



Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, October 22, 2014
Atlantic Wharf, 290 Congress Street

Attendees

Advisory Committee: Susanne Lavoie, Vivien Li, Rick Dimino, Janeen Hansen, Greg Vasil, Robert Venuti, Bud Ris, Marianne Connolly, Tom Wooters, Joanne Hayes-Rines, Meredith Rosenberg, Jim Klocke

City of Boston: Richard McGuinness, BRA; Chris Busch, BRA; Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

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

Government Representatives: Maria Puopolo, Office of Senator Petrucci; James Chan, Office of City Council President Linehan; Patrick Lyons, Office of Representative Michlewitz; Valerie Gingrich, CZM;

Members of the Public: Valerie Burns, Andrew Magee, Julie Hatfield Leland, Victor Brogna, Mary Holland, Charles Norris, Don Weist, Barb Boylan, Edward Hook, Julie Mairanu, James Hook, Rick Moore, Todd Lee, Tom Walsh, Jim Duffey, Wes Stimson, BJ Moriarty, Pam McDermott, Shawn Ford, Rachel Borgatti, Barbara Yanke, Thomas Burroughs, Thomas Nally, Jessica Seney, Marna Peters, Gabor Korodi, Jim Cravens, Stuart Rose, Carol Chirico, Sy Mintz, Scott Fuller

Meeting Summary

Chris Busch, BRA, opened the meeting and noted that the session would focus on the Hook Site.

Matthew Littell, Utile, began with a discussion of relationship between the Watersheet Activation Plan and the Municipal Harbor Plan, reminding the Committee the process is non-linear and operates at multiple scales. The zoomed-in discussion of the Hook site is a means of exploring and understanding what to prioritize in the MHP. As the third of three major sites along the Waterfront, the first two which have been discussed over the past few months – the Marriot Site and the Harbor Garage Site – the Hook property will be integrated into the MHP and then be subject to a further review process under Article 80.

Matthew noted that the Hook site was identified in the Greenway District Planning Guidelines as a key site and is listed in that plan with a height regulation of 175 ft. The site has immense connectivity potential, located between two bridges (the Moakley and Northern Ave), the Harborwalk, the Greenway, and the waterfront itself. The site is also at a complex intersection between the bridges, Atlantic Avenue, and the on ramp to I-93. The site is a critical bottleneck for connection to the rest of the City. Matthew also mentioned an adjacent site along the Harborwalk – a point by the Northern Avenue Bridge where connections are difficult physically and in terms of way finding. In terms of the connectivity of Harborwalk, precedents of connections underneath bridges at North Washington St. and adjacent to the Barking Crab were referenced.

Tom Skinner, Durand & Anastas, began by noting the site constraints. The parcel is both on Private Tidelines and Commonwealth Tidelands (on pile-supported piers), which incur higher standards for

public benefits. There is also a wedge of water along the side of the parcel, and Tom noted that this might impact the Water Dependent Use Zone, asking the committee to consider whether setbacks of 12 feet from this wedge and 25 feet from the harbor are appropriate.

Tom mentioned that the site is 20,000 square feet, which, by current Chapter 91 standards, would mean an allowable 10,000 square foot building area and 10,000 square feet of open space. In addition, the current regulation allow for a building 55 feet in height, and Facilities of Private Tenancy (FPT) are prohibited, meaning that substitute provisions would be needed for private building uses such as an office or residential.

Vivien Li, MHPAC Member, asked Matthew to clarify what was meant by a complex “stumbling” area adjacent to the Hook site and whether in fact that area is part of the Hook site or a General Services Administration building. Matthew noted that the area is indeed a Coast Guard building under the management of the GSA, adjacent but not part of the Hook site, and that the particular section is circuitous and unclear in terms of wayfinding. Vivien then mentioned problems of homelessness and public safety issues under the bridge by the Barking Crab.

Bud Ris, MHPAC Member, asked for clarification on whether the reopening of Northern Avenue Bridge to cars was confirmed. Richard McGuinness, BRA, noted that the city has in fact decided that two lanes will be opened for vehicle traffic and one barrel used for pedestrian travel; the Hook developers have been asked to consider both the current situation and this future plan.

Susanne Lavoie, MHPAC Member, asked for the heights of the buildings on either side of the Hook site. Chris Busch, BRA, responded that the next meeting would include an in-depth analysis of the proposals, including the context and how that compares to the requirements of Chapter 91.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, responding to Vivien’s comment about the bridge underpasses, noting the bridges are very low and sometimes have flooding issues. Bruce also mentioned potential for innovative interventions, such as proposals to activate areas under expressways in other parts of the City, as possible inspiration for this site. Linda Jonash, MHPAC Member, followed up to ask whether there might be an option to bring the Harborwalk over the bridge, rather than under.

Bill Zielinsky, SKW Partners, opened the Hook site presentation noting that several uses had been considered for the property, including office and hotel, but that a decision had been made to pursue residential. He described the significance of Hook Lobster to the area and introduced Eddie Hook, who described the family business’s presence on the site for four generations. After displacement to a modular building for five years since a fire, Hook noted the family’s excitement about bringing the restaurant, wholesale, and retail businesses back onto the site, utilizing water from the harbor to serve the area’s rising residential population and tourists.

Will Adams, SKW Partners, noted that the resounding message from members of the committee and the public were to make sure the Hooks stayed on the site and also the importance of the site as a gateway to the City and as a special building. He stated the proposed building is 280 feet to the roof at 305 feet to the penthouse, which relates to the context of the Intercontinental at 285 feet and the Atlantic Wharf at 430 feet. The building prioritizes pedestrian access and the creation of a Harborwalk extension out underneath the Moakley Bridge.

David Manfredi, Elkus Manfredi Architects, mentioned the Hook site's role as a crucial visual corridor between the Seaport, South Boston, the Financial District, and the Greenway. He noted the complexity of the abandoned roadway between 400 Atlantic Avenue and the site, where there is a complex pedestrian and vehicular conflict. He also mentioned the state-built pump house that is not part of the site or proposal, and the potential for the Harborwalk to be connected by a floating pier. Parking is also constrained on the site due to the piers and small footprint, and David noted the proposal would include a small number of cars on the second and third floors. He answered the earlier question about the heights of neighboring buildings, noting 400 Atlantic is 180 feet and the GSA Coast Guard Building is 100 feet.

David explained that the proposal's intention is to activate three and a half sides of the block. The Hooks will operate 9,000 square feet on the first-floor, featuring multiple uses all open to the public: a retail fish market, wholesale area, and a sit-down restaurant along the water's edge. The final side of the building would include access to the residential building by way of a small lobby. Adjacent will be loading and parking access, with two auto elevators and fully attended parking for around 60 spaces on two floors (.5 spaces per resident or less). Street parking will exist until the Northern Avenue Bridge reopens to vehicular traffic, at which time the number of spaces would greatly reduce and provide only for short-term parking. The residential floor plate is 10,000 square feet; the form was designed to maximize the visual corridors between the Downtown and Seaport, as well as take into consideration the views of pedestrians' crossing over the Northern Avenue Bridge. David then showed a series of views of the proposed building, indicating the connection between the ground floor and the water, the glazed parking floors, and the green terraces for the residential.

Shadow studies of the proposal were then reviewed, which used the penthouse height of 305 feet (285 to the highest occupied floor) in comparison with the Greenway Guidelines regulation of 175 feet. The drawings display new shadow as well as shadow durations, and David explained that the computer model can show any date or increment. June 21, the highest sun of the year, showed almost no shadow by noon, conversely, Dec. 21, represented most of the day was consumed by existing shadow.

Sydney Asbury, Committee Chair, then opened the conversation to questions and comments from the committee. Linda Jonash, asked whether there was potential to create additional value for the public by recapturing the additional wedge of water at the north of the site. David replied that although that option had been considered, the change would not increase the building footprint and would in fact remove pedestrian access to that side of the building.

Bruce Berman, inquired about the specifics of the Harborwalk extension, and David clarified that the extension was not yet fully designed but imagined as floating piers that would ramp down to the water. Susanne Lavoie, followed up by asking about the reality of vehicular traffic stopping on the street and creating congestion problems, as well as the possibility for valet parking for the Hook restaurant. David responded that further discussion with the BRA and BTB was necessary to determine the exact future traffic pattern along the Northern Avenue Bridge, but that one option would be one-way traffic to minimize vehicular and pedestrian conflict. Valet parking will be provided but will not be located in the building. Suzanne then asked for clarification about the pump station, and Rich McGuinness, BRA, explained that it was built by the MBTA to mitigate the impact of the Fort Port Channel excavation during the construction of the Silver Line in order to protect water dependent uses at the Hook site.

Tom Wooters, MHPAC Meeting, noted his concern that the evaluation of this site should be part of a larger approach to thinking about Chapter 91 rather than a site-by-site analysis. He also noted that changing the site to 175 feet, as stated in the Greenway Guidelines, would require substitute provisions, and that a further height extension would require further amendments. He commended SKW for their creative approach to a difficult site.

Joanne Hayes-Rines, MHPAC Member, reiterated Eddie Hook's comment about the rising residential population in the neighborhood and commented that the Harborwalk extension might not do enough to alleviate pedestrian congestion along Northern Avenue and Atlantic Ave, and wondered if there might be a solution that involved crossing over the street. David acknowledged the need to prioritize pedestrians at the intersection and noted that the Harborwalk extension was a possible solution that would help, but not necessarily solve, the issue.

Richard Dimino, MHPAC Member, applauded SKW for simplifying and improving pedestrian experience of the site, and asked Richard McGuinness about the potential to study shadows on the water sheet as well as the greenway. Rich responded that the watersheet shadows, due to the alignment of the building, are not a large concern but will nevertheless be clarified at the next meeting. Further, he noted that the Northern Avenue Bridge will be elevated 8 feet, opening an opportunity to create an uninterrupted Harborwalk. He noted some of the challenges of creating an elevated connection over the Moakley Bridge, such as accessibility requirements and the impact on view corridors. He also mentioned the advantage of the site having roadways on either side, which increases permeability and provides light and air, benefits both to the residential tenants and to the public realm.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, began by commenting on the tragedy of the Hook fire and complimented the creativity of the SKW approach. He commented on the potential complexities in ramping for the Harborwalk extension, but also noted that the pathway does not need to be accessible at each and every point. He reiterated the significance of the bridge raising 8 feet to allow for a seamless connection of the Harborwalk. He then asked SKW to talk a bit more about the residential use of the building, as well as the mix of uses on the ground floor.

David explained the thinking behind the residential program of the building, noting that the footprint was too small to make office feasible, and that while hotel was also an option, a mix of residential and hotel uses would not be efficient due to a need for multiple cores. He noted that the key piece of the building was the ground floor, where the wholesale, retail, and restaurant uses would draw a range of customers.

Jim Klocke, MHPAC Member, inquired about the logistical and financial challenges of the building on such a complex site given the size and pier conditions. David responded that the building is indeed an expensive project due to foundation complexity, a relatively inefficient envelope to floor plate ratio, and the building form. David also noted that the range of units could fall between 100 and 160, but decisions on type of units (number of bedrooms and sale versus rental) would come further down the line.

Linda Jonash, then requested that Utile examine the opportunity for a sculptural elevated passage for the Harborwalk and create some sketches, as well as a few quick illustrations of the pedestrian experience at the end of the Northern Avenue where it intersects with the highway ramp. Utile confirmed that they could make studies of these conditions.

Sydney Asbury, Committee Chair, then expanded the conversation to public questions and comments.

Todd Lee, architect, asked about the decision to raise the entire structure of the Northern Avenue Bridge 8 feet, wondering how Atlantic Avenue would ramp up to meet it and what the visual impact would be. Richard McGuinness responded that the decision was made to elevate the bridge rather than have it swing up, but agreed that the visual and grade connection with Atlantic Avenue should be studied.

Sy Mintz, Broad Street Resident, asked for a reevaluation of Northern Avenue as a vehicular bridge, supporting the continued use of the bridge for pedestrians and bicycles only, and questioning the expenditure to raise the bridge eight feet. He commended the smart ground floor treatment of the proposed design, but also commented on the potential for a stronger link between the Moakley Bridge and the site by eliminating the wedge of water. Todd Lee noted that this wedge in fact flows under the Moakley Bridge and that there is another wedge of water on the other side of the bridge. Sy also suggested the potential for retail uses along the Northern Avenue Bridge to create public use and a strong connection with South Boston and the Innovation District.

Jim Cravens, Harbor Towers, comments on the "stumbling point" mentioned earlier in the meeting and notes that this proposal does not address that issue.

Sydney Asbury, Committee Chair, adjourned the meeting at 4:45pm.