



Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 26, 2014
Atlantic Wharf, 290 Congress Street

Attendees

Advisory Group:

Janean Hansen, Phil Griffiths, Vivien Li, Bruce Berman, Rosenberg, Lois Siegelman, Greg Vasil, Bud Ris, Susanne Lavoie, Jacob Glickel, Lorraine Downey

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; Ronald Killian, MassDOT

Members of the Public:

Dian Rubin, Al Raine, Bill Zielinski, Chris Fincham, Thomas Nally, Jim Duffey, Tamara Roy, Steve Mitchell, Ann Lagasse, Victor Brogna, David Kubiak, Rob Cardad, Don Chiofaro Jr., Sy Mintz, Carolyn Spicer, M. Holland, Courtney Kirk, Chris Fincham, Martin Zisk, James Brady, Danielle Pillion, Matt Conti, Jim Cravens, Bob Cummins, Pam McDermott, Wes Stimpson, Tom Wooters, Talya Moked, Rick Moore, Peggy Briggs, Jeff Sauser, David Dixon, Peter Brill

Meeting Summary

Part I, Kairos Shen, BRA

Kairos Shen, opened the meeting with a presentation on the urban design context of the waterfront. He emphasized that cleaning up the Harbor was one of the most important planning challenges and achievements of the last generation. Now that the Harbor is clean, it should be made accessible. The Municipal Harbor Plan should aim to reclaim the Harbor as a civic and recreational resource for the city in the same way that Central Park is for New York City. He then stated that the second most important planning endeavor was the submersion of the I-93 corridor and the 27 acres reclaimed as the Greenway. He presented the challenge of connecting the inner core of the financial district across the Greenway to the Harbor, while also allowing more properties and users to benefit from the water and the park.

He pointed out that this area is quite resilient and is unique for its variety of building characteristics, including dense traditional wharf structures, tall modern buildings with small footprints, and large buildings like the Harbor Towers and Federal Reserve that have breathing space within the building. He emphasized the importance of continuing to connect public spaces to the street.

He stated that the MHPAC is not constrained to the Greenway District Guidelines because these previous plans did not consider the overlapping adjacent areas on the harbor side of the Wharf District. He recommends that moving forward, development impacts should be considered from four

perspectives: Program and Use, Form, Economics, and Environmental Impact. Microclimates of wind and shadow are very important, which also relate to height, massing, and building form. Additionally, he stated that Chapter 91 does not specifically address climate change, but almost the entire planning area is vulnerable to climate change, making resiliency and offsets for climate change a key concern of this planning process.

He then presented two development examples that the state has approved through prior MHP processes. The InterContinental Hotel was able to work with the state to get a height of 362' and Atlantic Wharf was able to develop a 382' tower. Both of these projects have made a significant contribution to the public realm, waterfront, and waterfront transportation. He concluded that a viable Municipal Harbor Plan will be very creative, introducing ideas for offsets and benefits. By identifying areas where the City can expect creativity from the development community and support from the public, new concepts could be made possible without being overly prescriptive. He then took questions from the Advisory Committee.

Bud Ris, MHPAC Member, stated that there is a tradeoff from stepping a building back in order to gain height since there is not much in the way of pedestrian access. He inquired if there is an inherent conflict between big buildings and the pedestrian. Kairos answered that both of those examples were narrow buildings and that while interior pedestrian connections were required, they both had sufficient open space on the ground floor.

Vivien Li, MHPAC Member, pointed out that the design of Atlantic Wharf was constrained by the historic façade and that the InterContinental Hotel was dictated by the vent stacks. In these cases, the footprints had to be worked around to go up in height, which is different from the Hook Lobster or Harbor Garage sites.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, stated that when first taking up the Municipal Harbor Planning process, they had to take a leap of faith, particularly with interior connections and interior open space. They questioned whether interior public space really makes a difference in the same way as ground floor exterior open space. He stressed that the success of the planning process and the activity on sites like at Atlantic Wharf clearly show the opportunities available and encouraged Kairos to make his presentation available to the public.

Vivien Li, MHPAC Member, pointed out that based on the maps presented, the area appears to be very dense and needs more open space aside from the Greenway, especially in light of more residents moving to the area. She also stated that the Harborwalk has evolved from something that developers didn't want to an amenity. She encouraged the consideration of a broad mix of different uses on the waterfront, such as galleries, grocery stores, and observation decks, not more bars and cafes, to make the area more robust.

Bud Ris, MHPAC Member, responded to Vivien that the area doesn't need more open space, but rather to use open space better. He indicated that the area badly needs better connections to see the waterfront and to get to the waterfront rather than just more open space.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, referenced the Mayor's interest in supporting businesses and transportation options that are open or active 24/7. Kairos responded that the Mayor made it very clear that the area needs more residential use. Revitalizing downtown should include the people it serves and

extending the use of infrastructure to serve more people. He acknowledged that this is easier said than done, but the planning process will examine the potential benefits and impacts of different uses. For example, restaurants are a conditional use of most business districts, but perhaps there is another way to look at this.

Kairos stated that the job of the MHPAC will be to figure out a reasonable way of distributing the open space requirement to maximize the benefits for everyone (perhaps looking at adjacent sites or areas). He stated that the City is looking for ideas from the MHPAC because the way that Chapter 91 is written is such that every site needs to resolve its own open space and offsets.

Finally, he acknowledged that the planning process of the Greenway Guidelines was very robust. However, he stated that this is an opportunity for the MHPAC to offer a critique of this work and to put any new solutions on the table. The BRA's job will be to communicate these conclusions effectively to arrive at a plan for the Mayor to review in the larger context of his policy. He emphasized that this plan can look at alternatives that weren't explored during the Greenway Guidelines planning process. The Mayor is neither retreating nor endorsing the conclusions of the Greenway Guidelines and would like to see the results of the MHPAC process before taking a position on the Guidelines.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, stated that the Committee was originally told to align Chapter 91 with the Greenway study but inquired if the Committee is now being asked to look beyond these constraints. Kairos answered that Chapter 91 was always going to be a broader study because it is from the State's perspective.

Tom Palmer, requested clarification on the conversion to zoning. Kairos Shen answered that the conversion to zoning is part of the Harbor planning process and the City will adopt consistent zoning as a menu of options within the planning area. He explained that the goal is to arrive at a viable Harbor Plan that will give a clear direction for redevelopment within the area, so that moving forward the City will not have to give specific approvals and processes for every individual site.

Philip Griffiths, MHPAC Member, stated that the Outer Harbor is huge and that there needs to be a better connection and ability to get access it and the Harbor Islands. He recommended finding ways to make this open space more accessible. Kairos answered that showing the connection to the Harbor Islands is important and could have a big impact on the city.

Chris Finsham, suggested showing the FAR of buildings when presenting the planning area and adjacent sites. Kairos Shen agreed that the inverse relationship of height and footprint are very important and both have environmental impacts. He added that Boston is seeing smaller footprints because many developers see the value gained by height when offset by smaller floor plans. He also stated that it is important to note that Chapter 91 does not include economic feasibility, which the BRA considers for development approval.

Sy Mintz, stated that creating a rich environment on this portion of the waterfront goes beyond just height and massing. Variety is not easy to achieve but he hopes that this will be a focus of the MHPAC. Kairos agreed with this statement and turned the meeting over to Matthew Littell.

Part II: Matthew Littell, Utile

Matthew Littell, presented the latest draft of the Downtown Waterfront Activation and Public Realm Plan. First, he summarized the feedback from the last meeting which was broken into three areas: Vision, Hierarchy, and Specificity. Overall, the draft plan should be easier to navigate for both the expert and the non-expert. He stated that the draft will be posted on the website for public review.

First he presented the revised structure of the draft plan and the expanded Table of Contents. The Vision section was added, the Implementation section was expanded, and a catalog of the planning process to date and an appendix with supplementary information were also added.

Second, he presented the newly created Vision section, which states the broader goals of the planning effort, framed by the Greenway and the waterfront as key assets for the city. The vision is broken into goals to create a waterfront district that is accessible, has clearly defined connections, is resilient to climate change, has year-round destinations and programming, and is flexible to accommodate innovative future uses. The overall vision will also create a strong sense of identity for this area of the waterfront.

Third, he presented the Sub-district Characters and Goals. These included the suggestion that Long and Central Wharves should touch the water and the challenge of connecting Rowes Wharf and India Row to the Greenway due to their density and private nature. Northern Avenue was presented as a gateway to the Innovation District and to the waterfront.

Finally, he presented the new Implementation section for the draft plan. He acknowledged that some of the information was not new, but that it had been revised as part of a clean list to provide a lot of detail, both district -wide and by individual district. Included was a matrix to describe which implementation strategy might be the most applicable within each sub-district. He emphasized that because this draft plan is the first piece of a broader planning effort that will ultimately result in rezoning, the public and the MHPAC should consider the appropriate balance between specificity and the broader effort. He closed by stating that the goal was to keep a broad menu of options to show the spirit and character of new thinking. Matthew then took questions pertaining to the draft plan.

Susanne Lavoie, MHPAC Member requested elaboration on the reference to a multistage planning process. Matthew Littell and Richard McGuinness, BRA explained that in order to get Chapter 91 compliance, there will be three stages: first, the Watersheet Activation Plan, and then the Municipal Harbor Plan, which will include more detail about potential impacts of development on the waterfront, appropriate remediating measures, and how to comply with the spirit of Chapter 91. The final step will be the codification of the plan through revised zoning for the district.

Bud Ris and Bruce Berman, MHPAC Members both noted that the planners did a good job of listening to feedback and that the plan is moving in the right direction to capture the robust planning process.

Vivien Li, MHPAC Member, commented that there are opportunities on all sites regardless of their current development, including "Sherwood Forest" and the end of Long Wharf. She would also appreciate if the Greenway is referred to as the Rose Kennedy Greenway. Finally, she requested that updated pictures of the Northern Ave Bridge be incorporated to show the collaborations that are happening within the area.

Jake Glickel, MHPAC Member, commented on the importance of addressing climate change and resiliency and how the area can bounce back in the incidence of flooding. Chris Busch clarified that this will be included in the Municipal Harbor Plan as a Chapter and there will be a work group for the Advisory Committee in the coming months.

David Kubiak, stated that while Kairos mentioned recreation, this presentation seemed to limit recreation to transportation alone and that there are in fact more opportunities for actual activation on the Watersheet. Additionally, he stated that environmental justice/economic justice are a big concern to the public when reviewing this plan. Since the public paid for the harbor cleanup, everyone should benefit from it, not just in open space but in space to live, work and recreate.

Tom Nally, stated that it will be good to get the draft plan on the website for comments to broaden the discussion as there might be ideas that have not yet been considered. He emphasized that the plan should string together the major themes and the benefits of implementation. He discussed how the waterfront should not just draw people from the Greenway, but that it should be a mutual attraction of assets. Finally, he was concerned about how this plan will consider congestion, especially in the spring and summer.

Sy Mintz, noted the Innovation District is much denser than it used to be, making the connection between the Greenway, the Wharf District and the Innovation District is critical.

Tamara Roy, indicated she was critical of the last draft but this presentation has been inspiration. Recommends keeping the plan fun, interesting, and fresh.

Vivien Li, MHPAC Member, noted that as Tom discussed, during the summertime there is a lot of congestion, especially with people waiting in lines for the Harbor Islands and Aquarium. She also suggested that it would be useful at some point in the planning process for everyone to give updates on what is currently happening on Long Wharf area.

Meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.