storage tank to supply Lowe's required fire flow protection pressure.

Sanitary wastewater will flow from the site to an 8-inch North Adams municipal sewer main then to an 8-inch Adams sewer main. This wastewater will ultimately be treated at the Town of Adams wastewater treatment plant. There is an existing intermunicipal agreement between North Adams and Adams for this arrangement. The amount of sanitary wastewater is estimated, based on DEP's guidelines, to be 8,026 gpd. Actual amounts are likely to be lower. It appears that the Adam plant has excess capacity and could

treat that amount; however, there is no mention of the capacity or status of the Adams wastewater treatment plant in the EENF. Also, in the course of the review it was learned that there is some indication or belief that the Adams main may have been compromised in some way during the reconstruction of Rt. 8. In communications with the proponent's representatives / consultants, it was indicated that the status of this main would be fully evaluated.

Sustainable Design Elements

The EENF describes numerous sustainable design elements. At the MEPA site visit another site design element was discussed. That element was plantings along Rt. 8 and within the parking area. The EIR should contain a greater description about the plantings, including the size and location of trees proposed to be planted on the site.

Transportation

Access to the site will be provided via two driveways. The existing signalized driveway will be retained and will serve as the primary access and egress point for the site. A secondary right-in/right-out driveway is proposed approximately 500 feet north of the existing traffic signal to facilitate on-site circulation, especially of trucks. An existing right-in driveway will be closed.

The EENF contains extensive traffic information and analysis. Substantive improvements to the proposed Project have been made over the prior development, including widening the gap between site drives, provision of a bus turn out for southbound BRTA passengers immediately south of the site driveway with pedestrian access to a crosswalk and attention paid to bicycle facilities. A transportation demand management plan is included to reduce the number of trips to the site.

The study area for traffic analysis was determined based on discussions with MassHighway, BRPC, the Town of Adams and the City of North Adams, as well as previous traffic studies performed in the area. The study area for the Project generally extends along Route 8 from Route 116 in Adams to Route 8A to the north, and then along Route 8A east to Church Street encompassing the following intersections:

- Route 8 (Park Street/Commercial Street) at Route 116 (Center Street) /Myrtle Street (Adams);
- Route 8 (Park Street) at Hoosac Street (Adams);
- Route 8 (Columbia Street) at Friend Street (Adams);
- Route 8 (Curran Memorial Highway) at Site Drive/Industrial Park Access Drive (North Adams);
- Route 8 (Curran Memorial Highway) at South State Street (North Adams);
- Route 8 (Curran Memorial Highway) at Route 8A (Hodges Cross Road) (North Adams);
- Route 8A (Hodges Cross Road) at South State Street (North Adams); and
- Route 8A (Hodges Cross Road/Church Street) at South Church Street (North Adams)

Route 8A (Hodges Cross Road/Church Street) at South Church Street (North Adams)

Hodges Cross Road (Route 8A), Church Street (Route 8A) and South Church Street intersect to form a three-way unsignalized intersection, with the northbound South Church Street approach under "STOP" sign control. It should be noted that this intersection is not a T-intersection and that Hodges Cross Road/Church Street is a curved section of roadway.

During the weekday evening peak hour, the critical movement (northbound left- turn/right-turn movement) at the Church Street at Hodges Cross Road intersection operates at LOS D under both Existing and No-Build conditions. Under Build conditions, this LOS worsens to

an F. No mitigation is proposed in the EENF stating that there is a small amount of traffic turning left from this intersection and the Project is not expected to add a significant amount of traffic to this left-turn movement (5 new vehicles).

Route 8 (Curran Memorial Highway) at South State Street (North Adams)

Route 8 and South State Street intersect to form a three-way unsignalized T-intersection, with the South State Street approach under "STOP" sign control.

The eastbound movement exiting South State Street onto Route 8 currently operates at LOS D during the weekday evening peak hour and is expected to continue to perform at this LOS under the No Build condition. However, with the addition of Project related traffic to the major road, South State Street is expected to operate at LOS E. The EENF states that this increase in delay only impacts approximately 15 drivers during the peak hour (one vehicle every four minutes) and that the increase in delay should be hardly noticeable. It further states no additional traffic is anticipated to be added to this side street movement.

Route 8 (Columbia Street) at Friend Street (Adams)

Route 8, Friend Street and Renfrew Street intersect to form a four-way unsignalized intersection with the Friend Street and Renfrew Street approaches under "STOP" sign control.

The eastbound movement at the intersection of Friend Street and Route 8 currently operates at LOS F during the weekday evening peak hour and LOS E during the Saturday midday peak hour. The westbound Renfrew Street approach currently operates at LOS E during the weekday evening peak hour, as well. Both approaches are expected to worsen in the future with both approaches operating at LOS F under both No-Build and Build conditions during the weekday evening peak hour and will degrade from E to F No-Build to Build for Friend Street Saturday Peak. The degradation during this Saturday peak for the Friend Street approach with delays increasing from 42 seconds to greater than 120 seconds that will result from the proposed project is problematic. The EENF states, however, that given the location of this intersection, 1 ½ miles south of the site, the Project is expected to have a minimal impact on the overall operation.

EENF page 4-20 summarizes LOS, for existing conditions, projected under 2012 No-Build and projected under 2012 Build as follows:

	2007 (Existing)		2012 No Build		2012 Build	
	Delay	LOS	Delay	LOS	Delay	LOS
EB weekday	>120	F	>120	F	>120	F
WB weekday	45	E	52	F	76	F
EB Saturday	35	E	42	E	>120	F
WB Saturday	20	C	21	C	31	D

EENF Page 4-10 cites that Friend St intersection had 14 accidents 2003-2005, resulting in an accident rate of 0.75. As an unsignalized intersection, Friend St.'s 0.75 accident rate is higher than the statewide average of 0.66 for unsignalized intersections.

EENF Figure 4.7 shows that 4% of the proposed Project's trip generation is to/from Friend Street.

Although there are conflicting statements in the EENF as to the intent for mitigating impacts on level of service and safety (e.g. Page 4 of the ENF form itself does not cite any mitigation element at the Friend/Renfrew intersection whereas Page 1.5 of the EENF, the 8th bullet reads, "The Proponent will provide MassHighway, BRPC and the Town of Adams with a full signal feasibility study for the intersection of Route 8 with Friend Street and Renfrew Street."), the proponent's consultant team has stated that the extent of mitigation will be: (1) provision of preliminary data related to the apparent lack of warrant for traffic signal at this intersection; and (2) brief text related to various alternatives that are feasible. There is no commitment by the proponent or consultant team to implement any mitigation alternative as of the EENF.

If the pavement width of Route 8 at the Friend St/Renfrew St. intersection permits, BRPC would request consideration of a center turn lane that would not only maintain and/or improve the flow of traffic along Route 8 but also allow vehicles to exit Friend St. and Renfrew St. more efficiently.

Route 8 (Park Street) at Hoosac Street (Adams)

Route 8 and Hoosac Street intersect to form an unsignalized T-intersection with the Hoosac Street approach under "STOP" sign control.

The westbound left-turn movement from Hoosac Street onto Route 8 southbound currently operates at LOS F during both the weekday evening and Saturday midday peak hours. Traffic operations at this intersection are expected to worsen under all future conditions, with or without the proposed Project. According to the EENF, the Project is not expected to contribute any traffic to the critical left-turn movement from Hoosac Street although a more than 30 second delay will result for those vehicles making that left turn movement as a result of the project. There is an anticipated increase in right-turning movements of 10 new trips during the evening peak hour and 25 new trips during the Saturday peak hour. It further states that due to the minimal increase of new traffic on the critical approach the operational impacts that this Project is expected to have at this intersection are minimal. No mitigation measures are proposed for this intersection.

Public Transit

In the EENF, the proponent has stated commitment to work closely and will coordinate with the BRTA on the installation of a sheltered bus stop on the west side of Route 8 and other efforts so as to ensure that the proposed project will have provision of transit services that meet the needs of employees and customers alike. This stop will be in conjunction with a signalized crosswalk. To our knowledge, this is the only stop along Route 8 in the immediate vicinity. The EENF is silent, however, about provisions for northbound BRTA passengers to the site from, for instance, Adams downtown, or continuing on to North Adams downtown. During the February 25, 2008 Clearinghouse Review Committee meeting, there was some concern expressed about the where a northbound bus stop could be provided and how provision of such amenities might not be cost effective given the BRTA pricing schedule, specifically that crossing the North Adams/Adams Town Line results in an extra $1.10 each way/time. With the $1.10 surcharge for passengers to ride across the town line, there may be people who choose to walk in the road, as there is no sidewalk.

Consistency with the Regional Plans

Redevelopment of existing underutilized properties is consistent with the *Regional Plan for the Berkshires*. Support for economic opportunities in northern Berkshire county is also consistent the Regional Plan. Efforts to reduce the impacts of the redevelopment on the environment, especially water

resources, are also consistent with the Regional Plan. Redeveloping sites such as this one is appropriate and supportable. Similarly, maintaining the capacity of the regional arterial highways is also an important regional policy. With appropriate mitigation, this Project would comply with regional policies regarding preservation of the existing highway system.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The EENF is generally a very complete and thorough description of the existing and proposed conditions and generally contains appropriate mitigation measures.

A mandatory EIR is required due to the factor that the traffic generated exceeds 3,000 vehicle trips per day. The proponent has requested that a single EIR be allowed to be submitted. BRPC agrees that request is reasonable.

The following comments are offered to facilitate the generation of a final EIR.

1. The EIR should clearly state that that hay bales will not be allowed for sediment and erosion control as they may contain seeds from invasive or other undesirable species. Straw bales or other methods that will not potentially introduce invasive species will be used in place of hay bales. This was discussed with the proponent's representative / consultant via phone conference call.
2. The EIR should include a wetland replication plan. The seeding and replication plan should utilize only native species. Measures should be taken to ensure that invasive species are not included in such plan. This was discussed with the proponent's representative / consultant via phone conference call.
3. The wetland replication plan should include a plan to address invasive species that includes monitoring and eradication should invasive species become established.
4. The EIR should include a monitoring plan for the wetland replication. To determine the success of the replication the monitoring period should be extended and monitoring should be conducted for five to seven years. BRPC realizes this exceeds the DEP mandated monitoring period but has consistently requested proponents extend monitoring to fully insure that replicated wetlands are fully successful.
5. The EIR should provide the results of an evaluation of the sewer main in Adams, particularly under Route 8 to indicate the main has the capability to adequately transmit the wastewater from the site to the Adams Waste Water Treatment Plant. This was discussed with the proponent's representative / consultant via a phone conference call.
6. The EIR should contain a brief statement about the capacity and condition of the Adam wastewater treatment plant and an indication that the plant can adequately treat wastewater from the site.
7. Traffic Analysis –
   <u>Route 8A (Hodges Cross Road/Church Street) at South Church Street (North Adams)</u>
   The EIR should contain a greater discussion for potential mitigation measures at this intersection, including those items that were considered and reasons why they are being advanced or not able to be advanced. South Church Street is already used as an informal

bypass by which the congestion of Route 8 can be avoided. As Route 8 LOS continues to degrade, the use of South Church Street may become even higher than predicted in 2012.

Route 8 (Curran Memorial Highway) at South State Street (North Adams)
The EIR should contain a greater discussion for potential mitigation measures at this intersection. Additional explanation was provided by the proponent's representative / consultant via phone conference call including how the proposed traffic signal at the site drive will create additional gaps in the Route 8 traffic that will allow vehicles exiting South State Street to enter Route 8. This information, as well as other items discussed, such as additional documentation of the site conditions, including the break in the median at South State Street offering "refuge" for a car exiting South State Street, turning left to head northbound on Route 8 should be included in this discussion.

Route 8 (Columbia Street) at Friend Street (Adams)
There is general acknowledgement that the existing LOS and accident rate are bad and will get worse with or without the proposed Project. However, the proposed Project will induce a 24 second delay during weekday peak at the Renfrew Street (WB) approach and a > 1 minute delay during Saturday peak at the Friend Street (EB) approach. The EIR should contain a greater discussion for and consideration of potential mitigation measures relative both to safety (the accident rate is currently higher than the statewide average) and LOS (which will degrade upon completion of the Project) at this intersection, especially since 4% of the proposed Project's trip generation is to/from Friend Street. During a phone conference call with the proponent's representative / consultant a section of a center turn lane was suggested as a possible means of mitigation. During the February 25th BRPC Clearinghouse Review Committee meeting, a suggestion was made to have an alternative be changing the speed zones and/or speed zone signing. It was also mentioned during the meeting that since this section of Route 8 is owned by the Town of Adams and has Town jurisdiction, it would be expected that the range of alternatives would reflect the greater flexibility.

The EIR should also clarify the inconsistency in the proponent's statement related to a full feasibility intersection study. During a phone conference call the proponent's representative / consultant indicated that the commitment to a full signal feasibility study (as reported on page 1.5) was supposed to have been deleted. There is no commitment to the feasibility study that would have included a traffic signal warrant analysis. The proponent's consultant did say, however, that through a preliminary evaluation, it was found that a traffic signal is not warranted. The consultant indicated a willingness to include that that preliminary evaluation in the EIR.

If striping a center turn lane at the Route 8/Friend St./Renfrew St. intersection is deemed appropriate and/or mandatory, the EIR should identify the logical termini and commit to completion of the intersection improvements in the form of line striping.

Route 8 (Park Street) at Hoosac Street (Adams)
The EIR should contain a greater discussion for potential mitigation measures at this intersection, including those items that were considered and reasons why they are being advanced or not able to be advanced. During a phone conference call with the proponent's representative / consultant a section of a center turn lane was mentioned as just one possible means of mitigation. During the February 25th meeting, it was mentioned that since this

section of Route 8 is owned by the Town of Adams and has Town jurisdiction, it would be expected that the range of alternatives would reflect the greater flexibility.

8. The EIR should contain greater discussion and explanation about northbound transit provisions, including feasibility – or lack thereof – of amenities provided for northbound BRTA passengers. This should include a discussion about transit pricing across municipal boundaries and how a Transportation Demand Management Plan might address a pricing program that encourages riders crossing the municipal line, for instance from Adams, to affordably use transit to get to the site.

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Executive Committee considered and approved these comments at their meeting on March 5, 2008.