



Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, May 28, 2014
Atlantic Wharf, 290 Congress Street

Attendees

Advisory Group:

Janean Hansen, Phil Griffiths, Vivien Li, Bruce Berman, Meredith Rosenberg, Lois Siegelman, Greg Vasil, Susanne Lavoie, Jacob Glickel, Lorraine Downey, Marianne Connolly, Bob Venuti, Joanne Hayes-Rines, Eric White, Tom Wooters

City of Boston:

Richard McGuinness, BRA; Lauren Shurtleff, BRA; Chris Busch, BRA; Michael Sinatra, Councilor LaMattina's Office; Maria Puopolo, Senator Petruccellis' Office

Consultant Team:

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

Government Representatives:

Valerie Gingrich, CZM; Ronald Killian, MassDOT

Members of the Public:

Dian Rubin, Bill Zielinski, Chris Fincham, Thomas Nally, Jim Duffey, Steve Mitchell, Ann Lagasse, Victor Brogna, Rob Cardad, Don Chiofaro, Sy Mintz, Carolyn Spicer, Sam Norod, Steve Adams, Shiela Rice, Bob Cummins, M. Holland, Jim Duffey, Marcelle Willock, Yanni Tshipis, Michael Kineavy, Matt Rubins, Victor Aragona, Trent Tesch, Terry McLaughlin, Kanan Alhassani, Jim Scali, Sy Mintz

Meeting Summary

Chris Busch, BRA, opened the meeting and noted that Advisory Committee Member Vivien Li would serve as Acting Chair. He mentioned the South Boston Waterfront Mobility Plan public meeting which was held on May 7th and the availability of materials from that meeting through the project's website at sbwaterfrontmobility.org, and introduced Lauren Shurtleff, BRA, who announced the initiation of a planning study on the ramp parcels within the Central Artery corridor. Chris also referenced the comments received regarding the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation plan and that a revised draft plan would be available within the next month. He then noted that today's meeting would be focusing on the Long Wharf Marriott property, the substitutions proposed by the property owner and related recommendations for the Advisory Committee to review.

Matthew Littell, Utile, presented the existing conditions around the Long Wharf Marriott property and some of the challenges posed by blank edges, surface parking areas, and lack of clarity and legibility around portions of the property. He then reviewed the sections of the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan specific to Long and Central Wharves and the programming, activation and infrastructure improvements that were discussed during the planning charrettes. He noted the hotel owners are proposing expansion of the hotel's footprint to provide for additional retail and restaurant uses. The

individual expansion components were then discussed along with existing conditions renderings which represent 64% of the lot covered by building with 36% open space, and then the proposed expansion which would result in 84% lot coverage with 16% open space. The proposed height of the ground floor expansion was referenced at 22 feet.

Matthew then provided recommendations relating to the design of the expansion to better accommodate the priorities outlined in the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan, including: a continuous pavement or ground treatment to create a more intuitive connection through the building lobby to link Christopher Columbus Park to the Old Atlantic Avenue/Central Wharf area; consideration of paving, landscape elements and signage along the retail expansion areas to better define sidewalks and HARBORWALK, and the relationship between the Harbor Islands Pavilion and ferries; massing refinements on the eastern edge of the building to better facilitate view corridors and prevention of pedestrian bottlenecks; and incorporation of a ferry waiting area and ticketing as part of the retail spaces.

Tom Skinner, Durand & Anastas, reviewed the Chapter 91 jurisdictional parameters as they relate to the property. He referenced the differentiation between Commonwealth and Private Tidelands and noted the hotel property is located on the latter. Tom stated there is no Water Dependent Use Zone related to the property so only the open space/lot coverage requirements are applicable with the proposed ground floor expansion plans. He noted that if a new hotel were being built today on the property all ground floor uses within 100-feet of the harbor would have to be Facilities of Public Accommodation (FPA), however, the ground floor and all of the floors of the hotel currently meet the FPA definition. Tom also provided some background on when the hotel was constructed and how the hotel conformed with the Chapter 91 regulations and requirements at that time in the early 1980's. He mentioned that the massing of the hotel generally conforms with Chapter 91 required height and massing requirements, and overall, the building exceeds Chapter 91 requirements which is rare for a building constructed prior to the regulatory revisions. He also referenced the lobby of the hotel which was an attempt as a pedestrian access network, however, it has not functioned well as a public space amenity and connection. Regarding existing conditions limitations he noted the property does not meet the required 50% open space requirements, with the proposed expansion would reducing open space further, and also the property does not have an activated ground level aside from the Tia's Restaurant area.

Tom stated that to increase activation at the ground plane there is a trade-off between building out the ground plan to establish added restaurant and retail uses, and the amount of available open space on the hotel property. He then provided an overview of how the additional lot coverage would be evaluated from a Chapter 91 perspective and reviewed some recommendations related to substitutions and offsets. Tom noted a substitution would be required for the expansion as it further reduces the amount of open space beyond the required 50%, and the loss of open space needs to be compensated or offset by providing additional open space somewhere else in the planning area or something that has some opens space connection, or review other qualitative offsetting measures such as subsidies. Tom then discussed five proposed concepts related to offsets including: making new open space or enhancing existing open space resources; improving the hotel lobby to create greater connectivity through the building; improved water transportation facilities such as a ticketing center as a Special Public Destination Facility; codification of all the FPA space in the hotel through a future Chapter 91 license; and lastly, subsidies to support other benefits outlined in the Public Realm Plan.

Vivien Li, Acting MHPAC Chair, noted that the presentation visuals needed to be improved prior to posting the slides on the project's webpage. She then invited comment on the presentation from the Advisory Committee members.

Suzanne Lavoie, MHPAC Member, asked for greater clarity on how the Advisory Committee should respond. Tom Skinner, noted that the intent was to have the committee discuss and respond to the proposed offsetting measures on the Marriott property as they relate to the loss of open space that would result from the proposed ground floor expansion. Rich McGuinness, BRA, stated that the committee is analyzing a request for additional lot coverage on the property and the City is looking for feedback on the recommendations provided and the scale of lot coverage and the means to activate the ground plane to promote a more active waterfront and the goals of the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan. Suzanne responded that the Marriott is an appropriate location for additional activation and supports the added lot coverage to facilitate waterfront activation and programming.

Vivien asked if the hotel owners were considering changing the use of the property from hotel to some other use in the future. The hotel owners responded that there was no anticipated change in use planned for the property.

Tom Wooters, MHPAC Member, noted that there needed to be further discussion on the offsetting measures presented to more fully develop the specifics on how those measures would be effectuated, however, they were in general good suggestions.

Joanne Hayes-Rines, MHPA Member, noted that the ferry ticketing sign needs to be better oriented and face Christopher Columbus Park and the Greenway. Regarding the proposed ground floor expansion locations around the hotel she indicated that the ticketing area for the trolley tours could be better organized and used more effectively to disseminate information and activate the area more. She also expressed concern with traffic and vehicular circulation along Old Atlantic Avenue and the south side of the hotel and the need to better organize and clarify pedestrian and vehicular zones. Regarding proposed modifications to the hotel she noted that changing the lobby to an open passage way was not desirable and questioned whether views would be substantially improved by drawing back the proposed massing on the eastern side of the hotel.

Lois Siegelman, MHPAC Member, referenced the need for better facility and pedestrian signage and concern with the existing level of music and noise in the area and need for management of amplified sound systems in the area with the proposed retail and restaurant uses.

Phil Griffiths, MHPAC Member, expressed support for further activation of the area around the hotel and a fair tradeoff. He also supports a Harbor Islands gateway at the location and thinking about the entire area as a water transportation hub and intermodal connections, as well as signage that is consistent throughout the area.

Eric White, MHPAC Member, mentioned the Harborwalk around the Long Wharf area and the need to make it more legible and spoke of the need to integrate resilient design into new public realm enhancements. Meredith Rosenberg, MHPAC Member, referenced the need to think beyond the hotel property and address the broader Long Wharf area and how the existing security and safety issues will be addressed. She also referenced the Chart House parking lot and issues with the existing dumpster

area and tidal inundation as well as the need to improve wayfinding and a more secure environment around the hotel with improvements such as better lighting.

Janeen Hansen, MHPAC Member, spoke to the proposed retail around the hotel and means to ensure the retail space is tenanted and utilized. Bob Venuti, MHPAC Member, raised concerns over the extent of lot coverage, specifically on the north side of the hotel where there is the potential for pedestrian bottle necks and restrictions. Greg Vasil, MHPAC Member, stated that the proposed expansion will enliven areas of the hotel property that are inactive.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, noted that the existing Tia's Restaurant footprint is approximately the size of the proposed expansion on the north side of the hotel, and also referenced the Starbucks coffee shop within the hotel lobby which he recognized as an activating retail use. He also stated that the lobby is more than just a passageway but is also very much a public space, and noted that he had no particular issues with the ground level expansion areas. He also stated that he would like to see more music, street music and activity in the area during reasonable hours and impressed the point that the area be active and welcoming to all.

Lorraine Downey, MHPAC Member, noted the importance of having new retail and restaurant uses be designed to activate and open to the public. Vivien Li, expressed concern with any credit for improving indoor areas to offset loss of open space, as it sets a troubling precedent, and the importance of considering the proposal in a broader context that includes the Greenway, Christopher Columbus Park and the end of Long Wharf and the activation of these areas as well. Vivien then opened the meeting to public comment.

Marcelle Willock, Harbor Towers Resident, stated that a skate-park may be an option for activation given the number of skateboards she has observed in the area, and mentioned the need to consider the sustainability of retail and restaurant uses as many businesses fail. She also expressed support for a ferry center and ticketing kiosk in one of the hotel expansion areas.

Mary Holland, Harbor Towers Resident, expressed concern with the massing of some of the proposed expansion areas impacts upon views and pedestrian passage. Sy Mintz, Broad Street Resident, discussed the hotel lobby and asked the Advisory Committee to consider turning the area into an open air public use area. He also suggested incorporating the retail kiosks into the area around the MBTA head-house.

Steven Comen, Harbor Towers Resident, expressed concern with the loss of trees that would occur with the expansion, as well as additional activation of the planning area and questioned the carrying capacity of the area. He also referenced issues with car and taxi staging in front of the hotel which impedes public passage.

Rick Moore, Harbor Towers Resident, noted that if there is new retail proposed on the exterior the public should be encouraged to go around rather than through the hotel, as well as limiting or doing away with parking and staging around 255 State Street and allowing it to serve more as a pedestrian way.

Chris Fincham, Harbor Towers Resident, expressed concern with the viability of retail in the area, and noted the lobby passageway through the hotel should be better defined. He also supported better and additional signage for the area as an offset.

Victor Brogna, Atlantic Avenue Resident, addressed activation in the area and the need to focus on the type and quality of activation that is more responsive to a broader public. He expressed concerns with additional Tia's type restaurant uses around the hotel.

Suzanne Lavoie, noted that the needs of the hotel should not be lost in the discussion and hotel guest and vehicle transition areas are a necessary part of their business. Bruce Berman, advocated for more diversity at the Advisory Committee meetings to have a better representation of all the user communities of the waterfront and residents and visitors to the City. Joanne Hayes-Rines, expressed concern with existing traffic congestion and the need to maintain and support contemplative and quiet areas and open spaces along the waterfront.

Meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.