



Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, July 24, 2013
Atlantic Wharf, 290 Congress Street

Attendees

Advisory Group:

Jack Hart, Vivien Li, Lorraine Downey, Joanne Hayes-Rines, Bob Venuti, Suzanne Lavoie, Bruce Berman, Joe Gambino, Rick Dimino, Lois Siegelman, Linda Jonash, Greg Vasil, Ann Thornburg, 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; Andrea Langhauser, DEP

Members of the Public:

Linda Cravens, Nitin Bhardwaj, Yue Chan, Karissa Vincent, Tom Palmer, Victor Brogna, Christopher Reardon, Lorraine Pope, Stephen Loughren, Coulter Bailey, Ezequel Lopes, Cynthia Loesch, Justin Backal-Balik, Jane Stricker, Yanni Tsipis, Bob Cummins, David Lucy, Chris Fincham, Theresa McLaughlin, Amanda Cavallo, Jim Duffey, Morris Englander, Maria Jose Vasquez, Sarah Grose, Stevie LaMonica, Berit Brawning, Yahir Flores, Sarah Walker, Steven Comen, Peter Brill, Andrew Dankwerth, Mary Holland, Frank Nasisi, Sy Mintz, Steven Mitchell, Bob Paone, Kitty Armstrong, Al Raine, Adam Hundley, James Shanley, Bill Walker, Terry Baurley, Ann Lagasse, Matt Conti, Diane Stone, Victor Aragona, Don Chiofaro Jr., Rob Caridad, Lara Rosenberg, Rick Moore, Julie Maranu, David Kubiak

Meeting Summary

Chris Busch, BRA, opened the meeting noting that for the next several MHP Advisory Committee meetings property owners from within the planning area would be providing overviews of their facilities and future plans for development and programming.

Yanni Tsipis, of Colliers International, provided some history on the Long Wharf Marriott property and reviewed plans for modifications to hotel facilities. He noted the hotel was developed within the context of the city's urban renewal efforts to redevelop the waterfront, and as such the hotel use was intended to bring people to the water, however, its architecture and ground floor environment served to separate and wall-off the structure from its grittier surroundings at the time of construction. He further qualified that some of the vision for the hotel property has not been realized regarding the pedestrian experience due to the trade-offs made to originally develop the property, stating that there is nothing permeable or inviting about the existing edges of the hotel. He noted that to improve the condition of the hotel and build upon the activation around the property created by the Greenway,

Christopher Columbus Park, the Aquarium and Long Wharf water transportation facilities, modest changes to the hotel have been under consideration. Rather than whole scale redevelopment of the property more incremental investment in the facility have been reviewed to contribute more to public access, public realm and the watersheet. He noted one of the proposed option is to wrap the waterfront end on all three sides of the hotel with more active retail and restaurant uses to replace the existing opacity with more transparent windows and doors. Other proposed improvement include reinforcing the State Street access area; extending the Faneuil Hall Market Place retail main street feel down to the waterfront; and improve visitor experience on the north side of Long Wharf through a series of one story retail pavilions along the existing edge of the property which could include a Harbor Islands ticketing center. Regarding recent improvement he noted Sunstone just spent over \$30 million on interior modifications including new public restroom on the north side of the property, and referenced additional smaller, future investments to be made on Greenway edge where tour bus enclosures are as well as improvements to the Tia's location to make it more of a year-round facility. To address the issue of existing open space that would be occupied by the retail pavilions, the concept of making improvements to the BRA's parking lot on Long Wharf and converting it to a new open space area was raised. He closed noting that all of the referenced improvements provide a vision of what is possible not a formal proposal or plan as of yet.

Vivien Li, MHPAC member, inquired whether the hotel was proposing to purchase the BRA parking lot and asked about the specific dimensions of the retail pavilions. Mr. Tsipis responded that the reference to the parking lot was a suggestion within the context of a larger municipal harbor planning effort, noting that a purchase of the lot would be a good way to achieve the goals for the hotel property. Regarding the pavilions, they would be somewhere between twenty and thirty feet. Richard McGuinness, BRA, added that the issue of the parking lot and its conversion to open space was a topic that has come up as part of the public realm discussion for the planning area, however, it is premature to discuss its sale or transfer at this time. He also noted the BRA owned areas on the north side of Long Wharf are in an interim condition and the agency foresees more permanent improvements to the area in the future. Jack Hart, Commission Chair, inquired as to who currently parks in the Lot. Mr. McGuinness responded that the spots are currently leased to ELV which owns and manages the Custom House Block buildings on Long Wharf.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC member, raised issue with the recent removal of much of the seating throughout the hotel lobby on the ground floor, as well as tables around the alcove at the north entrance to the hotel and asked if the tables and seating could be brought back. Mr. Tsipis responded that the matter would be reviewed with the hotel's general manager.

Susan Lavoie, MHPAC member, noted one of the concerns that the neighborhood has with the area is the number of vendors in the area and emphasized the need for future development to plan for where they go and how vendors are organized, adding new kiosks should not add to congestion in the area.

Steven Comen, Harbor Towers resident, inquired as to the staging area for taxi cabs represented on the revised site plan. Mr. Tsipis noted that there would be no change in the geometry of the taxi staging area and no encroachment onto the sidewalk or any public way.

Joanne Hayes-Rines, MHPAC member, emphasized the importance of maintaining walkways and clear access along the Walk to the Sea and Christopher Columbus corridors which link the Greenway to the waterfront.

Rick Demino, MHPAC member, noted that the presented improvements to the hotel are modest and questioned to what extent those features need to be addressed within the context of a municipal harbor plan and Chapter 91. Mr. Tsipis responded that the existing Ch. 91 license was issued at a time when there was very little permitting detail, so the proposed modifications would have to be addressed through some licensing action. He added that the improvements are dependent upon the municipal harbor planning process with respect to timing of implementation.

Dick Mulligan, BRA/EDIC Asset Management, reviewed the BRA property holdings in and around the planning area. He stated over the past nine years the BRA with the assistance of the state's Executive Office of Transportation has expended over \$11 million on infrastructure improvements in the area. He specified that the BRA owns much of the open space areas from Long Wharf to East India Row. Regarding the current management of the area he reviewed the revised arrangement for kiosks and vendors along Central Wharf and Long Wharf and the intent of the BRA to have a restaurant as part of the vent structure at the end of Long Wharf to draw the public to the waterfront during the shoulder season and off hours. He indicated the revenue from the vendors goes back into maintenance of the Long Wharf area and went on to reviewed many of the on the ground maintenance and management issues related to the public spaces and BRA holdings in the area. He mentioned most of the improvements have involved seawall stabilization, new sections of HARBORWALK, seating, and new ramps and floats for commuter boats and shuttles. He also expressed his support for the proposed Marriott improvements to open up the ground plane and further activate Long Wharf.

Vivien Li, asked about the ownership of the docks around Long Wharf. Richard McGuinness indicated that the docks are owned either by the MBTA or BRA. Bruce Berman inquired as to any late night and after hour issues with the bars and restaurants in the area. Mr. Mulligan noted that there have been few complaints although there were a number of issues with vandalism which has been reduced with the assistance of Boston Police and the Mayor's Emergency Shelter Program.

Bud Ris, MHPAC member, referenced the marina adjacent to the BRA owned parking lot and the need to support the facility by ensuring there is a drop off and loading zone and accommodation for some parking. He also indicated the area is susceptible to inundation and anything constructed in the area will need to be designed to accommodate future sea level rise.

Jack Hart, MHPAC Chair, referenced the state owned land and whether there a practical use for the property. Mr. Mulligan responded that the property must meet City Department of Public Works Public Improvement Commission standards prior to transfer and the land currently does not meet their requirements.

David Lucy, Head of US Operations for Pembroke Real Estate then provided a synopsis of the 255 State Street property which Pembroke represents. He also introduced Andrew Dankwerth, Director of Project Management at Pembroke. Mr. Dankwerth provided some background on the property noting that the building avoided being demolished as part of the 1950's Central Artery Project and provides exceptional views on all four sides of the property. He stated the property was previously owned by New England Telephone and had telephone switch gears in the building which probably prevented the structure from being significantly altered or demolished. He noted when Pembroke purchased the building from NYNEX in 1997 upgrades and restoration work converted it to office and retail space and brought the building up to code.

Mr. Lucy reviewed the current status of the building, noting that it is now 97% leased with a mix of restaurants with Legal Seafood, City Landing and Emack and Bolio's on the first floor; the restaurants along with the lobby allow over 70% of the ground floor to be open to the public. With regard to climate change and sea level rise he noted that the elevator machinery and backup generators are on the roof, however, there is also machinery in the basement and they are looking at options for relocating the equipment as well as resizing sump pumps and conducting additional water infiltration prevention measures. He also mentioned through ground floor tenants the sidewalk areas around the building have been activated through exterior seating; and they are looking at extending patio seating around to Atlantic Avenue to tie into the Greenway. He indicated Pembroke is working with neighbors on the outdoor seating as well as shifting trolley staging locations to improve visibility and pedestrian safety.

Mr. Dankwerth spoke to activation efforts in and around the property referencing the cod sculpture and improvements to the front door and entrance. He also noted the challenge of existing property owners implementing climate change adaptation measures with relocating mechanicals and equipment, raising the option of incentivizing adaptation measures within the context of the harbor planning effort and the need to be proactive in accommodating structural changes and retrofits to existing buildings; specifically in moving equipment into higher occupied floors will require the replication of the usable space elsewhere.

Ann Thornburg, MHPAC member, inquired as to the types of accommodations property owners may be looking for. Mr. Dankwerth noted that there may be more space needed on the roof or other locations to accommodate equipment or displaced tenant area. Chris Busch inquired as to whether the below grade areas could be dry flood proofed. Mr. Dankwerth responded that there is too much water and pressure to prevent infiltration through flood proofing.

Richard Meyer, MHPAC member, raised the question of whether incentives are necessary for property owners to take necessary precautions on their own to protect their assets. Mr. Dankwerth noted that without incentives some property owners may wait until it is too late to effectively implement measures. Mr. Lucy added that there are implications for the city and tenants in removing and relocating usable space as a reduction in revenue generating space will reduce taxes paid on the property, specifying that such measure can effect property valuations and consequent tax revenues. Mr. Meyer noted that such resiliency measures could actually enhance the value of the building.

Bud Ris, MHPAC member and President of the New England Aquarium, reviewed existing conditions and proposed improvements for the Aquarium property. He stated that there is nothing currently in design regarding new projects and referenced the significant improvements made to the Aquarium over the past five years and summarized the existing facilities, programming and current visitation numbers.

Regarding recent improvements he noted over the last few years \$43 million was raised and \$35 million of that spent on the harbor side with a Marine Mammal Center, a new terrace and HARBORWALK; also a new Shark and Ray tank on the west side of the building, a new Blue Planet Action Center and the \$18 million renovation of the giant ocean tank which just re-opened. On the west side of the property he indicated the area from the lobby extending out to the Greenway is not optimal conditions for inviting the public onto the property and improvements to better organize the area is one of the Aquarium's future objectives over the next five to six years. He noted the challenge of better identifying the

Aquarium property and the difficult operational situation with ticketing, truck access and access to the IMAX, all in front of the facility. He indicated there are also over 160 private events at the Aquarium each year, which facilitates funding and the Aquarium's mission. Regarding parking and transit he noted that regardless of efforts to push public transportation between 200-400 attendees park in the garage at any one time during the day depending on the time of year. He also reviewed wind and shadow studies associated with possible massing of new structures around the property noting that any structures higher than 200 feet will cast shadows on the Aquarium plaza during the time of day when the volume of visitation is highest, which is an important consideration due to the Aquarium's future plans for more exterior exhibits and activity.

Regarding future projects out around the Aquarium he indicated the need for more openness along the Harbor Garage property and the Fidelity park parcel to better facilitate pedestrian flow and access to the waterfront and provided various design concepts to improve wayfinding and better facilitate visibility and access, with consistent paving, lighting, LED displays, and exhibit spaces. He noted the goal of consolidating ticketing operations and using a new ticket structure to enhance visibility. Regarding the topic of water dependent uses he referenced the sea water intake structure for the giant tank and the floating dock on the south side that will accommodate a new coastal connector starting in August to link the Aquarium, Children's Museum and the ICA. He again referenced the challenges with the lobby and need for more classroom and administrative space which could be improved by extending another canopy and creating a larger lobby, as well as building a second floor above the west wing to accommodate space needs. Additional objectives include the need to finish and raise the HARBORWALK on the north side of Central Wharf; reinstallation of the whale mobile sculpture; and a new open air pavilion adjacent to the Marine Mammal Center for events to replace the existing tents. He concluded noting none of these options are designed and would require another capital funding effort.

A question from the public was raised regarding the garage site and whether options were being developed to remove parking from the property all together. Don Chiofaro Jr., noted that there are no options being explored where the parking goes away.

Bruce Berman asked about art and sculpture in the public realm and whether it was permanent once installed. Bud Ris noted that it depends upon the restrictions from the donor.

Ann Thornburg asked how much more activation the area can handle. Bud Ris noted that the Aquarium is 'right sized' for the New England market and does not anticipate numbers as growing much beyond where they are now, indicating the Aquarium can currently handle existing capacity even on peak days.

Rick Dimino, noted that it would be helpful to have a template of the proposed improvements presented today to serve as a base plan for matching the public realm plan with what is being considered in the way of new development. He also mentioned it may be worthwhile to have property owners come back after the public realm discussion to fill in the spaces and inform the offset and substitution discussion.

David Kubiak, NEWRA commented on the compromising of open space resources along the waterfront and how other open space resources differ in value and from a qualitative standpoint. He advocated for an analysis of net benefit of putting commercial enterprises on open space and turning commercial space into open space as well as a comparative valuation of net public benefit of open space resources and how that is affected by adjacent commercial activity.

Chris Busch noted that the City's Request for Notice to Proceed would be submitted to the state soon and recent comments from MHPAC had been incorporated into the document. He stated there is a 30 day comment period following submission to the Office of Coastal Zone Management. He also noted the next meeting scheduled for September 25th at the Boston Harbor Hotel at Rowes Wharf.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 4:55 p.m.