Staff Report

Devens Enterprise Commission

Date: March 14, 2025

To: **Devens Enterprise Commission**

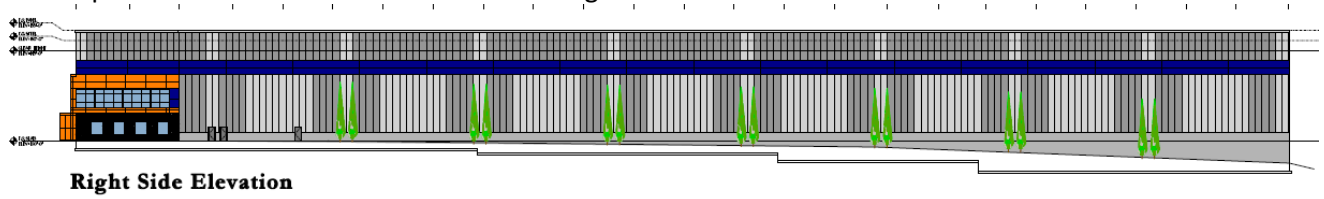
From: Neil Angus, Director

RE: **11 Grant Road Level 2 Unified Permit Amendment Request**

On June 8, 2023, the DEC approved a Level 2 Unified Permit for a 232,000 sq.ft. building and associated site improvements on a 13.2 acre parcel at 11 Grant Road. Construction commenced quickly and the building is now substantially complete and the Certificate of Occupancy was issued on 3/13/25.

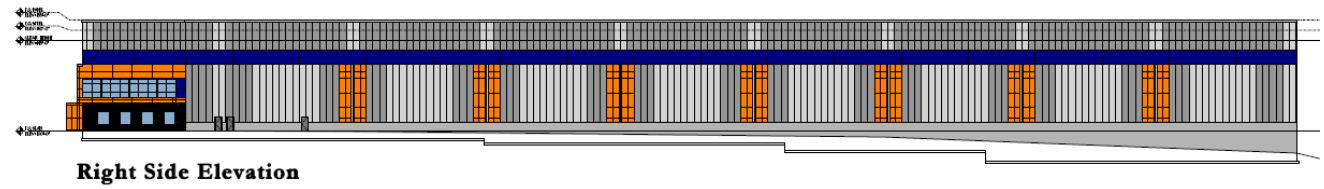
They have posted a performance bond for a few remaining, non-life-safety issues, so that they can occupy the building ASAP. One of those remaining items is the twenty-one (21) sets of landscape trellises that were required to aid in both screening the building and helping break up the scale and massing of the façade:

The Applicant is requesting to amend the original unified permit to eliminate the proposed trellises on three sides of the building, and replace the trellises on the Grant Road side with either columnar evergreen plantings or ACM pilasters to match the front of the building:



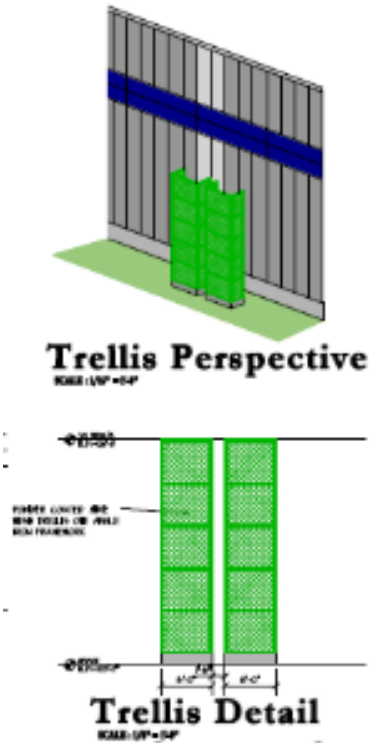
Right Side Elevation

Columnar Evergreen option (above)

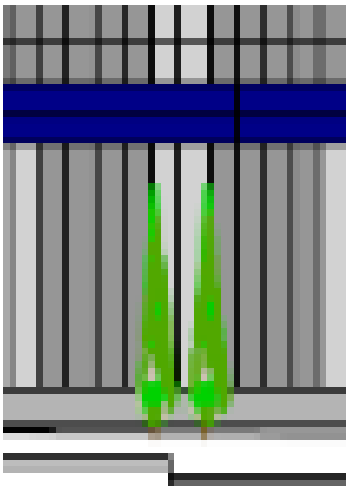


Right Side Elevation

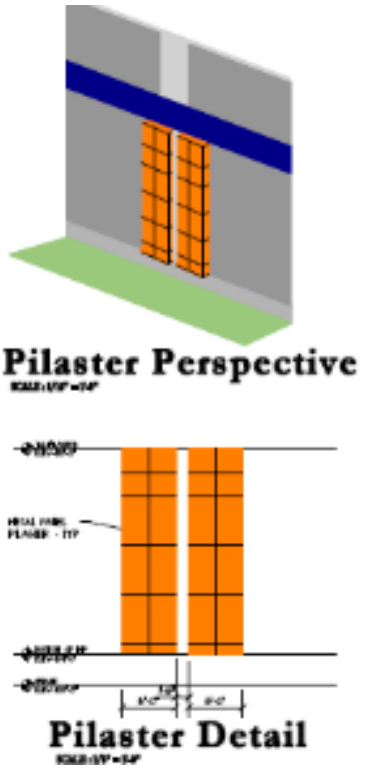
ACM Pilaster option



Approved Trellis



Proposed Columnar Evergreen Option



Proposed Pilaster Option

This project was subject to the Devens Jackson Park Design Guidelines which require higher standards than the Rail, Industrial, Trade Related District where the owner's existing building is currently located. Buildings in the Jackson Technology Park have more windows and architectural elements that break up the scale and massing of the building. The size of this building was actually reduced in order to provide the Applicant the additional area needed to meet these landscaping and screening requirements. The trellises were an innovative and agreed upon approach to meeting the design guidelines, in addition to the landscape screening requirements of the DEC Regulations 974 CMR 3.04. There has been a great deal of landscaping installed around the property and it appears very dense – and it is. But this is due to the size of the building, which forced the Applicant to incorporate the necessary screening into a very small left-over land area, especially along Grant Road.

While the Jackson Technology Park Design Guidelines are overseen by MassDevelopment, the trellises were a joint compromise by the DEC and MassDevelopment to help deal with the scale and massing of this building and lack of windows and other architectural features on the three sides of the building, but also to provide additional screening to meet the DEC landscaping AND screening requirements. The sheer size of this building, coupled with the fact that the property is surrounded on all sides by public roadways, makes this a unique situation. As per 974 CMR 3.04, landscape screening is required for multiple reasons, including softening the visual impact of buildings.

The Applicant requested these changes due to three key issues of concern:

1. The trellises would be required to be affixed to the building, which would require additional building penetrations that would not comply with FDA requirements for pharmaceutical storage. This was the same reasoning given for not including any windows or other fenestrations around the building façade.
2. The trellises would use climbing vines that would be very difficult to maintain and keep lush and "green" year-round, leaving exposed metal structures that would detract from the buildings appearance.

3. Trellises would require a concrete foundation separate from the building that would eliminate and disturb a number of landscape plantings already installed. In addition, they would have to be built separate from the building and connected with attachments that may not blend in with the façade.

Staff reviewed these options with our Landscape Architect, and while the columnar arborvitaes would provide some additional screening, they would not extend as high as the trellises and would not provide as much variation in the actual façade. Staff also reviewed the FDA requirements and they do not prohibit building penetrations – they just have to be properly planned for and managed (part of facility Integrated Pest Management Plan). With respect to the visual appearance, the DEC's Landscape Architect provided suggested options for evergreen vine species that would remain green year-round, and the trellises could be powder coated green to help blend with the vegetation. As for the third issue, this was self-created by the Applicant not installing the trellises first.

Staff went back and forth a number of times with the Applicant and visited the site to assess the situation first-hand. After further review, Staff agreed with the Applicant that the trellis foundations and their separation from the building façade may not achieve the desired effect and the Taylor' Juniper, while smaller, would be installed at a 12-15' height and would grow up to 30' over-time. The Taylor' Juniper could be placed very close to the foundation and, once installed, would provide an immediate year-round screen/visual break in the façade. This would meet the dual intent of the screening – providing the required year-round visual screening, as well as breaking up the scale and massing of the windowless facades.

The Applicant did a good job preserving more existing vegetation around the site than originally planned and protected these trees throughout construction. This has helped screen the building a little better from a portion of Jackson Road and Givry Street. However, again, due to the size of the building and it's proximity to 4 public roadways, the trellises and/or columnar arborvitae (Taylor' Juniper) are still necessary to comply with screening requirements.

MassDevelopment's Review:
During the review of this Unified Permit, MassDevelopment requested the Applicant consider the following recommendations:

- The addition of dimension to planar elements of the building, such as distinctive roof profiles, trim detailing, and repetitive window and door openings, and especially features along the building's Grant Road façade (e.g., commercial lattice and trellis walls), to add texture and greenery to the building mass;
- Architectural features or details to create a more prominent entrance for employees and visitors; and

The Applicant subsequently added some design elements to the front façade (facing Jackson Road), along with the proposed trellises to address these comments, as well as the DEC's landscape screening comments. While focus was on the Grant Road side of the building which was most prominent, MassDevelopment also requested that the proposed powder-coated wire mesh trellises for climbing vines be placed near the corner of the rear or left side elevations where visible from Grant Road. Because the building was largely visible from Givry, Hospital, Grant, and Jackson Roads, the Applicant ended up including trellises around the entire building for consistency. MassDevelopment has since issued a letter stating they are fine with the building as is now.

Conclusion/Options:
Staff had already agreed to administratively authorize the change from the trellises to the columnar evergreens (2 Taylor' Juniper @ 21 trellis locations for a total of 42 plantings) since the change would still meet the screening requirements. As the Applicant is requesting to only install these columnar evergreens on the Grant Road side of the building, it would reduce the number of plantings by 26, for a total of 16 plantings at only 8 locations. This would reduce compliance with 974 CMR 3.04, which only the Commission can authorize.

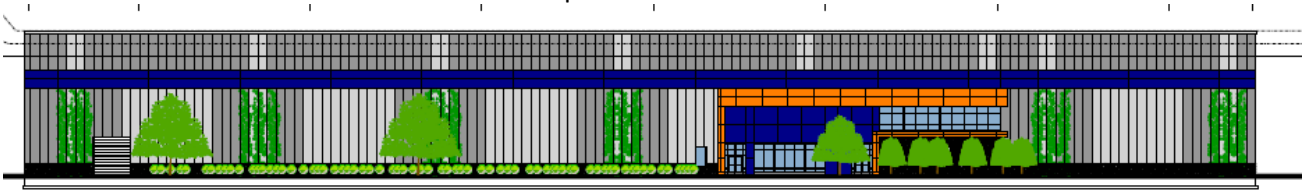
Staff has reviewed the existing installed landscaping in the field, in conjunction with the existing preserved vegetation, taking into account the addition existing vegetation that the Applicant preserved along Givry, Hospital, and Jackson. While the trellis locations were spaced out to offer some uniformity along the facades and provide year-round screening, the preservation of vegetation along the Givry Street side, and at the corner of Jackson Road, offers adequate screening of the building. If the Commission is so inclined to consider a compromise, it could consider eliminating the 5 locations for Taylor' Juniper plantings along the Givry Street side of the building, and 3 of the locations along the Jackson Road side of the building.

Process:
Mack Devens Development 11, LLC, submitted a Level II Unified Permit Modification request on February 4, 2025 and the Determination of Completeness was issued on February 7, 2025. Copies of the application and plans were received by the surrounding Towns on February 10, 2025. Legal notices were placed in Nashoba Publications on February 21 and 28, 2025. Certified Mail notice was sent to all abutting property owners on February 7, 2025. The 30-day public comment period expired on March 10, 2025. No public comments were received.

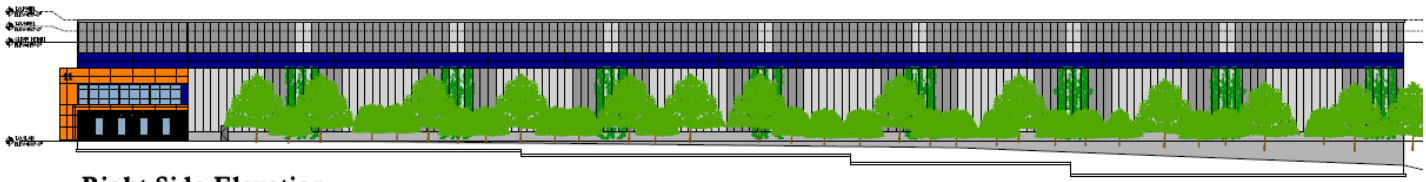
Recommended Action:
Staff would recommend the commission approve the elimination of the trellises, in exchange for the planting of two (2) Taylor' Juniper- Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor'(min. 12-15' at installation) with one of the following options:

1. At all 21 trellis locations as shown on the final endorsed plan set for 11 Grant Road Unified permit.
2. At the trellis locations as depicted on the plan entitled: "*Trellis Alternate Plan #2: Taylor' Juniper- Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor' Plantings @ 13 Trellis Locations (26 plantings total)*", dated March 12, 2025.

All other conditions of the unified permit would remain in place. Staff has prepared a draft record of decision for the commission's consideration for either option.

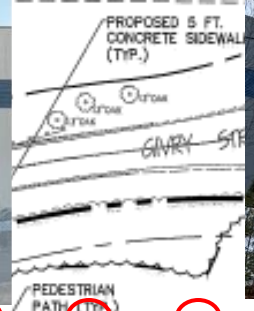


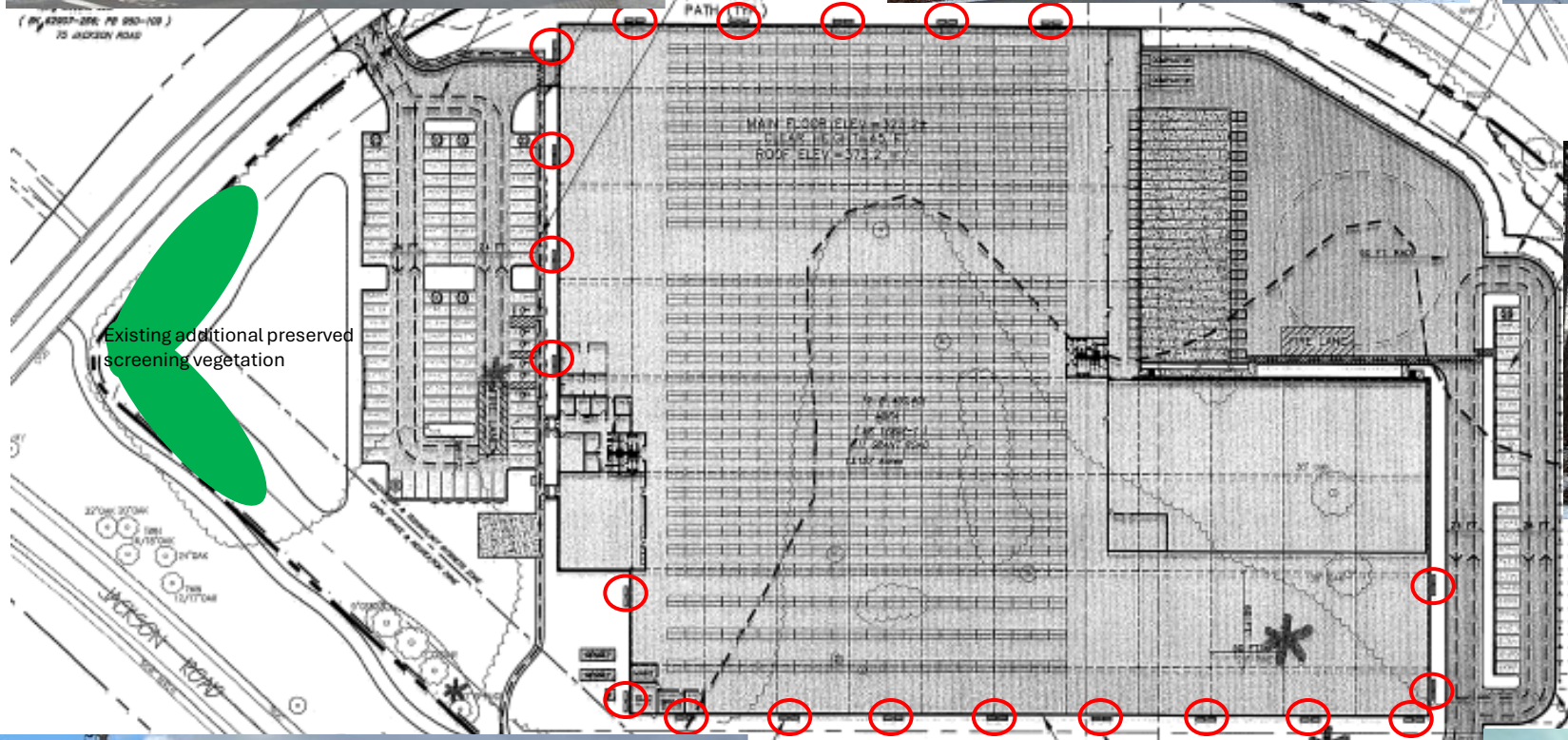
Front Elevation



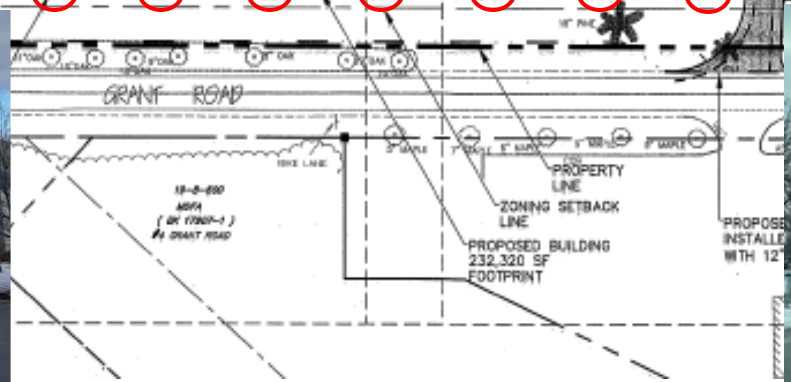
Right Side Elevation

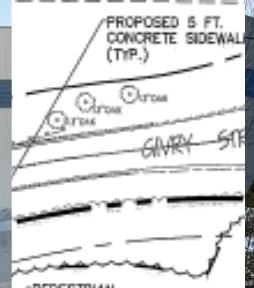
Architects elevations of originally approved trellises on Jackson Road (front) and Grant Road (right) with new landscaping super-imposed. Note that the larger plantings shown in front of the building facades are deciduous trees and would not provide any year-round screening as required by 974 CMR 3.04. The trellises and/or columnar arborvitae/Taylor juniper provide the year-round screening requirement from the ground, up.

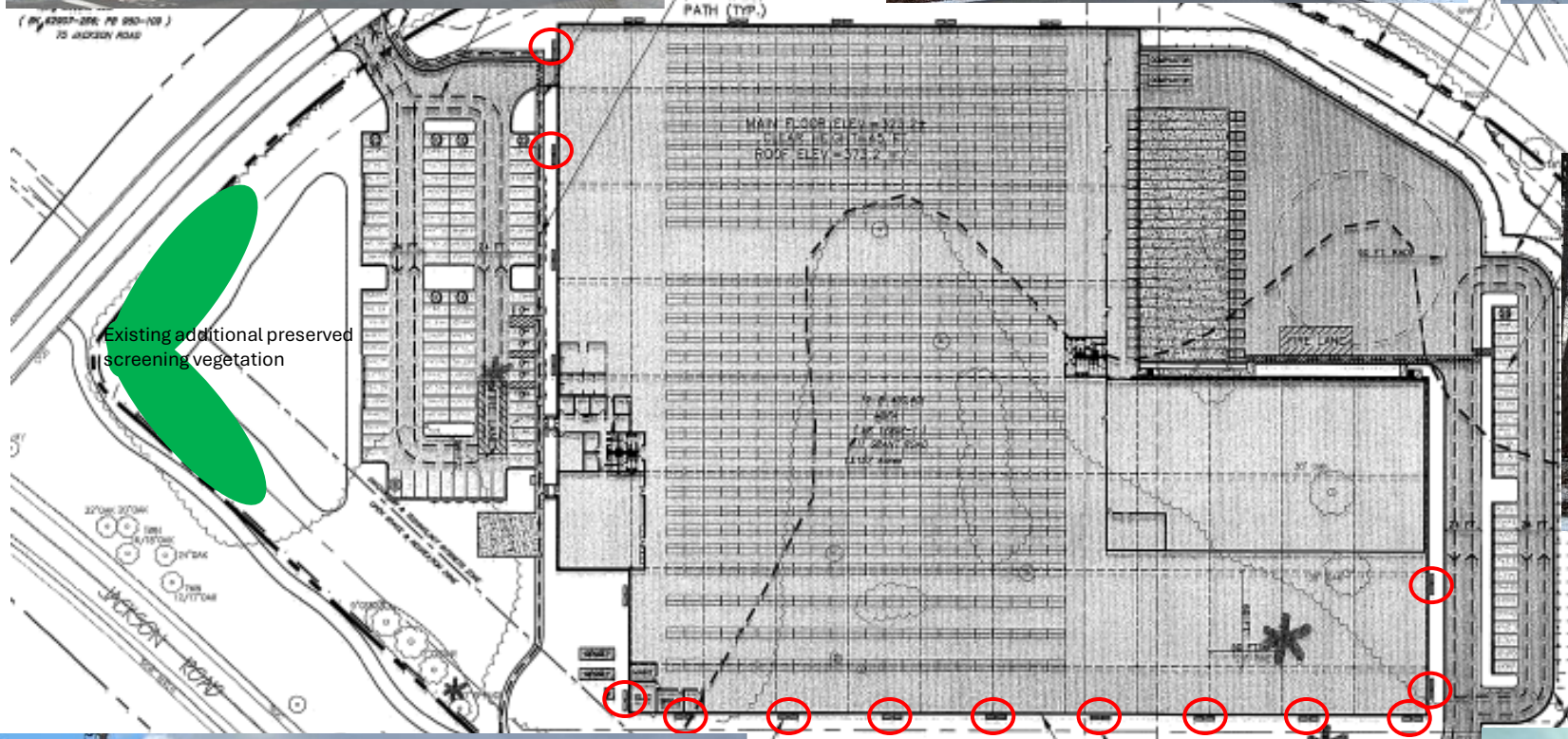

PROPOSED 5 FT.
CONCRETE SIDEWALK
(TYP.)
PEDESTRIAN


Existing additional preserved screening vegetation
JACKSON ROAD
MAIN FLOOR ELEV = 374.33'
ROOF ELEV = 373.2'
FIRE LANE

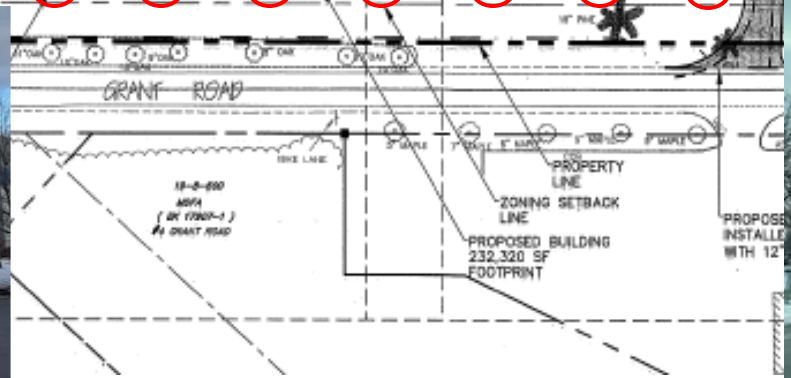
PROPOSED TIMBER
GUARD RAIL
LINE
PROPOSED 9'X18'
STANDARD PARKING
STALL
APPROXIMATE

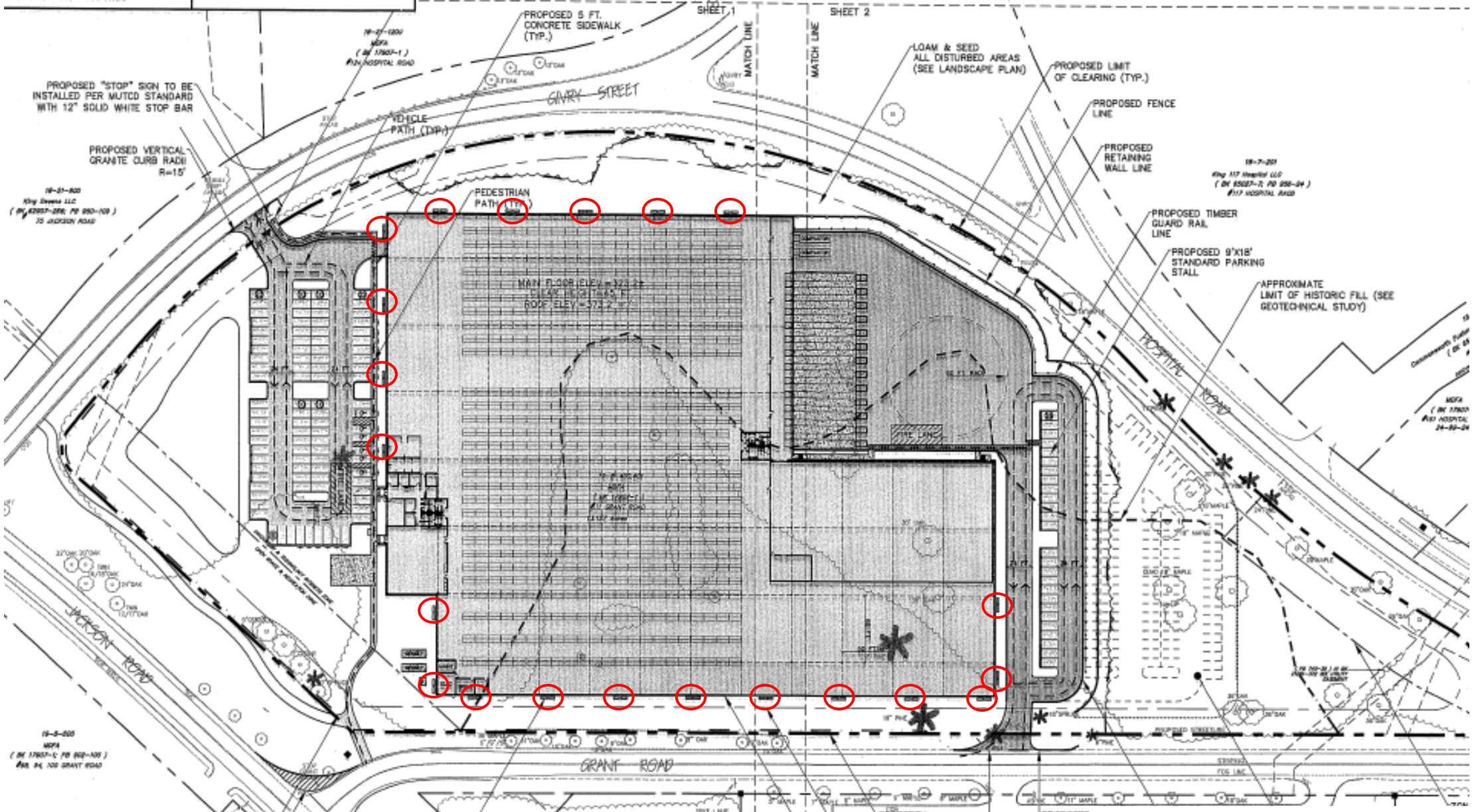

GRANT ROAD
PROPERTY
LINE
ZONING SETBACK
LINE
PROPOSED BUILDING
232,320 SF
FOOTPRINT


PROPOSED 5 FT.
CONCRETE SIDEWALK
(TYP.)
PEDESTRIAN
PATH (TYP.)


Existing additional preserved
screening vegetation
JACKSON ROAD

PROPOSED TIMBER
GUARD RAIL
LINE
PROPOSED 9'X18'
STANDARD PARKING
STALL
APPROXIMATE
LIMIT OF HISTORIC FILL (SEE


GRANT ROAD
PROPERTY
LINE
ZONING SETBACK
LINE
PROPOSED BUILDING
232,320 SF
FOOTPRINT

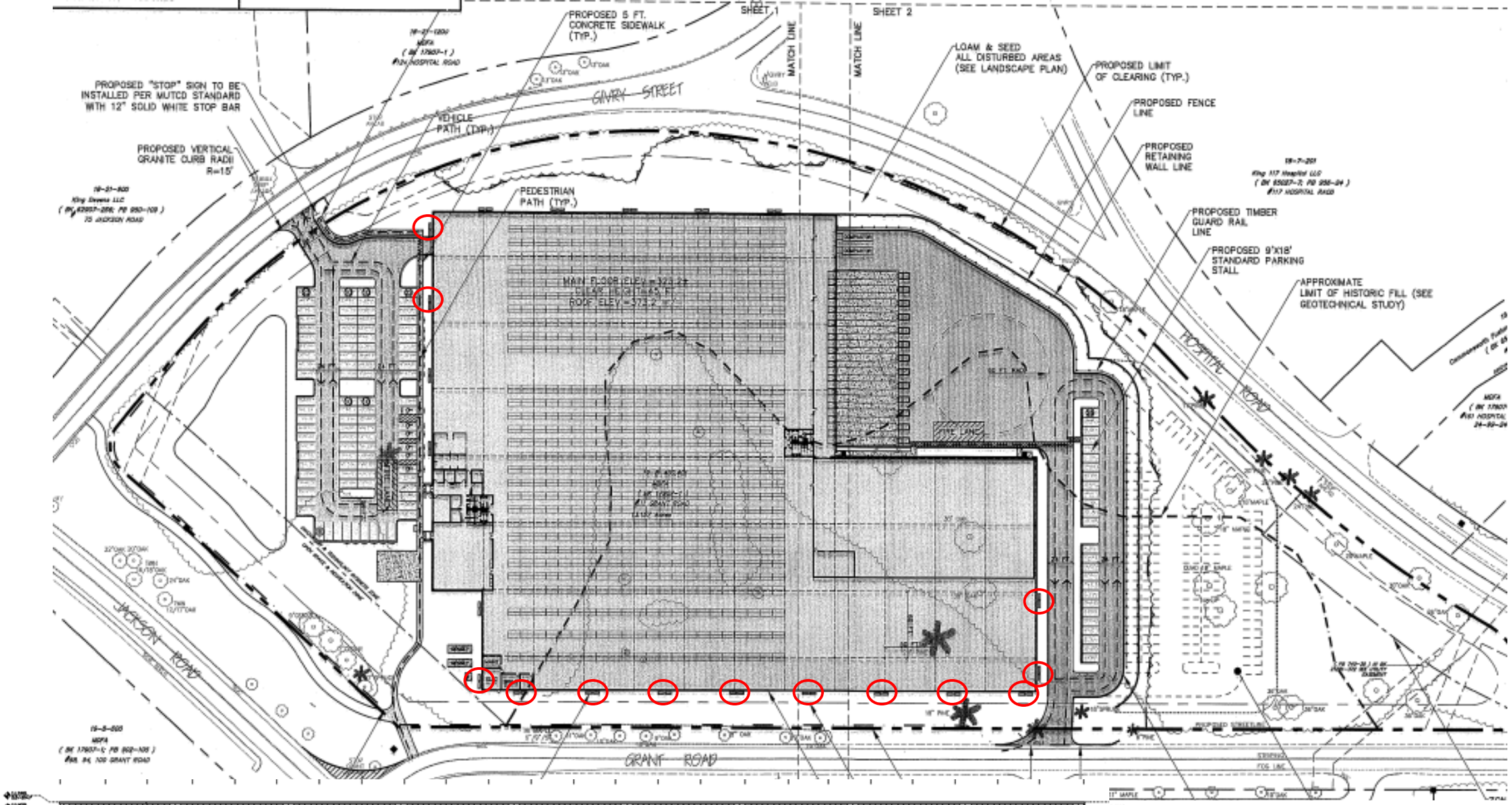


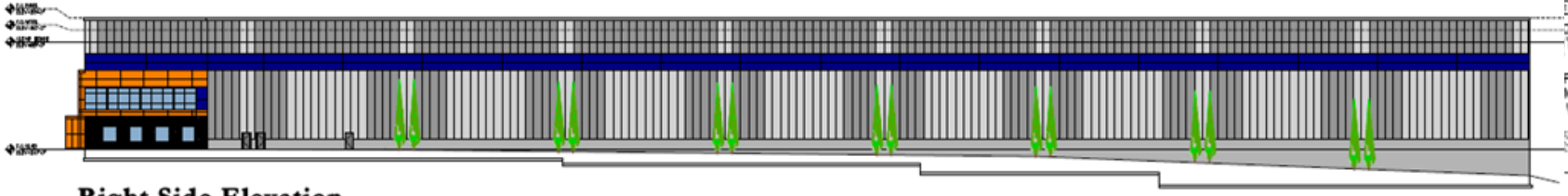
Trellis Alternate Plan #1:

Taylor' Juniper- Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor'

Plantings @ 21 Trellis Locations (42 plantings total)

March 12, 2025





Right Side Elevation

Trellis Alternate Plan #2:

Taylor' Juniper- Juniperus virginiana 'Taylor'

Plantings @ 13 Trellis Locations (26 plantings total)

March 12, 2025