



# City of New Bedford

## Department of Planning, Housing & Community Development

608 Pleasant St, New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740  
Telephone: (508) 979.1500 Facsimile: (508) 979.1575

**PATRICK J. SULLIVAN**  
DIRECTOR

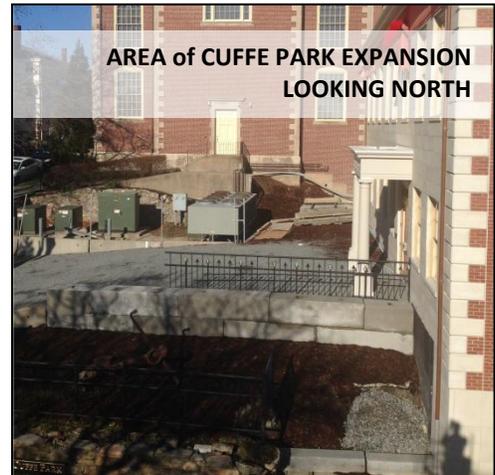
# STAFF REPORT

## NEW BEDFORD HISTORICAL COMMISSION MEETING May 1, 2017

**Case #2017.08: CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS**  
18 Johnny Cake Hill  
NE Corner of Union Street and Johnny Cake Hill

**Applicant/  
Owner:** Old Dartmouth Historical Society/  
New Bedford Whaling Museum  
18 Johnny Cake Hill  
New Bedford, MA 02740

**Applicant's  
Agent:** Civitects Architecture  
66 Troy Street  
Fall River, MA 02720



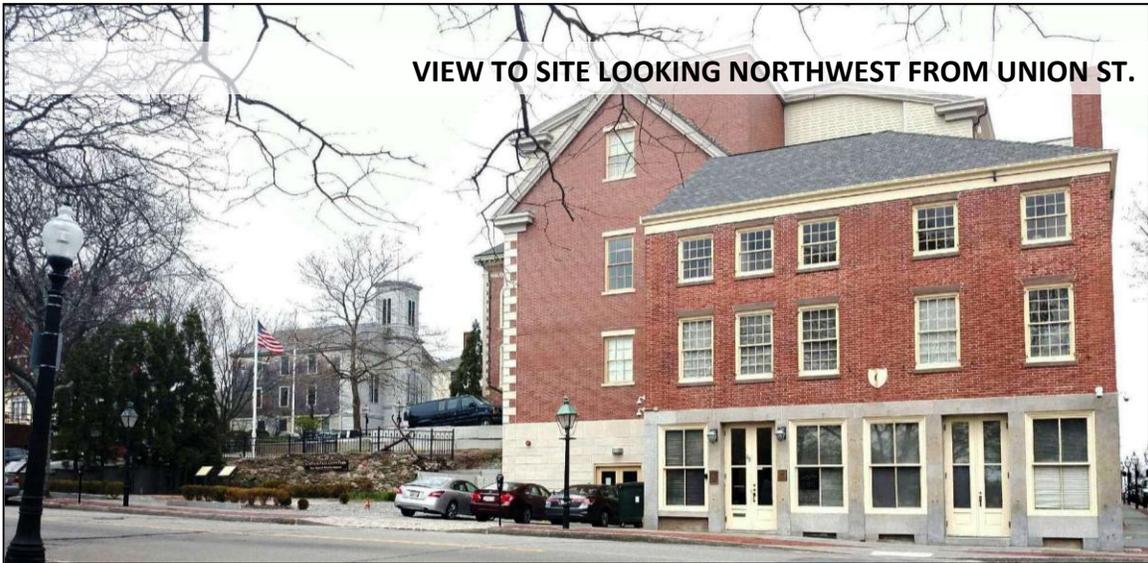
### Overview:

The applicant is seeking to elevate the grade level of the current Captain Paul Cuffe Park, located at the north east corner of Union Street and Johnny Cake Hill, so as to integrate the site into a larger planned plaza located in front of the Whaling Museum's Wattles Jacobs Education Center (WJEC). The new level surface would be attained through the use of retaining walls at the edges of the sidewalks at the northeast corner of Union Street and Johnny Cake Hill. **The New Bedford Historical Commission (NBHC) is being asked to review the project at its May 1<sup>st</sup> meeting and provide guidance to the applicant on materials and finishes.** A final plan will then be developed and returned to the NBHC for its review and consideration of a Certificate of Approval.

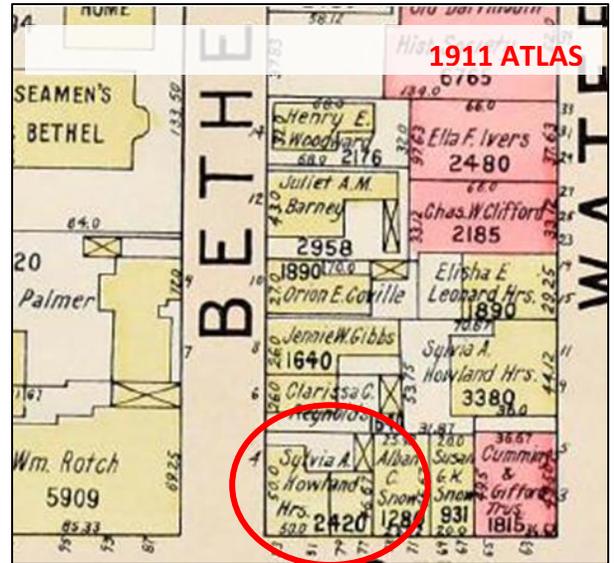
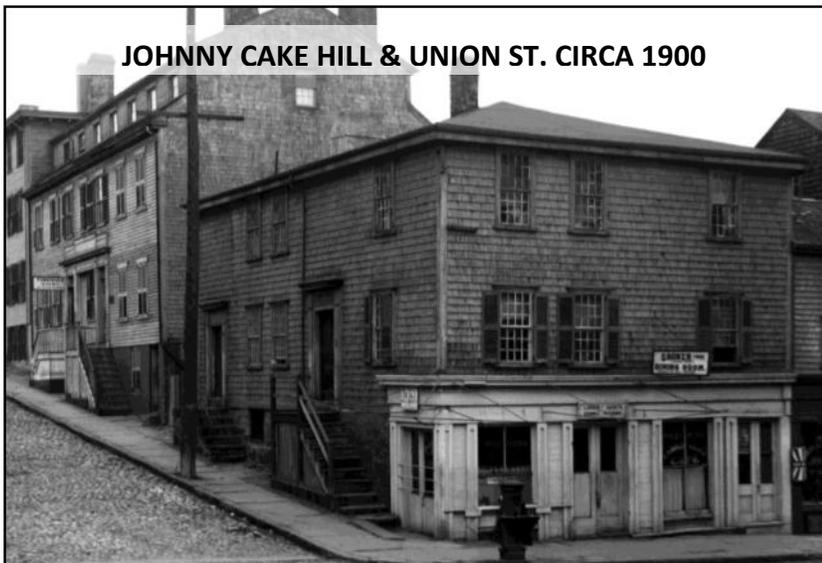
### Existing Conditions:

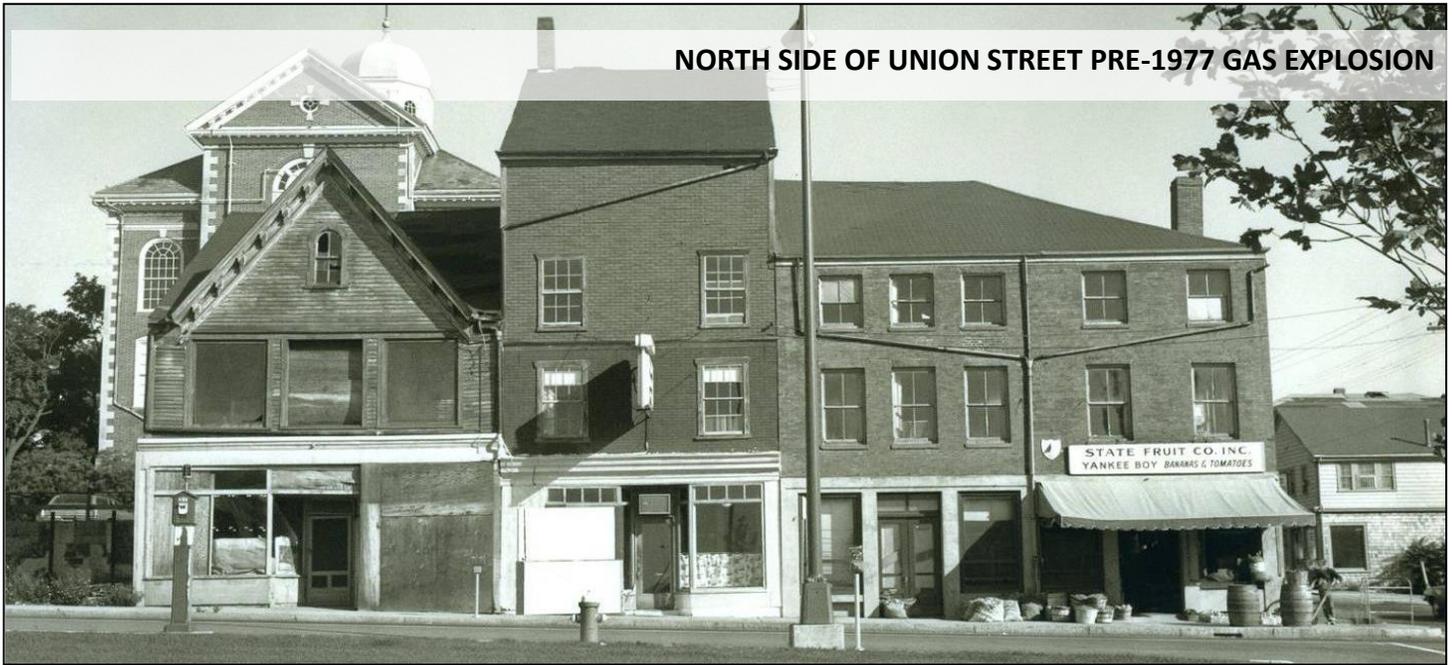
The location of the current Captain Paul Cuffe Park was once occupied by buildings prior to a 1977 gas explosion which leveled those structures. Cuffe Park was formally developed and dedicated in 2011. The WJEC opened in 2015 with an unfinished landscape on Johnny Cake Hill. The Whaling Museum intended to design and create an open public/private space in front of the WJEC which would connect to the Seaman's Bethel/Mariner's Home and generate activity on the southern section of Johnny Cake Hill.



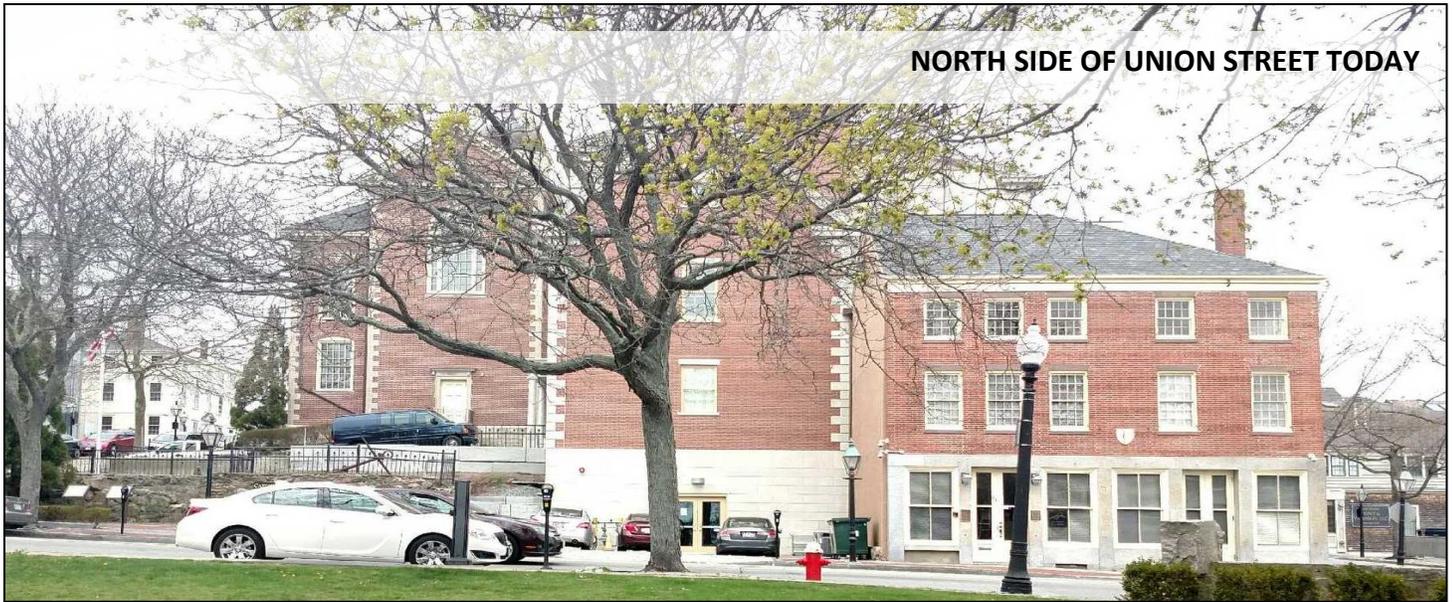


Historical Context:





**NORTH SIDE OF UNION STREET PRE-1977 GAS EXPLOSION**



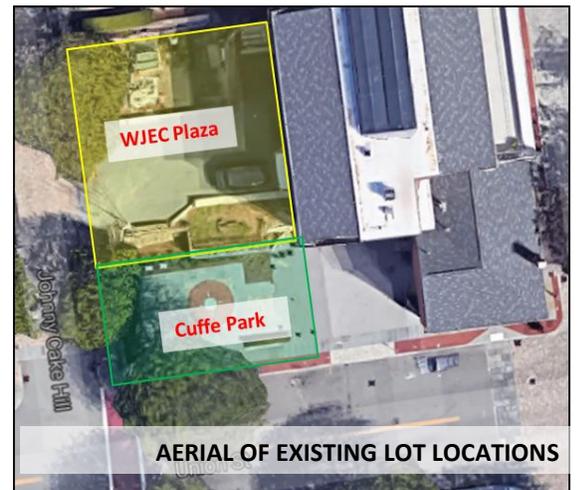
**NORTH SIDE OF UNION STREET TODAY**

**Proposal:**

The proposed elevation and expansion of Cuffe Park would require the use of retaining walls which would create a new street-front along Union Street, and to a lesser degree, on Johnny Cake Hill.

The resulting leveled surface would provide an expansive open space for both private and public programming and would provide for opportunity to interpret the themes of the park through plaques, panels and sculpture.

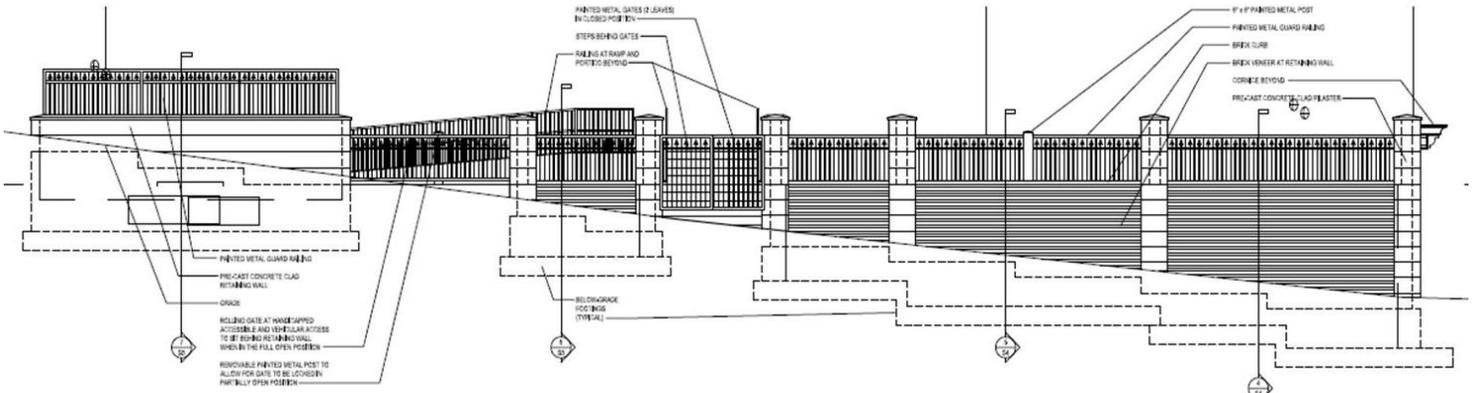
The landscape and hardscapes of the project as currently proposed includes fencing and a pergola. The project addresses the entrance to the Wattles Jacob Education Center with the addition of a new landing, stairs, handicap access ramp and railings.



**AERIAL OF EXISTING LOT LOCATIONS**

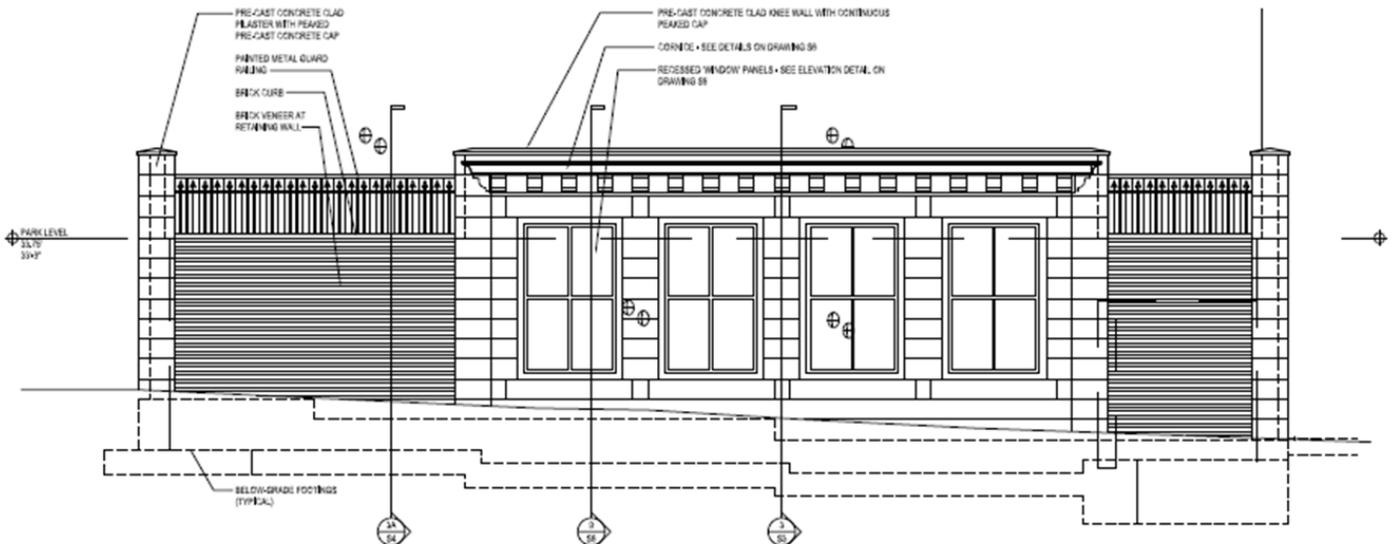
**RETAINING WALLS**

**A. West Elevation (Johnny Cake Hill):** The form of the proposed facade consists of a pre-cast concrete wall, pre-cast concrete piers, and brick veneer walls with a black metal ‘harpoon’ railing above. The design calls for two gated entrances on the Johnny Cake hill side: a rolling gate to accommodate universal access and a primary entry consisting of a double gate with stairs. The height of the wall varies to accommodate topography; however the corner of the wall at Union and Johnny Cake Hill is approximately ten feet (10’) in height. The pier cap and fence provides an additional 4’-6” . See Drawings A1 and A3 for detail.



**WEST ELEVATION (JOHNNY CAKE HILL)**

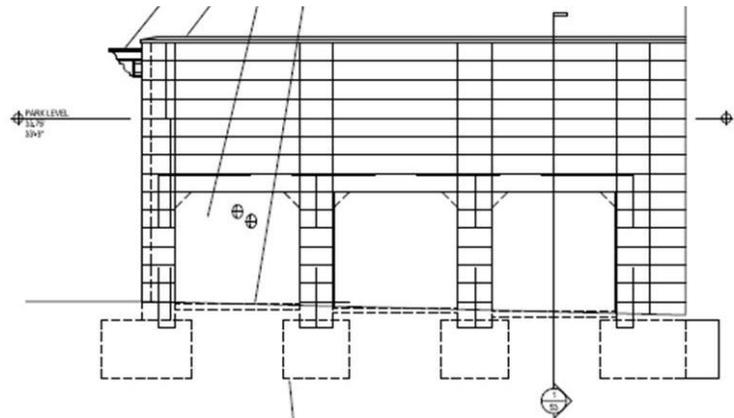
**B. South Elevation (Union Street):** The form of the facade is currently designed as a pre-cast concrete wall with pre-cast concrete piers and brick veneer walls with a black metal ‘harpoon’ railing above. The pre-cast concrete wall in its design, scale, massing and use of window fenestration, references the storefront of the abutting Sundial Building. This “storefront” portion of the wall utilizes an extended Fypon bracketed cornice and perforated metal window panels. The height of the wall varies due to topography, ranging from approximately ten feet (10’) in height at the corner of Union Street and Johnny Cake Hill to approximately thirteen feet (13’) in height at its easternmost corner. The pier cap and fence provides an additional 4’-6’ in overall height. The center (Section3) of the “storefront” façade measures approximately 15’-6” in height. See Drawings A1, A3 and S6 for detail.



**SOUTH ELEVATION (UNION STREET)**



**C. East Elevation (Loading Dock):** The form of the facade consists of a pre-cast concrete wall with three openings which are approximately 8' wide, 8' high and 8' deep. The purpose of these "bunkers" is to store the dumpster and various pieces of outdoor equipment. No details have been provided thus far as to how these openings would be gated or enclosed. *See Drawings A1, A3 and S2 for detail.*



**EAST ELEVATION (LOADING DOCK)**

**Applicability of Review:**

Though the proposed project is not a building, it is a "structure", which according to M.G.L. c. 40C definition, means a combination of materials other than a building, including a sign, fence, wall, terrace, walk or driveway. The Commission would review the structure as new construction.

**Statement of Applicable Guidelines:**

*The Bedford Landing District Design Guidelines* state the following relative to this proposal:

**NEW CONSTRUCTION**

When considering a new structure within the District the designer shall study the appearance and character of the entire neighborhood and pay particular attention to immediate abutters. The District has a unique character based on its history and development patterns. These characteristics express themselves in the scale, setback, roof form and materials and detail of its historic buildings. A new building should be designed so that it shares and is compatible with these qualities. New construction should be in harmony with the old and at the same time be distinguishable from the old so that the evolution of the District can be interpreted correctly.

- **SCALE:** Scale refers to the size of a building in relation to surrounding buildings as well as the relationship of the building to its site.

- **MASSING:** The mass of a building can be described as the boxlike forms that fit together to create the overall building shape and footprint. Massing is the three-dimensional form of a structure. The massing of a new building in the District should relate closely to the structures in close proximity.
- **SETBACKS:** The front setback is the distance between a building's façade and a public right-of-way. A new building should follow the precedents established by neighboring structures.
- **MATERIALS:** The selection of materials and textures for a new building should be compatible with and complement the surrounding buildings.
- **ALIGNMENTS AND RHYTHMS:** A new building should relate to its immediate neighbors. The historic building pattern of the district creates a sense of rhythm that was achieved by groupings of buildings with aligning cornices, ridges and or bases. Building widths are similar and where a building is wider than its neighbors, the façade is typically articulated in such a way as to break it down into proportional sections. New buildings should follow these development patterns.
- **ROOF FORM:** An important component of the District's visual appeal is its particular mix of historic roof shapes. The most common roof shape is a side or front gable found both on modest residences and prominent civic and commercial buildings. The second roof type is a simple flat roof found on most commercial blocks. Flat roofs are typically trimmed with a decorative cornice or parapet.
- **FENESTRATION:** Window selection and patterning in new buildings should be compatible with neighboring structures. Windows do not necessarily need to be vertically proportioned or have ornamental casings, but the overall effect of the façade composition shall reference historical window opening to wall ratios. Historic buildings in the District typically have a large ratio of window opening to solid wall. New construction should reflect these relationships in some fashion.

*The Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation* state the the following relative to this proposal:

- New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Though there is no Secretary of Interior "Standard for Compatible Infill," there are principles of new construction within local historic districts that should be considered. **New construction should respect, and not detract from, the integrity of the District. The design should respond to the aesthetic rhythm of the District and adjacent buildings, while being differentiated yet compatible.**

The design and form of the retaining walls takes into consideration the scale, massing, materials and character of the property, and in addition, the Union Street façade takes its cues from the adjacent Sundial Building. The siting of the retaining walls continues the historic building setbacks of Union Street and the use of windows maintains the established rhythm for the street. The "storefront" wall on Union Street aligns itself with the height of the adjacent Sundial Building storefront, and the scale and design of the widows further establishes this connection.

Overall, the project compliments and supports the District. The continued interpretation of Captain Paul Cuffe and New Bedford's African American history is a significant contribution to the District and beyond. The use as a green space supports the viability of not only the Whaling Museum, but also the adjacent Bethel and Mariner's Home. Furthermore, the infill of this site realizes the objectives of the city's Downtown Action Plan related to urban density and activating underutilized sites.

This application was submitted with the applicant's knowledge and consent that it would be continued, as there are several missing components or details that requires further articulation. For planning purposes the applicant has chosen the retaining wall face materials to consist of pre-cast concrete and brick veneer; the same materials which are found on the Wattles Jacobs Education Center. However the applicant has informed staff that the project may consider the use of alternate materials, and in an effort to inform further planning and cost analysis, is seeking input from the Commission at this time.

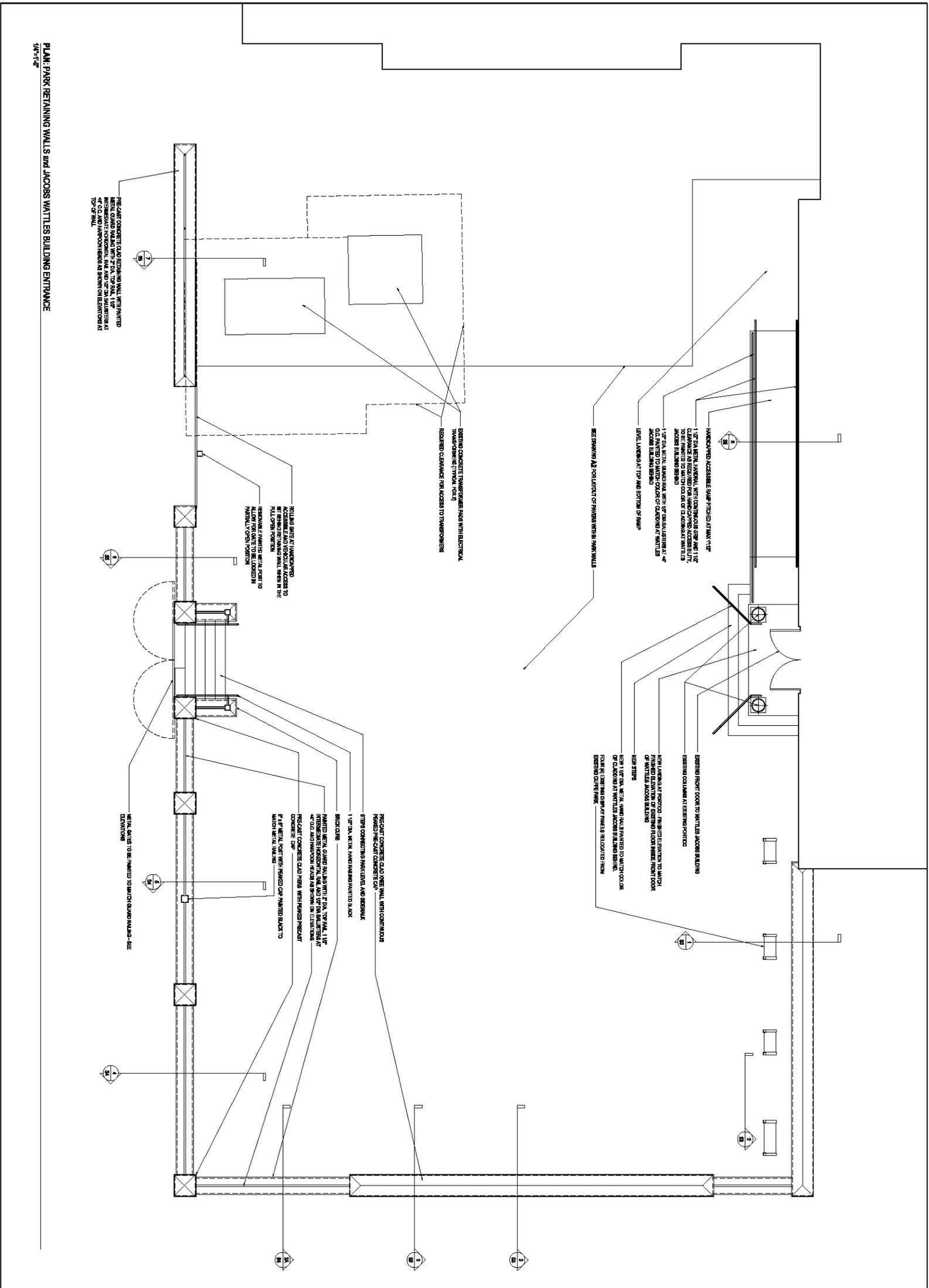
In an effort to better understand the effect that this project may have on the property and District, **staff additionally recommends that scaled perspective drawings (renderings) that demonstrate the relation of the project to adjacent buildings be sought.** The possible phasing of the project to include the pergola, utility screening and public art should be preliminarily discussed in order to inform both the commission; as such **staff recommends a detailed phasing plan should be presented as part of the final submission materials when the applicant returns to the Commission for a Certificate of Appropriateness.**

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) holds a Preservation Restriction on the land and buildings of the Whaling Museum and would therefore review and comment on this project. A recent preliminary review of the Cuffe Park expansion by MHC was solely related to the potential requirement of an archaeological survey. That review determined that the new park will expand on existing fill and bedrock outcrops, therefore being a location not likely to contain significant archaeological resources. MHC has conditioned the requirement that the applicant submit scaled existing and proposed conditions project plans for the project to MHC for review and comment.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR NBHC CONSIDERATION RELATED TO ALL PROPERTIES WITH MHC PRESERVATION RESTRICTIONS.**

Staff, in consultation with the Historical Commission Chair, strongly recommends the adoption of a NBHC policy in which a property that has a MHC restriction defer to MHC's review and comments prior to rendering a NBHC decision or Certificate, and apply that policy to this project.

In light of this MHC restriction and **staff's recommendation as presented in the inset**, the NBHC may wish to consider applying that policy to this project. In this way, neither the applicant nor the NBHC is burdened by repeated hearings should MHC make changes to the project design.



PLAN: PARK RETAINING WALLS and JACOBS WAITLESS BUILDING ENTRANCE  
1/4"=1'-0"

PROGRESS  
PRINT

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ARCHITECTURE  
PLANNING + LANDSCAPE  
PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION  
65 TROY STREET, FALL RIVER, MA 02720  
T. 774.357.8993 F. 774.899.5167

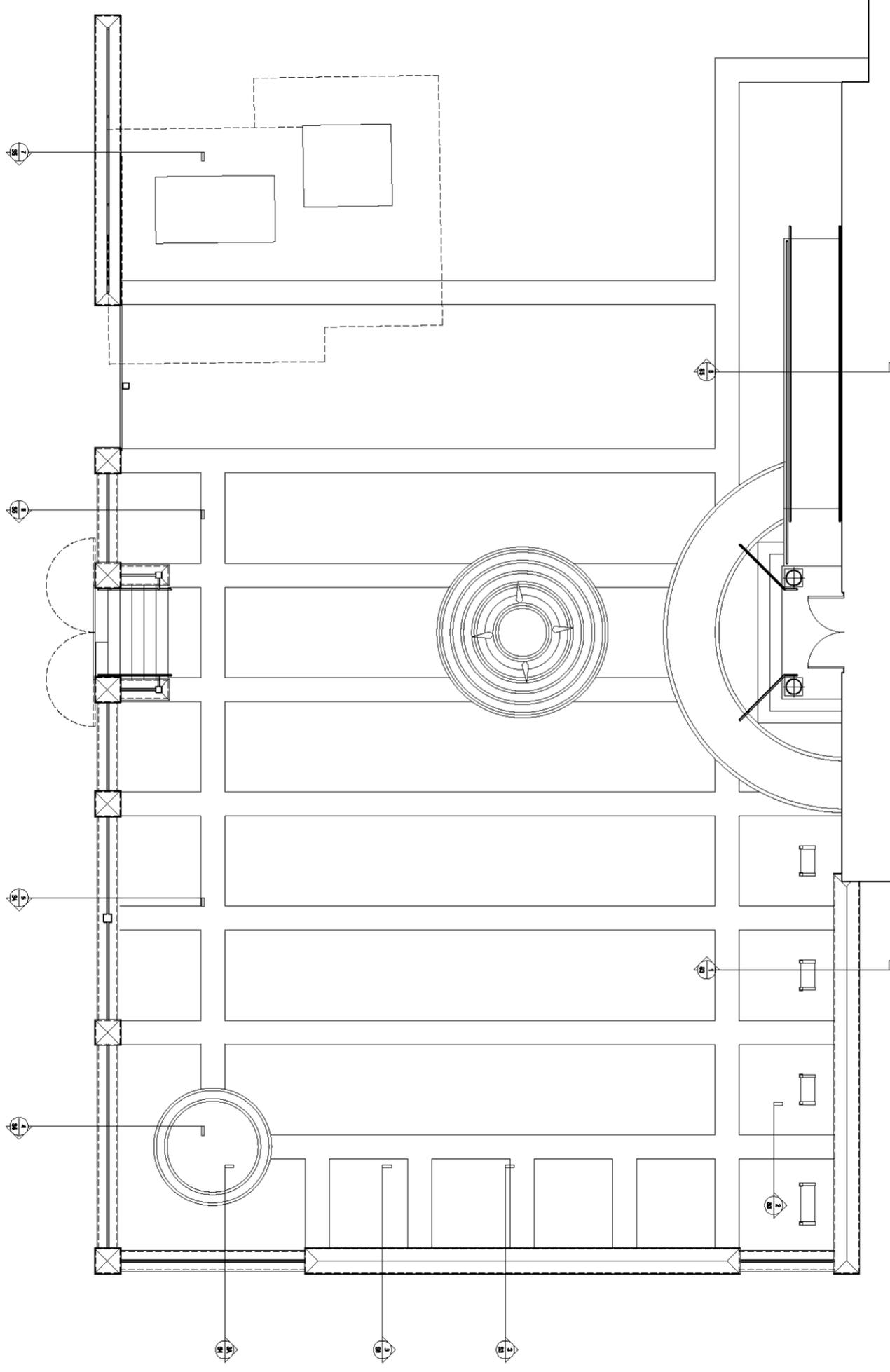
NOT FOR  
CONSTRUCTION

CAPTAIN PAUL CLIFFE PARK  
**NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM**  
UNION STREET and JOHNNY CAKE HILL  
NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 02740

PLAN: PARK LEVEL  
PROJECT NO.: 18118  
SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:

A1

PLAN: PARK PAVEN LAYOUT  
1/4"=1'-0"



A2

PLAN: PAVING LAYOUT  
PROJECT NO.: 18118  
SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:



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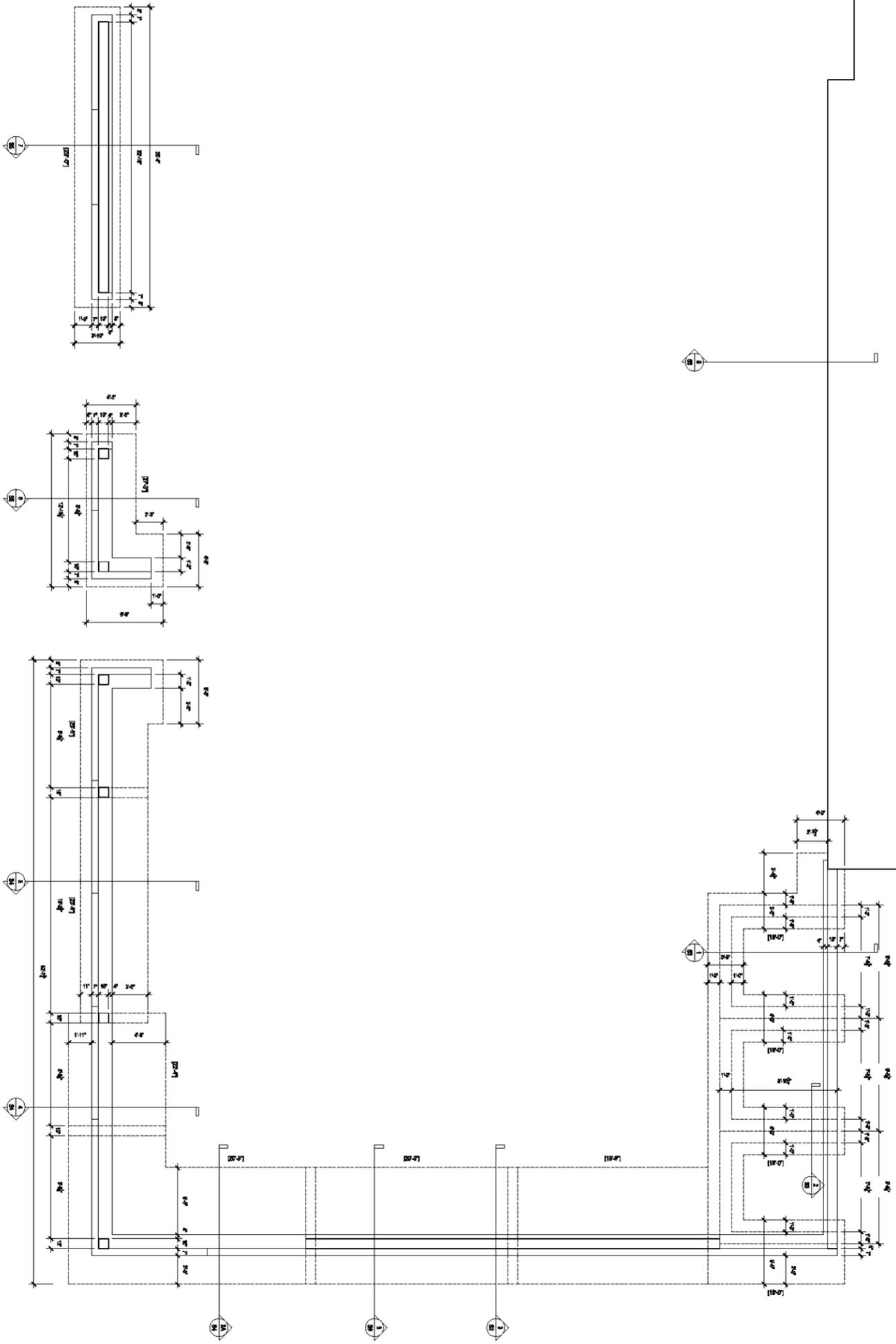
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T.774.357.5353 F.774.885.5167

PROGRESS  
PRINT



ELEVATION: SOUTH - UNION STREET  
1/4"=1'-0"



S1

**RETAINING WALL PLAN**

PROJECT NO.: 18118  
SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:



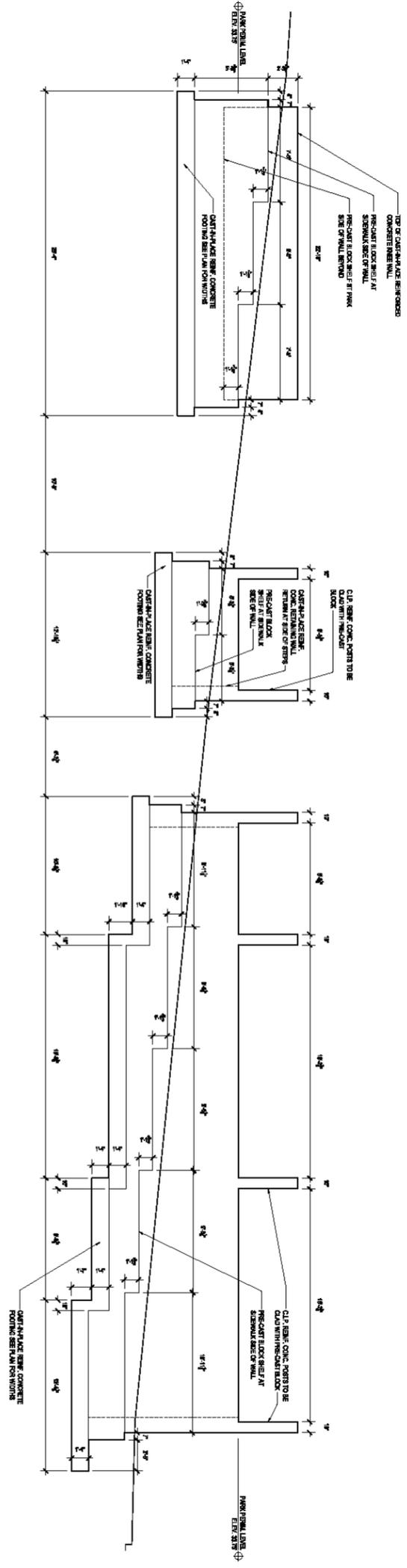
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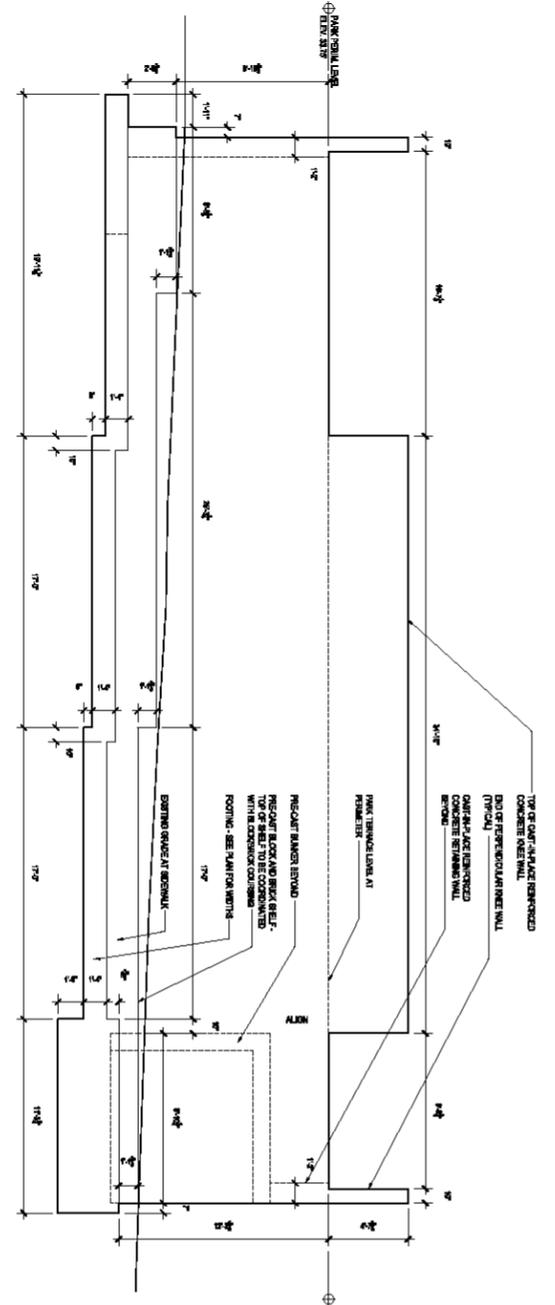
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T. 774.357.5353 F. 774.955.5167

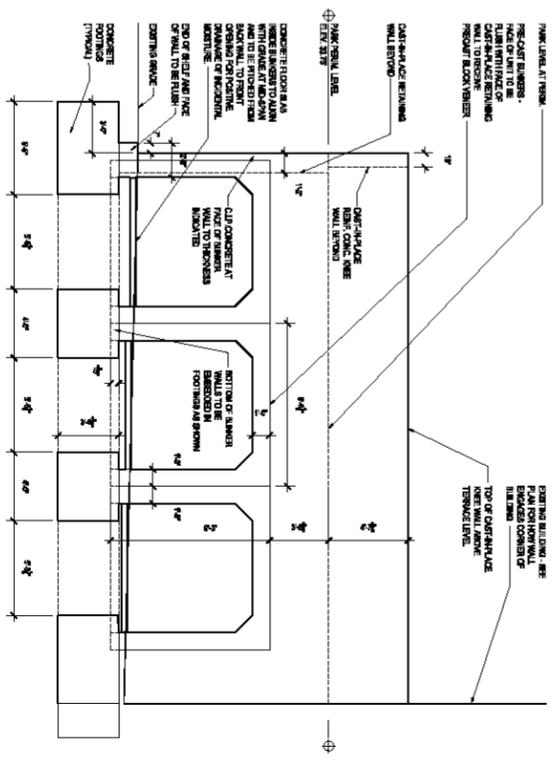
PROGRESS  
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ELEVATION: WEST - JOHNNY CAKE HILL  
1/4"=1'-0"



ELEVATION: SOUTH - UNION STREET  
1/4"=1'-0"



ELEVATION: EAST - LOADING DOCK  
1/4"=1'-0"

PROGRESS  
PRINT

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T. 774.387.8883 F. 774.988.8167

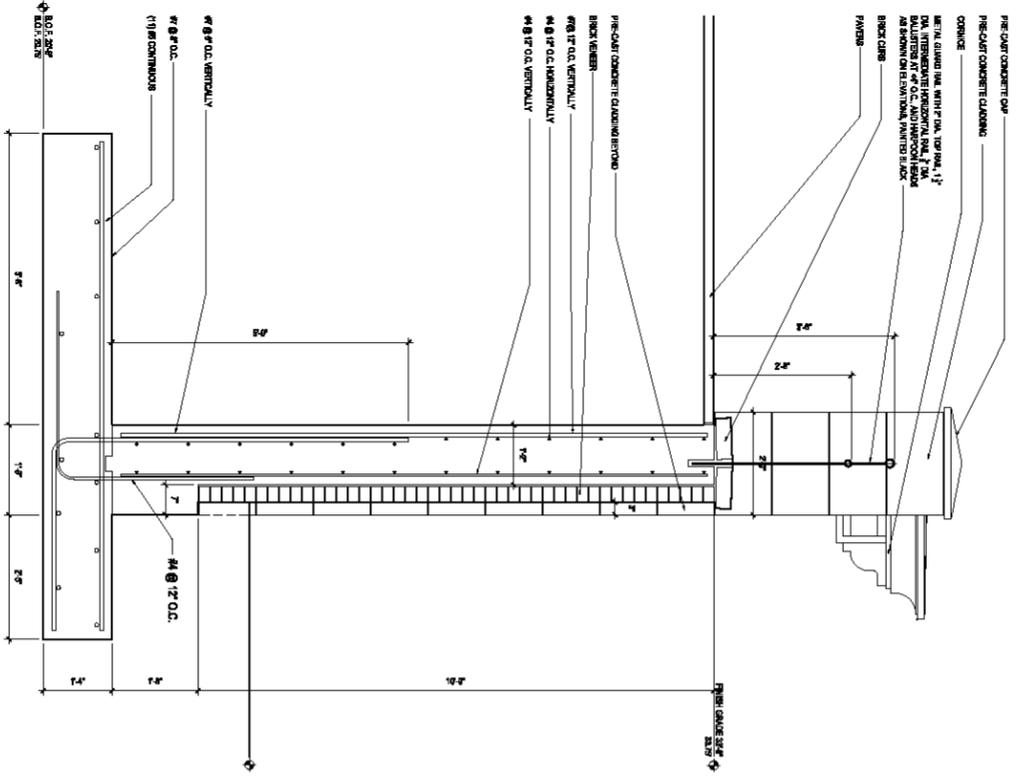
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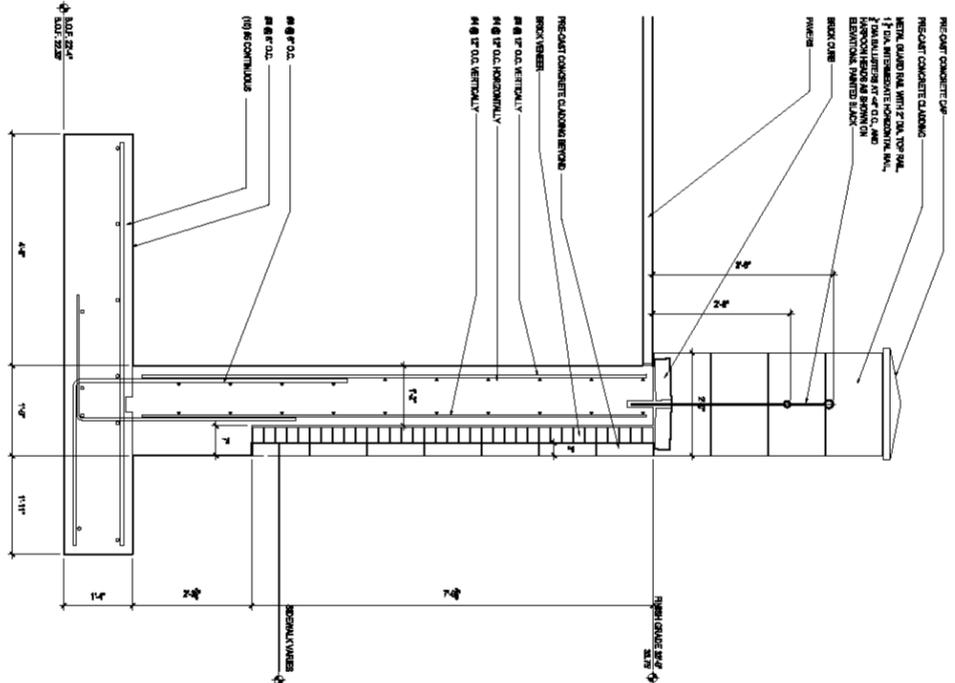
RETAIN'G WALL ELEV'S: SOUTH, EAST and WEST  
PROJECT NO.: 18118  
SCALE: 1/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:

**S2**

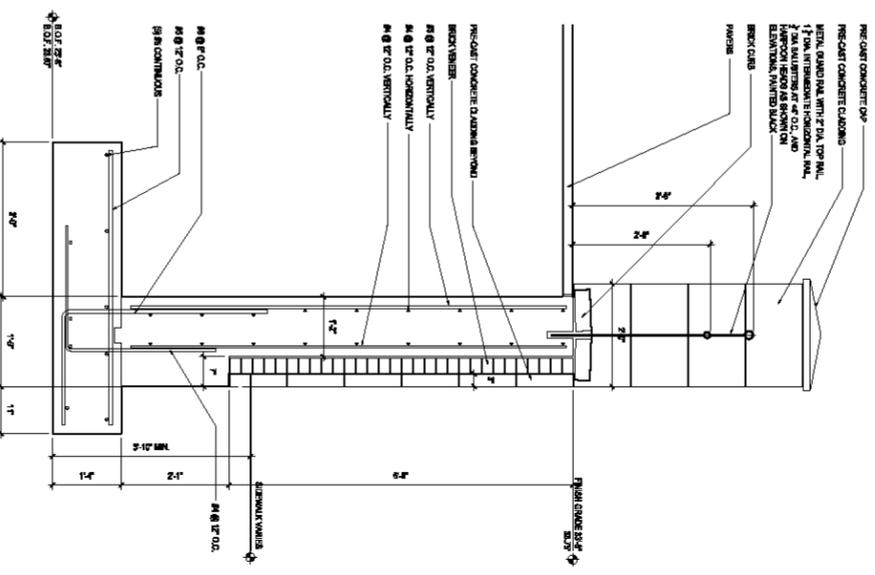




**A** SECTION DETAIL: RETAINING WALL WITH METAL GUARDRAIL  
3/4"=1'-0"



**B** SECTION DETAIL: RETAINING WALL WITH METAL GUARDRAIL  
3/4"=1'-0"



**C** SECTION DETAIL: RETAINING WALL WITH METAL GUARDRAIL  
3/4"=1'-0"

PROGRESS  
PRINT

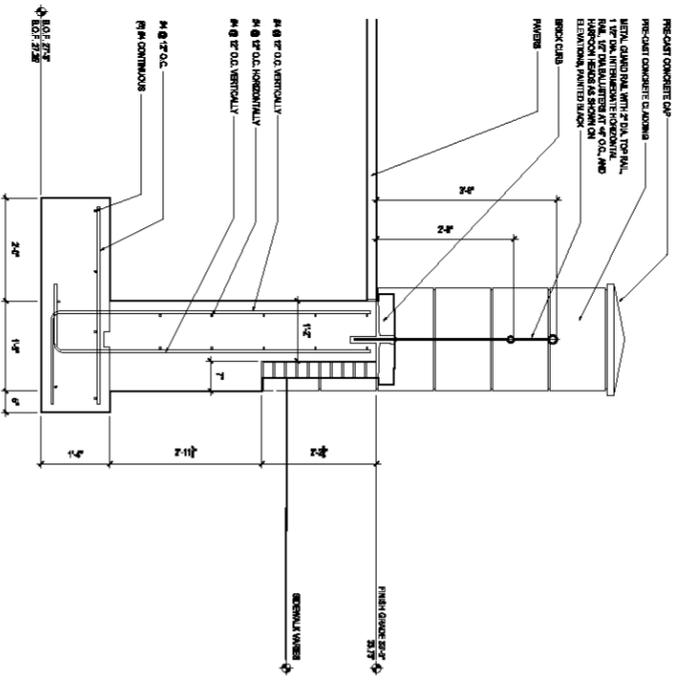
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PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION  
66 TROY STREET, FALL RIVER, MA 02720  
T: 774.357.8983 F: 774.988.8187

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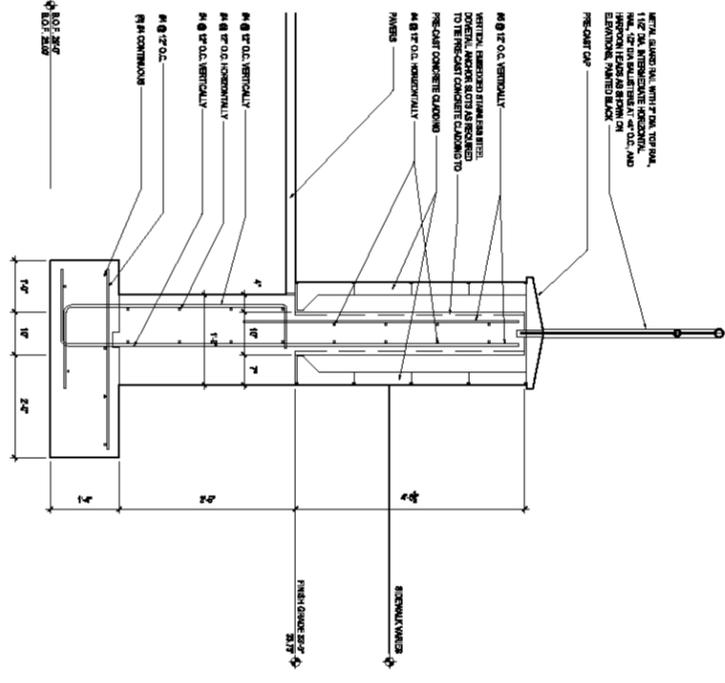
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DETAILS  
PROJECT NO.: 18118  
SCALE: 3/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:

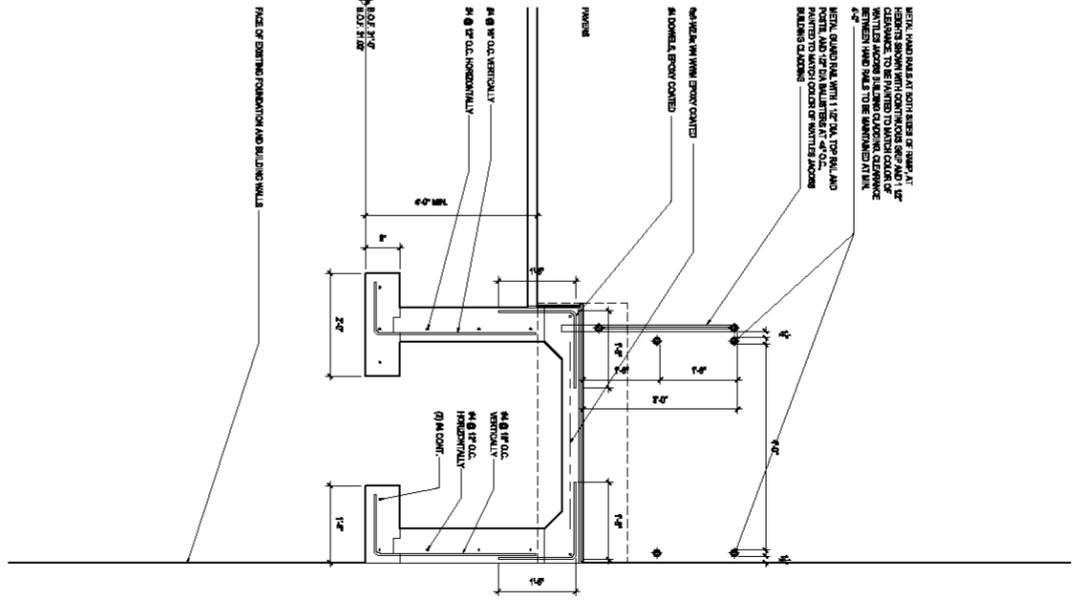
**S4**



6 SECTION DETAIL: RETAINING WALL WITH METAL GUARDRAIL  
3/4"=1'-0"



7 SECTION DETAIL: RETAINING WALL AND MASONRY KNEEWALL WITH METAL GUARDRAIL  
3/4"=1'-0"



8 SECTION DETAIL: HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE RAMP WITH METAL GUARD AND HAND RAILS  
3/4"=1'-0"

PROGRESS  
PRINT

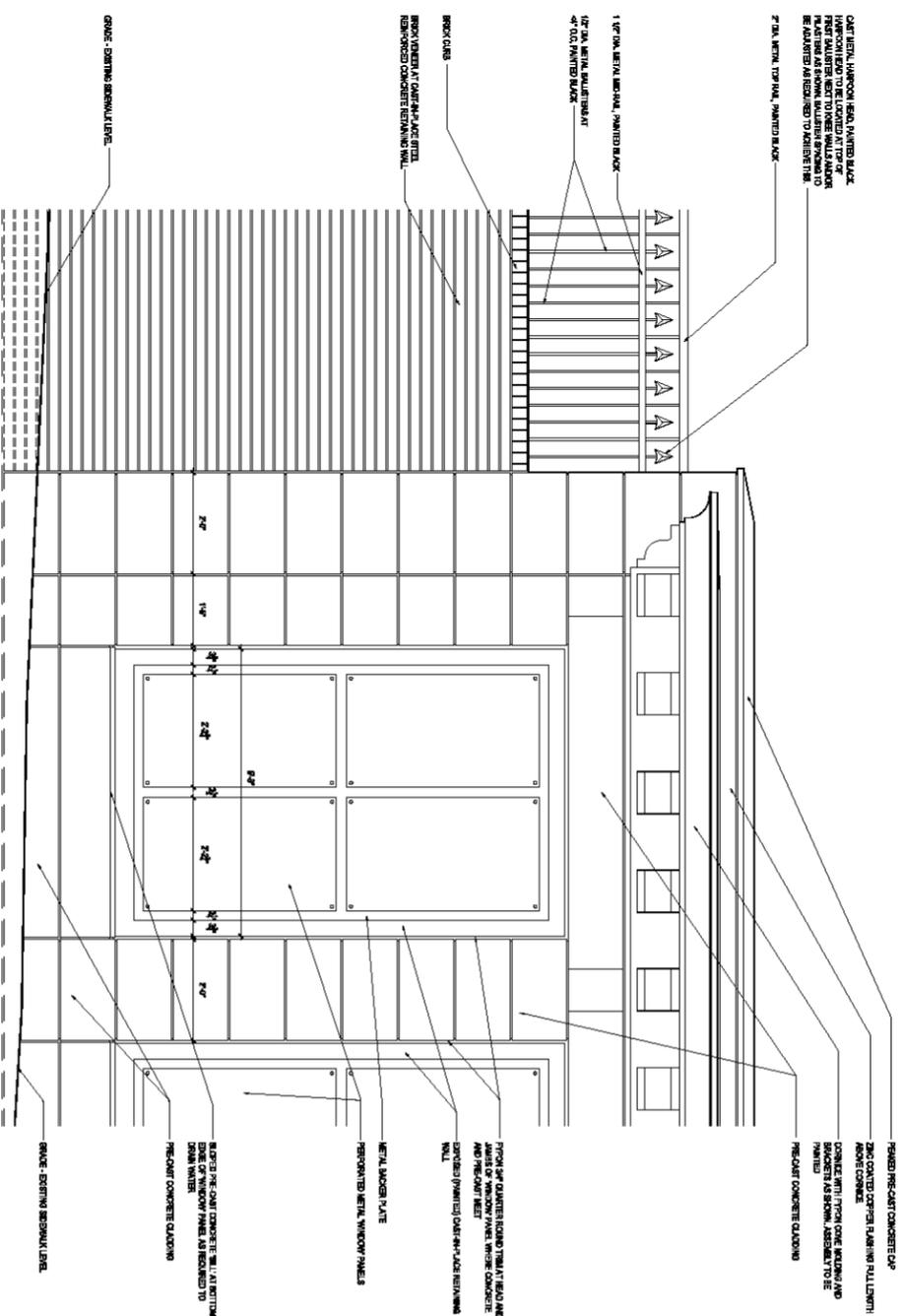
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PLANNING + LANDSCAPE  
PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION  
66 TROY STREET, FALL RIVER, MA 02720  
T.774.387.5355 F.774.855.9167

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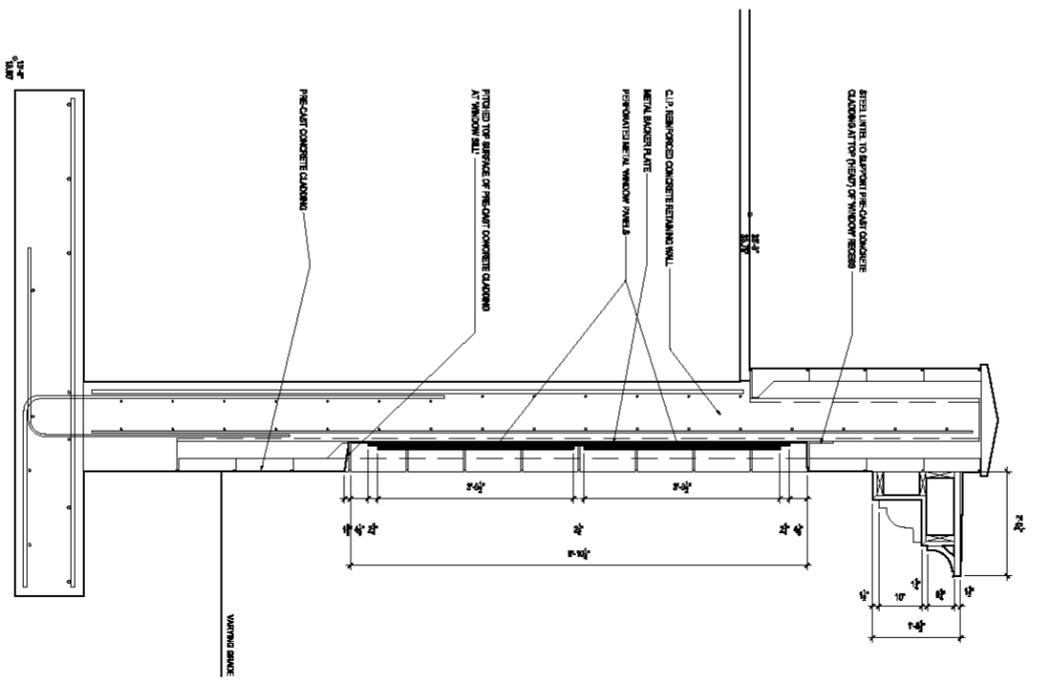
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DETAILS  
PROJECT NO: 16116  
SCALE: 3/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:

55



10 ELEVATION DETAIL - RETAINING WALL WITH BRICK CLADDING AND METAL GUARD RAIL, and with PRECAST CONCRETE CLADDING, KNEE WALL, CORNICE, and WINDOW PANELS  
3/4"=1'-0"



9 SECTION DETAIL - RETAINING WALL WITH DISPLAY PANEL, WINDOW - SEE ALSO 9/55  
3/4"=1'-0"

PROGRESS  
PRINT

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PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION  
66 TROY STREET, FALL RIVER, MA 02720  
T. 774.357.8358 F. 774.955.8167

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**DETAILS**  
PROJECT NO.: 18118  
SCALE: 3/4"=1'-0"  
DATE: 3 APRIL 2017  
REVISIONS:

**S6**