



Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, September 25, 2013
Boston Harbor Hotel, 70 Rowes Wharf

Attendees

Advisory Group:

Vivien Li, Lorraine Downey, Joanne Hayes-Rines, Bob Venuti, Suzanne Lavoie, Bruce Berman, Joe Gambino, Rick Dimino, Lois Siegelman, Linda Jonash, Greg Vasil, Jim Klocke, Eric White, Meredith Rosenberg, Andrew Hargens, Philip Griffiths, Bud Ris, Cassius Cash, Louis Elisa, Richard Meyer

City of Boston:

Richard McGuinness, BRA; Lauren Shurtleff, BRA; Chris Busch, BRA; Michael Sinatra, Councilor Lamattina's Office

Consultant Team:

Tom Skinner, Durand & Anastas; Matthew Littell, Utile; Meera Deean, Utile

Government Representatives:

Valerie Gingrich, CZM

Meeting Summary

Richard McGuinness, BRA, opened the meeting and noted that the Commission Chair, Jack Hart, would not be attending. He indicated that today's meeting would continue with presentations from property owners from within the planning area providing overviews of their facilities and future plans for development and programming. He referenced the concerns raised at prior meetings regarding vehicular traffic along the Greenway and in the South Boston Waterfront area and provided an update on the current efforts being undertaken by several state agencies, the City and A Better City to implement short, and medium term traffic mitigation measures, as well as the development of a more substantial transportation planning effort to occur over the next year. He also noted that the BRA and MassDOT would be initiating a master planning process for the expansion of the South Station Transportation Terminal which will also involve an amendment to the Fort Point Downtown Municipal Harbor Plan.

Chris Busch, BRA, noted that the City's Request for Notice to Proceed was filed with the Office of Coastal Zone Management at the beginning of August and CZM should be providing a response within the next few weeks. Copies of the Notice to Proceed will be distributed to Advisory Committee Members when available. He also stated the Water-Dependent Use Subcommittee met on September 17th and the findings from that workshop would be incorporated into Waterfront Activation and Public Realm Plan which should be in draft form by the end of the year. The Waterfront Activation and Programming Subcommittee will also be meeting towards the end of October and notice will be provided on the date, time and location for that meeting.

John Conley, of Equity Office Properties spoke to the history and background on Rowes Wharf noting that the property is managed as a condominium with residential, office and hotel components, which was a unique ownership arrangement back in the 1980's when the property was developed. He

indicated the arrangement has assisted in making Rowes Wharf an active, 24/7 property. He provided the following specifics on the property: the office building is approximately 375,000 square feet and over 90% leased with a few large tenants, who are willing to pay upwards of \$20 per square foot more than equivalent properties in the area due to the location and activity around Rowes Wharf; the hotel has 230 rooms and 15,000 square feet of function space; the residential building has 100 luxury condominiums; and, there are also public plazas approximately 1500 feet of Harborwalk and waterside marine infrastructure which offers a variety of services, with commuter boats, water taxis and berthing for private vessels.

He then reviewed the evolution of the property showing several photos of Rowes Wharf's transformation from dilapidated wharves, piles fields and parking lots into the exemplary waterfront property that it is today. He noted there are currently four restaurants with a fifth being planned and the restaurants and summer programming have helped to bring the public down to the waterfront enhancing its destination value. He mentioned some of the restaurants are being expanded into some of the exterior spaces around Rowes Wharf to activate the area and the hotel is looking to further program the complex during the off season with the installation of a temporary ice skating rink beneath the archway this winter and also working on a lighting program for the exterior of the building. With regarding climate change preparedness he indicated there have been no issues with flooding to date, however, procedures are in place for the facility and as infrastructure and equipment needs to be maintained and replaced the hotel is looking at modifications and measures to make the property more climate resilient.

Vivien Li, MHPAC member, asked if it is the intent of Rowes Wharf to continue with the summer time programming in future years. Mr. Conley noted that the plan is to continue with the programming as long as the public continues to attend and enjoy it. Ms. Li noted that the programming is a good example of how to activate the waterfront.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC member, inquired as whether there are any conflicts with the mix of uses on the property, particularly between the residential component and the waterfront activation programming. Mr. Conley noted that everyone works closely together on coordinating the summer programs and is well aware of what is scheduled and when, and there have been very few issues.

Rick Dimino, MHPAC member, asked if there are opportunities for more water transportation capacity at the property. Mr. Conley noted that they have been working with the MBTA to upgrade the docks and that has been the current focus.

Meredith Rosenberg, MHPAC member, referenced the hotel's Alley Bar and if there are more plans to expand restaurant uses around the property. Mr. Conley noted they are looking at possibly expanding retail uses to the public along the front of the building.

Suzanne Lavoie, MHPAC member, asked about the proposed lighting and expressed concerns with light pollution. Mr. Conley, noted that the lighting conditions would be reviewed with temporary lighting to assess conditions and modify based up what is suitable.

Linda Jonash, MHPAC member, commented that the hotel has done a great job with pubic-private partnerships to activate the area.

Yanni Tsipis, Senior Vice President at Colliers International and Consultant to the Harbor Towers I and II Condominium Board of Trustees, and Lee Kozol, Chair of the Garage Committee, Harbor Towers I and II Condominium Trust, both presented on the Harbor Towers property, where they are both residents. Mr. Tsipis noted that there are 1,200 residents at Harbor Towers and provided the historic background on the property referencing the period of decline of Boston's waterfront after World War II with the City turning its back on the Harbor with the development of the elevated Central Artery which effectively cut off the waterfront from Downtown. He referenced the period of blight and neglect during the 1940s and 1950s followed by an interest in redevelopment and renewal of the waterfront which was advanced by a call from the BRA's to developers to have the waterfront redeveloped with private investment, resulting in the Harbor Towers residential development and Harbor Garage, which was completed in 1973. He noted there were initially three towers planned however only the two towers were completed.

Mr. Tsipis spoke of the complex advancing the goal of creating a vibrant residentially oriented waterfront and noted the regulatory and planning efforts that govern the area, as well as the public realm around the property including the Greenway and HARBORWALK. Mr. Tsipis then provided an overview of the property noting that Harbor Towers is comprised of three distinct parcels, with the residential towers on two of the parcels, and the third at the southern extent of the development which adjoins the Rowes Wharf property. He noted the Harbor Garage parcel is under separate ownership although initially developed as part of the complex and housing parking and support infrastructure for the residential buildings. Lee Kozol then expanded on the history and geometry of the property parcels. He expressed an interest on behalf of the residents that new development around Harbor Towers be congenial and agreeable to existing residential uses. He then reviewed planned improvements to the Harbor Towers property looking first at the western extent of the complex along Atlantic Avenue including the replacement of the guard shack so it is out of the view corridor, and enhancements to existing planters and landscaping. Mr. Tsipis then spoke of future challenges for the property referencing repairs and upgrades that will need to occur to contend with sea level rise. He closed noting that the current planning process will need to function to find an appropriate balance of all the needs and uses within the planning area.

Bruce Berman, asked for Mr. Tsipis to elaborate on the reference to the area being a residential district. Mr. Tsipis, responded noting that the original vision was for a residential enclave on the waterfront, however, there have been changes over time and there is currently a diverse mix of uses along the water. He noted that new uses and development need to be carefully balanced with existing and new residential uses to ensure that non-residential uses do not overwhelm the residential community.

Paul Saperstein, MHPAC member, asked about the status of the parcel of city land adjacent to the Harbor Towers pool. Mr. Tsipis, noted that it was early in the planning process.

Lorraine Downey, MHPAC member, inquired as to whether there was going to be any increase in public access to the property and expansion of the narrow reach of HARBORWALK between Rowes Wharf and Harbor Towers. Mr. Tsipis noted that there are public rights of access along the waterfront portion of the property and he sees the improvements planned for the property as being public benefits that will enhance the public realm. He indicated there are no current plans to expand the width of HARBORWALK.

Don Chiofaro, The Chiofaro Company, initiated the discussion on the Harbor Garage property, referencing a previous development proposal for the property which was withdrawn last year. He indicated he and his partner Ted Oatis have been working for some time to advance a project for the site that will serve as a community asset, and the initiation of a new process that will engage the community and the Advisory Committee as partners. He stated the current options are to leave the garage as it is, build on top of it, or demolish the garage and build a new project. He noted the planning for the project will start from the ground up, looking at public access, public spaces and amenities. He then introduced the project team and representatives of the Chiofaro Company.

Fred Kramer and Tamara Roy of ADD Inc., then reviewed the existing conditions on the property and options for public realm improvements and enhancements. Ms. Roy noted the garage has served as barrier to the waterfront, and there are now opportunities to create significant new access to the harbor. She provided an overview of the adjacent properties, existing public realm components and reviewed some of the objectives for a new project which includes improving accessibility; opening the Greenway to the water, create new programming and activity where there isn't today; and can more public open space be provided.

Mr. Kramer then summarized the objectives of the Greenway Guidelines, Chapter 91 Waterways goals and building performance standards, and the planning goals noted in the MHP Request for Notice to Proceed. He then discussed some of the principle themes and topics from the MHP planning charrettes held earlier in the spring. Ms. Roy discussed concepts for improving existing conditions around the garage if the structure were to stay in place including recladding the garage exterior, side walk improvements and other modifications, such as new exterior lighting and street furniture. She then raised the issue of new public realm improvements around the garage that could be part of a redevelopment of the site, including widening of sidewalks, outdoor cafes, interactive street furniture, new lights, banners, super graphic pavers, new plazas for picnics, stages, pools and beach, public art, and creative landscaping concepts. She also discussed programming concepts, noting all the enhancements will serve to improve view corridors, activate the ground level environment, and establish better connections to the Greenway, waterfront and the Aquarium.

Mr. Kramer indicated that the team would be looking to the community to assist in prioritizing which amenities and programming concepts would be most favorable and appropriate for the area. Mr. Chiofaro then mentioned that the team needed community input to build consensus moving forward and noted the public could comment on the project through their website.

Linda Jonash, stated that there is significant potential with the site to improve the public realm and that the focus should continue on the possible and what people want rather than what they do not want, and that the presentation has put forth a great way to reframe the dialogue.

Gregg Vasil, MHPAC member, noted that continuing with the existing structure would extend a vestige from the elevated Central Artery and limit the potential of the property and surrounding public realm. Mr. Kramer responded that the current garage is limiting and makes programming and activation difficult.

Bud Ris, MHPAC member, asked whether the team had looked at slicing up the site and opening the massing through the property and whether they are looking at moving the garage underground as part of a redevelopment. Mr. Kramer noted that opening the site is a possibility, and stated that putting the

garage underground would be a significant undertaking but could occur based upon what type of project develops.

A Harbor Towers resident, asked about the density of a future project and how that will affect area residents. Mr. Kramer responded noting that density and the mix of uses in the area are important, however, it is premature to discuss height and density at this time as the focus is on the public realm and the basic foundation for a project, and the team will be back before the community to discuss project density.

Robert Sterker, Harbor Towers resident, noted that there is a tradeoff between how much public access is proposed and the size of the building. Mr. Kramer noted that is the team's intent to come back to the community as priorities for public amenities and the site improvements are advanced and discuss the trade-offs associated with a proposed project.

Richard McGuinness noted that with regard to the charrette proposed by the Harbor Garage team, the BRA has previously held public realm charrettes as part of the planning process to develop a Waterfront Activation and Public Realm plan to inform the MHP. He stated that private property owners may have their own charrette workshops to build consensus, however, the Municipal Harbor Planning process and all submittals to the state will be through the city's current process and subject to the review and oversight of the Advisory Committee.

Laura Moag, Harbor Towers resident, noted that the garage is an eyesore but it does serve a function for people that need to park. She also noted that there needs to be consideration of 700 families that reside at Harbor Towers who want to maintain the peaceful and quiet enjoyment of their homes.

A Harbor Towers resident inquired whether the Boston Harbor Hotel distinguishes between the residents of the hotel that are there full time and those that are there part time. Mr. Conley of Boston Harbor Hotel, noted that the residents and the hotel are two distinct buildings and that there are time limitations on activities and coordination between the resident committee and the hotel.

Paul Saperstein, MHPAC member, noted that the area residents live in the city not the country and that 99% of the Rowes Wharf condominium residents are there full time and that the whole city is welcome to the waterfront at any time.

Quinton Kerns, ADD Inc., stated that he is a member of the younger demographic within the city and has participated in some of the prior charrettes and noted there are exciting opportunities to connect the Greenway to the waterfront and provide access and opportunities for making this a destination for residents and visitors to the City.

Aaron Hodges, ADD Inc., spoke of the challenges of design and architecture to facilitate collaboration between residents and other mixed uses to highlight the waterfront and create an attractive place for young people and further Boston's reputation as a world class city.

Rick Moore, Harbor Towers resident, asked if there was any thought to a new development on top of the garage. Mr. Kramer responded that if there is a structure built on the garage there would be a number of floors, but the current focus is on the lower floor elevations and how to make a better place in the city and activate the surrounding area. The question was asked whether the garage can

structurally sustain a building over the structure. Mr. Kramer noted that some reinforcement would probably be required, but building over the existing structure could occur.

A Harbor Towers resident noted that Harbor Towers was constructed as a single entity including the garage, which provides essential services and parking for the residential component. As the garage is now owned by a separate entity she cautioned that the Advisory Committee should review impacts the redevelopment may have on area residents now and in the future.

Sy Mintz, Broad Street resident, related problems along Broad Street with increasing numbers of bars and associated late night activity, and the lack of control over licensing and hours of operation of such facilities, which is administered by the state. He noted the Downtown neighborhood has to develop a balance of uses that accommodates life and activity for all types of people and that proper planning will be crucial to counter issues with the current state licensing process.

A Harbor Towers resident noted that the residents are not against develop of the garage but worried about parking, and the need to have residential quality of life issues addressed and recognized.

Bud Ris, noted that it is important to balance uses throughout the planning area and not concentrate all the activity in one area. He further mentioned that the planning process needs to be sensitive and do things properly and look comprehensively at the planning area.

Richard McGuinness closed the meeting noting that the next Advisory Committee meeting would be held October 23rd at Boston City Hall.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 5:30 p.m.