

# TOWN OF GUILDERLAND

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Stephen J. Feeney, Chairman  
& Town Planning Board

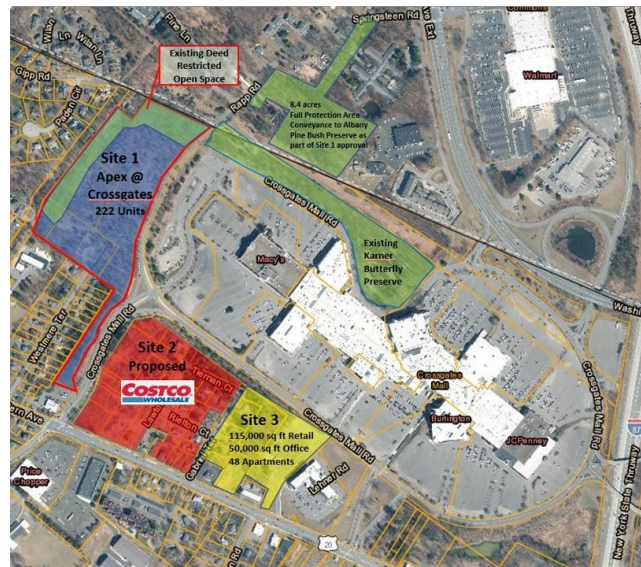
FROM: Kenneth Kovalchik, AICP, Town Planner

DATE: March 15, 2023 (updated March 17, 2023)

SUBJ: Site Plan Review Associated with a Special Use Permit – Costco Retail Facility  
Crossgates Releaseco, LLC

### Location of the Proposed Costco

The site of the proposed Costco is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Western Avenue/Crossgates Mall Road/Johnston Road. An aerial map showing the location of the proposed Costco is shown in the map below, including the two additional project sites that were analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) adopted by the Planning Board in August 2020, assessing the cumulative environmental impacts of the 3 project sites.



### Background

The proposed Costco requires approval of a Special Use Permit (SUP) by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Pursuant to Section 280-52.B of Town Code the ZBA is the lead agency for reviews

of SUP's. The ZBA has the authority to permit or deny the use. The first step in the review of SUP's is for the Planning Board to conduct a site plan review and provide a report to the ZBA pursuant to Section 280-52.C of Town Code.

The Applicant (Crossgates Releaseco, LLC) is proposing an approximate 163,000 square foot Costco wholesale retail facility, including an 18 pump fuel facility, liquor sales and tire sales/installation on 16.46 acres +/- located in the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District. Access to the site will be provided via 3 driveways, which includes a full access driveway from Gabriel Terrace; full access driveway from Crossgates Mall Road and right-in only driveway from Crossgates Mall Road. A minimum of 653 parking spaces are required for the proposed use, with a maximum of 817 parking spaces permitted. The applicant is proposing 770 parking spaces, which includes 16 accessible parking spaces and 8 electric vehicle charging parking spaces.

Pursuant to Section 280-1.F.2 of Town Code maximum lot coverage permitted is 75% of the project site. The applicant is proposing 83.3% lot coverage. In order to encourage consolidation of green space, this section of Town Code permits a reviewing board to consider all property within the TOD District which is owned or controlled by an applicant if the green space is identified on an approved site plan. The applicant is proposing 1.5 acres of offsite greenspace, proposed east of the main entrance to Crossgates Mall from Western Avenue. The offsite greenspace plan can be viewed on page 16 of 22 of the full plan set and Offsite Greenspace Plan. The ownership of the property proposed for the offsite greenspace is the same as the site of the proposed Costco.

#### Off-site Improvements – Crossgates Mall Road and Gabriel Terrace

Significant offsite improvements will be constructed as part of the proposed Costco, including but not limited to:

- Installation of a roundabout at the intersection of the I87 exit/entrance ramps and Crossgates Mall Road. Construction of the roundabout is expected to commence on or about April 3, 2023. The roundabout was required by the NYS Department of Transportation as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) adopted by the Planning Board in August 2020, which included the Costco site and 2 other sites adjacent to Crossgates Mall. The roundabout was required to address an existing high rate of accidents at this intersection (20x the national average). A condition of the EIS requires the roundabout to be operational prior to Costco opening for business. The roundabout is also a critical roadway infrastructure improvement for CDTA's new bus rapid transit 'Purple Line', providing improved access between Broadway in downtown Albany and Crossgates Mall. Construction of the Purple Line commenced in 2022.
- Road diet on Crossgates Mall Road, which includes decreasing the existing 4-lane roadway to two lanes and installing dedicated turning lanes at major intersections.
- Installation of landscaped medians on Crossgates Mall Road, which acts as traffic calming.
- Gabriel Terrace is currently accessed from Western Avenue and terminates as a dead-end street. Gabriel Terrace will be improved and extended to intersect with Crossgates Mall Road, creating a 4-leg, signalized intersection with crosswalks. A new sidewalk will be

installed on the north side of this intersection providing improved pedestrian connectivity from Crossgates Mall Road to the area of Macy's/Dick's Sporting Goods.

- A new 10' wide multi-use trail will be installed around the perimeter of the Costco site, on Crossgates Mall Road and Gabriel Terrace, improving pedestrian connectivity to the Costco site and surrounding sites. The multi-use trail will also extend to the Homewood Suites/Tru by Hilton located east of the Costco site.
- Removal of the existing exit ramp on the west side of the intersection of Crossgates Mall Road/Rapp Road. Vehicles can currently use the exit ramp at high rates of speed. Removal of the ramp will require all vehicles to travel through a signalized intersection, which will slow vehicle speeds and increase pedestrian safety.

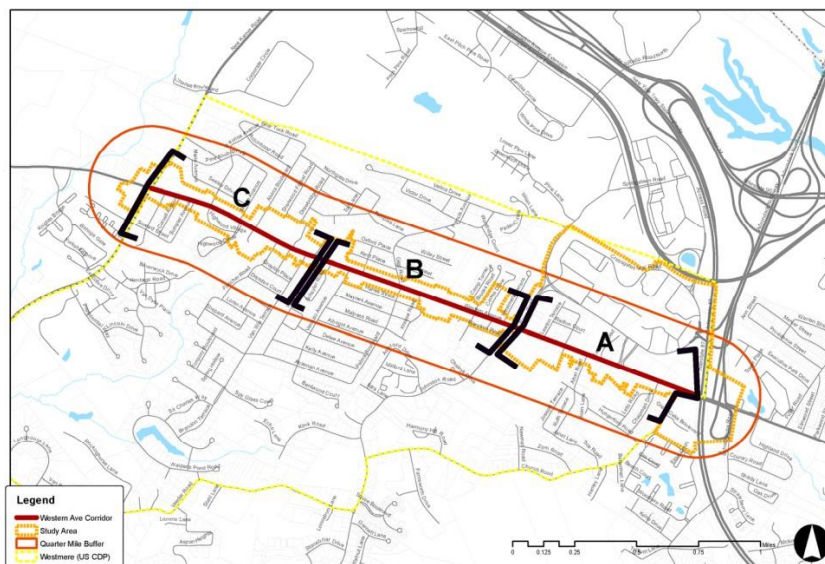
## Westmere Corridor Study

### Background

In December 2016 the final report for the Westmere Corridor Study was completed after a yearlong public planning process. The town hired a consultant team consisting of IBI Group and subcontractors River Street Planning & Development and T. R. Johnson Engineering. The study was prepared in cooperation with the Capital District Transportation Committee, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission, the Capital District Transportation Authority, Albany County and the New York State Department of Transportation. The study was funded by the Capital District Transportation Committee's Linkage Program.

### Study Area

The study corridor is defined as the extent of Western Avenue between the Adirondack Northway entrance on the east and Route 155/New Karner Rd on the west. The study area is demarcated based on the parcel boundaries of the lots immediately abutting Western Avenue. The study area also included the Crossgates Mall Ring Road, due to its importance to the commercial and traffic characteristics of the area. A quarter-mile (typical walking distance) buffer is considered as the influence area for the study. The study area was divided into 3 segments as shown in the map below.



### Study Area Segments

- A) auto strip retail between Church Road and Johnston Road/Crossgates Mall Road.
- B) a combination of smaller scale retail and professional uses in converted houses and residential between Johnston Road/Rapp Road and York Road.
- C) a mix of larger-scale retail, residential, and office between York Road and State Farm Road/New Karner Road.

**\*Costco is located in segment A**

The following recommendations from the Westmere Corridor Study relate to Segment A of the study area and could be implemented by the proposed Costco development, including but not limited to:

- 1. Create a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Neighborhood Recommendation**
  - The TOD model provides a mix of housing, shopping, entertainment and employment within walking distance (½ mile) of transit which, in Guilderland’s case, is bus and bus rapid transit service (BRT) with a BRT stop planned for Crossgates Mall. A TOD neighborhood is expected to be fairly dense to keep walking distances shorter and maximize the number of people living in, working and visiting the area.
  - Segment A has critical features that would be necessary for a successful TOD neighborhood. These features include the availability of underutilized or vacant land adjacent to major destinations that attract high volumes of people (such as shopping, entertainment and employment centers) and could support high ridership transit stops.
- 2. Enhance Pedestrian Connectivity and Amenities Recommendations**
  - Town Planners should work with developers and property owners to enhance the walkability of the area through rear lot connections and connections to the new sidewalks, bus stops, street trees and other landscaping and pedestrian amenities.
- 3. Increase Use of Green Infrastructure and Landscaping Recommendations**
  - Green infrastructure elements can include sustainable (such as pervious) paving, green roofs, rain gardens, and increased landscaping and green space.
  - Parking lots should be broken up with landscaped areas wide enough for proper plant, shrub and tree growth and water absorption.
  - Landscaping options could include trees, shrubs, plants and green space on the perimeter of parking lots, within parking lots, along road frontage, adjacent to transit stops, corners or other gathering locations.
- 4. Transit Oriented Development Recommendations**
  - The TOD model provides a mix of housing, shopping, entertainment and employment within walking distance (½ mile) of transit which, in Guilderland’s case, is bus and bus rapid transit service (BRT) with the BRT Purple Line planned for Crossgates Mall.
  - A TOD neighborhood is expected to be fairly dense to keep walking distances shorter and maximize the number of people living, working and visiting the area.
  - While several elements of TOD are recommended throughout the Westmere Corridor with regard to access management, traffic calming, and pedestrian, bicycle and transit improvements, this particular part of the corridor has critical features that would be necessary for a successful TOD neighborhood. These include high ridership transit stops and a future BRT station, a regional shopping and entertainment center, some higher density commercial, residential and employment uses within close proximity to one another and several large underutilized/vacant parcels and smaller infill lots for future development.

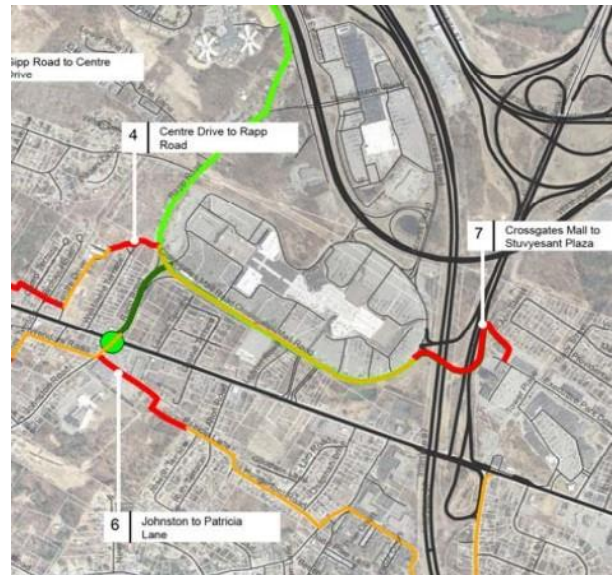
- Traffic volumes and access complexities associated with the I-87 Ramp to Crossgates, the Crossgates Ring Road, and the intersection of Fuller Road Alternate and Western Avenue create challenges to making this corridor more pedestrian-, bicycle- and transit-friendly.

## 5. Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility Recommendations

- Street and internal access drive/road design should promote a sense of neighborhood intimacy, provide for safe pedestrian crossings and slow automobile travel speeds. This can be accomplished through a variety of ways including:
  - a) Frequent opportunities for pedestrian crossing of streets and internal access drives/roadways.
  - b) Safe pedestrian crossings that are well marked and well lit.
  - c) The use of pedestrian actuated signalized crossings, medians, or pedestrian refuge areas, curb extensions, raised and/or textured crosswalks, and other traffic calming features where appropriate.
  - d) Landscaping and street trees as a barrier (generally at least 3 feet wide) between pedestrians and vehicles traveling alongside pedestrians.

## 6. Off-Road Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections (Multi-use Trails) Recommendations

- The map shows 'Existing and Future Bicycle and Pedestrian Links' recommended in the Westmere Corridor Study.
- It is recommended that the following off-road bicycle and pedestrian connections be considered as long-term solutions to close gaps in the corridor's residential street network to the north and south of Western Avenue, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to travel through the corridor, access amenities, and minimize interaction with arterial vehicle traffic. In conjunction with improved on-street pedestrian and bicycle facilities, these off-road connections would create continuous east-west "green corridors," or neighborhood greenways.



## Section 280-18.1 of Town Code – Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District

The "Purpose" section of the TOD states:

*"The Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) District is designed to implement the recommendations of the Westmere Corridor Study (study) by using an overlay district to support and incentivize development that adequately protects nearby residential neighborhoods and utilizes resources within and near the TOD's boundary, including regional shopping, entertainment, and employment centers, a robust transit service with high ridership and proposed enhancements,*



*direct vehicle access to the interstate highway system, and a nearby local business community. The TOD District encourages more compact development, traffic-calming measures, better access management, improving the environment for non-automobile-oriented modes of transportation, reducing the number of required parking spaces, supporting mixed-use buildings and pedestrian linkages, and focusing intense development away from existing residential neighborhoods.”*

Town Planner Comments:

- A primary recommendation of the Westmere Corridor Study was the creation of the TOD District. The site of the proposed Costco is within the TOD.
- The site of the proposed Costco is within ½ mile walk of CDTA’s bus rapid transit stop (Purple Line) at Crossgates Mall. Additionally, a new CDTA bus stop is proposed on Crossgates Mall Road, immediately west of the Costco site.
- The site of the proposed Costco is located approximately ½ mile from two major entrances to I87, one from Crossgates Mall Road and one from Western Avenue.
- The proposed off-site improvement plans for Crossgates Mall Road and Gabriel Terrace will implement road diet features to calm traffic and increase pedestrian safety, as previously discussed in this memo.
- The Westmere Terrace neighborhood is located approximately 600 feet to the west of the location of the proposed Costco building footprint. Crossgates Mall Road (town road) separates the Costco site from the neighborhood. Additionally, an existing approximate 20’ tall landscaped berm is located on the west side of Crossgates Mall Road and east side of the neighborhood, which acts as both a noise and visual buffer as depicted in the photo below.



**Section 280-52C(2) of Town Code – Site Plan Report to Zoning Board**

In preparing the site plan review report for the Zoning Board, the Planning Board shall consider the factors identified in § 280-53H and the following criteria:

- a) Whether the proposed use and site conform to the Comprehensive Plan.
- b) Whether the project conforms to accepted design and aesthetic principles.
- c) The effect of the proposed use on the other properties in the neighborhood, and whether it will materially affect the value of such properties and the use and enjoyment of such properties by the occupants and other effects of such use on the health, welfare and safety of the occupants of such properties.

Town Planner Comments:

The Planning Board will address these items as part of the site plan report that will be provided to the Zoning Board.

**Section 280-53H of Town Code – Factors for Consideration of Site Plan Approval**

The Planning Board's review of an application for site plan approval shall include, but is not limited to, the following considerations:

- a) Full conformance of the site plan with the provisions of this chapter, including site plan guidelines set forth in § 241-39.
- b) Adequacy and arrangement of vehicular traffic access and circulation, including intersections, road widths, transit accommodations, and traffic controls. Consideration will also be given to the project's impact on the overall traffic circulation system of the neighborhood and the Town.

Town Planner Comments:

- The on-site/off-site improvements were previously discussed in this memo addressing intersection improvements, transit improvements and driveway access.
  - A truck movement plan (Sheet 6) and emergency vehicle movement plan (Sheet 21) are included in the full plan set. The Town Designated Engineer will review the movement plans to ensure adequate turning radii are included for vehicle maneuverability.
- c) Adequacy of fire lanes and other emergency zones, traffic circulation and system of fire hydrants.

Town Planner Comments:

- In an email dated September 6, 2022 the Westmere Fire District commented that the developer has agreed to coordinate fire hydrant quantities and locations with the fire department.
  - Design of fire lanes and drive aisles are addressed in the comments above.
- d) Adequacy and arrangement of pedestrian access and circulation, including, but not solely limited to, separation of pedestrians from vehicular traffic, control of intersections and overall pedestrian convenience, including access and facilities for bicycles.

Town Planner Comments:

- As discussed above, a new 10' wide multi-use trail will be installed around the perimeter of the Costco site, on Crossgates Mall Road and Gabriel Terrace, improving pedestrian connectivity to the Costco site and surrounding sites. The multi-use trail will also extend to the Homewood Suites/Tru by Hilton located east of the Costco site.
  - Sidewalks and crosswalks are proposed within the Costco site providing pedestrian amenities from the parking areas to the building entrance.
- e) Location, arrangement, design and general site compatibility of buildings, lighting and signs. As much as it is possible, consideration should be given to noise sources, privacy, prevailing wind directions and seasonal sun movements when locating structures, patios and open spaces on parcels, exhaust fans and outdoor waste disposal locations.

Town Planner Comments

- The elevation of the Costco building will be lower than the elevation of Crossgates Mall Road, ranging from 7' to 14' lower depending on the location within the site.
  - The elevation of the Costco building at the entrance is 282'. The elevation of the top of the retaining wall (highest point) on the west side of the site, adjacent to Crossgates Mall Road, is 297'.
  - Noise produced from the site will have lesser impacts on surrounding uses, particularly the residential uses located west of the site, due in part to the building being lower in elevation as it relates to the elevation of Crossgates Mall Road.
  - The applicant is proposing 16' tall poles with LED's for parking lot lighting. The height of the poles complies with the maximum height allowed in the TOD District.
  - The lighting plan indicates all proposed lighting is in compliance with the lighting code, with the maximum illumination level at the property line not exceeding 0.2 footcandles.
- f) Location, arrangement and setting of off-street parking and loading areas.

Town Planner Comments:

- The proposed loading dock area is at the southeast corner of the building.
- The Truck Movement Turning Plan (Sheet 6) shows delivery vehicles entering the site from Western Avenue and using the Gabriel Terrace driveway entrance.
- The turning plan shows the delivery vehicles can adequately navigate through the parking lot to and from the loading dock area.
- The Town Designated Engineer will review this plan to confirm the turning radius movements.
- The Costco building footprint is located at the rear portion of the site, allowing parking areas to be constructed on the west, south and east sides of the building. Sidewalks and crosswalks allow for safe pedestrian access from the parking areas to the building entrance.



- g) Adequacy, type and arrangement of trees, shrubs and other landscaping.

Town Planner Comments:

- A landscape plan is included in the full plan set (Sheet 12).
  - Landscaping is proposed around the perimeter of the site and within the parking lot area.
  - Landscaping is proposed within the end islands and center islands of the parking lot area.
- h) In the case of an apartment building, multiple-dwelling complex or PUD, the adequacy of usable open space for playgrounds and informal recreation.

Town Planner Comments:

- This provision is not applicable to the proposed Costco.
- i) Adequacy of provisions for the control of stormwater and drainage, sanitary waste and sewage, water supply for fire protection and general consumption, solid waste disposal and snow removal storage areas.

Town Planner Comments:

- The Town Engineer will review the proposed stormwater management plan (SWPPP). The SWPPP will comply with NYSDEC Stormwater regulations.
  - The Westmere Fire District has previously provided comments on the proposed Costco. Updated site plans were sent to the fire district for review/comment.
  - Public water/sewer is available at the project site.
  - Snow storage areas are depicted on the landscape plan (Sheet 12)
- j) Protection of adjacent properties against noise, glare unsightliness or other objectionable features.

Town Planner Comments:

- Previously discussed in item 'e' above.
- k) Retention of existing trees and vegetation for protection and control of soil erosion, drainage, natural beauty and unusual or valuable ecology, and whether the impacts to sensitive environmental areas have been avoided or minimized to the maximum extent practicable.

Town Planner Comments:

- The site of the proposed Costco consists of numerous unoccupied single-family homes, and town roads (Lawton Terrace, Rielton Court and Tiernan Court) that will be abandoned/discontinued as part of the development.

- The site also contains the alignment of the former Rapp Road, with the pavement, sub-base, guard rails, signage, etc. still in place.
  - Invasive species to the Pine Bush Preserve, such as White Pine, are present on the site with some having already been cut. In an email as recent as March 16, 2023 Neil Gifford, Conservation Director with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission recommended replacing the proposed white pine in the Costco landscape plan with pitch pine.
  - Many invasive plant species, particularly on the single-family properties, are also present.
- l) Necessary easements and/or construction of sidewalks or bikeways consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Town Planner Comments:

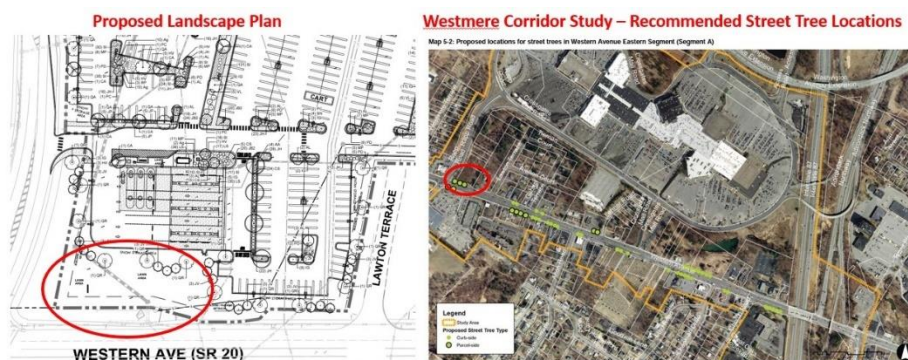
- Pedestrian amenities, both on-site and off-site, will be constructed as part of the proposed Costco and were previously discussed above.
- m) Compliance with standards for stormwater management and erosion and sediment control contained in Chapter 241 of the Town Code, unless exempted under § 241-23.

Town Planner Comments:

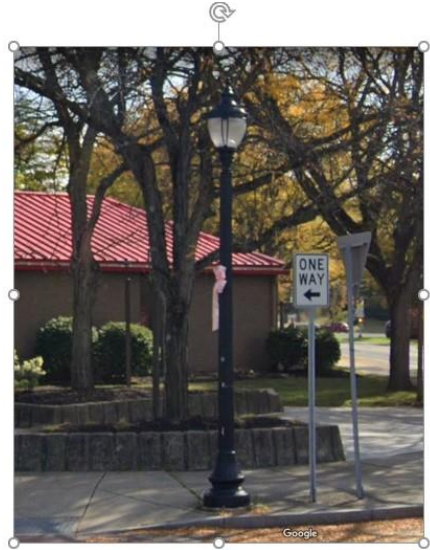
- The Town Engineer will review the proposed stormwater management plan (SWPPP). The SWPPP will comply with NYSDEC Stormwater regulations.

## Town Planner Recommendations

1. The landscape plan should be revised to incorporate comments from Neil Gifford, Conservation Director with the Pine Bush Preserve Commission in an email dated March 16, 2023. The proposed white pine and white spruce should be replaced with pitch pine.
2. The Westmere Corridor Study recommended street trees to be installed abutting Western Ave on the SW corner (see image below) of the proposed Costco site. The proposed landscape plan (see image below) should be revised to include additional street trees in this location. The Planning Board may also want to consider requiring a small pocket park/seating area in this location.

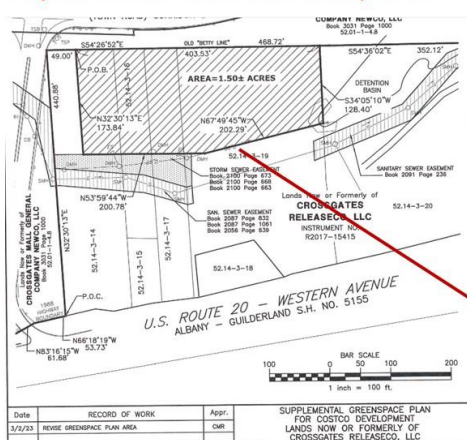


- The off-site improvement plans should be revised to include pedestrian scale lighting along the proposed multi-use trails. The plans should include the heights of the poles and spacing between each pole. A few examples of light poles appropriate for use along the multi-use trail are shown in the images below.



- The Site Details Plan (Sheet 16) shows a galvanized steel chain link fence is proposed to be installed between the multi-use trail and retaining walls. The Planning Board should consider a more decorative style of fencing to be installed in these areas.
- The Planning Board may want to consider whether the proposed 1.5 acre off-site greenspace area should be developed as a low impact pocket park. The greenspace area is located near the Tru by Hilton hotel, 24-unit apartment building currently under construction and main CDTA bus stop for Crossgates Mall. Additionally, the proposed greenspace is located in an area identified in the Westmere Corridor Study for future bicycle and pedestrian links (see images below). An email was sent to the Town Parks and Recreation Director seeking input on the proposed greenspace area.

**Proposed Location – Costco Offsite Greenspace Plan**



**Westmere Corridor Study Recommended Bicycle and Pedestrian Links**

