



**Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning
Advisory Committee Meeting No. 39**
Wednesday, September 28, 2016
Boston City Hall, Piemonte Room

Attendees

Advisory Committee (“Committee”): Sidney Asbury (Chair), Bruce Berman, Jesse Brackenbury, Rick Dimino, Joanne Hayes-Rines, Nigella Hillgarth, Jill Valdes Horwood, Lee Kozol, Suzanne Lavoie, Marc Margulies, Lois Siegelman, Bud Ris, Meredith Rosenberg, Joe Ruggiero

City of Boston (“City”): Richard McGuinness, Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA); Chris Busch, BPDA; Lauren Shurtleff, BPDA

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

Government Representatives: Lisa Berry Engler, Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM)

Members of the Public: Brigitte Alexander, Sarah Barnat, M. Barron, William Beckwith, Jonathon Berk, Victor Brogna, Linda Cabot, Richard Cane, Jack Clark, John Copley, Jim Cravens, Emily DaSilva, Mistral Diane, Chris Fincham, Todd Giben, Duncan Gratton, Aeron Hodges, Mary Holland, Pamela Humphrey, Chelsea Johnson, Peter Kimbill, Gabor Korodi, Eric Krauss, Tony LaCasse, Jim Lelard, Julie Lelard, Julie Mairano, Robert McLamette, Norman Meisner, Charlie Mills, Sy Mintz, Olivia Moore, Deanna Moran, Thomas Nally, Ethan Nessen, Charlie Norris, Margie Palace, Michael Panagako, Devanshi Purohit, Chris Reed, Diane Rubin, Matt Rubins, Lucas Sitter, Debra Lee Stevens, Kishore Varanasi, Heidi Wolf, Barbara Yanke, Parnia Zahedi

Meeting Summary

Mr. Richard McGuinness, Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA), opened the meeting at 6:05 PM by introducing BPDA staff and the consultant team. He reminded the public that the [draft Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan](#) and [Downtown Waterfront Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan](#) are both available online and that the next, and likely final, Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee (MHPAC) meeting is scheduled for October 19 from 6 – 8 P.M. This meeting will be followed by an unofficial comment period prior the BPDA Board meeting on November 17 for authorization to submit the plan to the Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM). Such a submission initiates another public process, which includes a notice in the Environmental Monitor, a 30-day comment period, a public meeting, and a consultation period, after all of which the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) would issue a decision on the MHP, likely sometime in February.

Mr. McGuinness continued that the Committee’s feedback from its two working sessions on September 14th and 21st included stressing exceptional design and architecture and concerns related to the offsets. He stated that the BPDA has had productive meetings with the New

England Aquarium (NEAq), which developed a plan for their institution that the BPDA will be incorporating aspects thereof into the MHP, and invited Ms. Nigella Hillgarth, NEAq CEO and MHPAC Member, to present NEAq's plan.

Ms. Hillgarth introduced "Blueway", NEAq's new master plan for their Central Wharf campus, which is intended to be a compelling vision for the district's open spaces and complement the MHP. She clarified that it does not contemplate a number of significant issues, such as parking, traffic, and density of nearby developments, but looks forward to working with BPDA and the public to realize the vision. She invited Mr. Eric Krauss, NEAq COO & CFO, Mr. Kishore Varanasi of CBT Architects, and Mr. Chris Reed of Stoss Landscape Urbanism to present NEAq's new master plan.

Mr. Varanasi stated that NEAq is uniquely situated between the Rose Kennedy Greenway and Boston Harbor and a new institutional master plan presents a once-in-awhile opportunity to create a public space to unite the two. He caveated that the vision is aspirational, not a specific design for such open space or developments. The foundation of the NEAq's vision is that aquariums are redefining themselves as civic spaces engaged in discussions about climate change, ecology, the environment, and so on. As such, NEAq is shifting from an inward institutional focus to an external focus that attracts people not only to NEAq itself, but the waterfront as a whole. Mr. Varanasi provided a brief history of NEAq, from its inception and through its growth and additions, including the existing IMAX theater.

Mr. Varanasi explained that, throughout their development of their vision, NEAq sought to emphasize their desires to transform the public realm, connect the public to the waterfront, grow as a civic institution, and create a destination not only for NEAq visitors, but for the public at-large. He continued that given climate change, specifically sea level rise, NEAq is literally on the front lines of the coming conflict. He added that NEAq would like to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety on Central Wharf and their access to the waterfront.

Mr. Varanasi continued that NEAq, CBT, and Stoss's "big ah-ha moment" was the realization that the public doesn't really see the water on Central Wharf, despite its proximity to it. Mr. Reed commented that seeing the water is the first step in recognizing the city's relationship to its harbor, followed by feeling it. As a result, NEAq's vision seeks to improve and maximize both water views and water access through "the Blueway," which is an approximately 80-foot-wide by 1000-foot-long public space leading from the Rose Kennedy Greenway along the south side of NEAq to the waterfront that is legible, accessible, and prominent. Mr. Reed continued that the Blueway would be landscaped with appropriate coastal vegetation, adorned with trail markers and seating to foster its identity as a coastal path, and could include stormwater gardens. NEAq would have educational and interpretive elements, programming, and an island or two built on the harbor. Mr. Varanasi noted that NEAq would need to relocate the IMAX theater and become a strong component of the public realm. He shared some sample

concepts of the vision, such as opportunities to engage with the water along the south side of the new NEAq, and then concluded his presentation.

Mr. Jesse Brackenbury, MHPAC Member, thanked NEAq for their presentation and commented that the plan is inspirational. He applauded them for “coloring outside the lines” by considering the public realm beyond their buildings and expressed hope that it is financially feasible. Mr. Krauss responded that the vision is still conceptual, but conceded that it would like require a significant investment.

Mr. Marc Margulies, MHPAC Member, congratulated NEAq on the Blueway concept and suggested that, given the consistencies between the Blueway and the Wharf District Council’s (WDC) public realm plan, the implementation of it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Lee Kozol, MHPAC Member, agreed with Mr. Margulies that the plans are not inconsistent and asked if WDC would be allowed to present their plan and, if so, should the schedule for the MHP process be adjusted. Mr. McGuinness replied that the draft MHP does not conflict with the Blueway vision. He continued that the WDC’s plan was not developed through a public process, but that the BPDA has encouraged them to publicize it. NEAq, on the other hand, is a water-dependent use and cultural institution and, as encouraged by CZM, a potential recipient of offsets. BPDA has reviewed the WDC’s plan, which is consistent, if only more specific, than the Downtown Waterfront Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan, which was developed through a public process. Mr. McGuinness stated that he expects the forthcoming design study to be more specific than the existing Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan. Further, Mr. McGuinness noted that the WDC plan does not make any recommendations for the public realm at Rowes Wharf or Harbor Towers, whereas the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan is more comprehensive.

Mr. Rick Dimino, MHPAC Member, concurred that connecting the Rose Kennedy Greenway to NEAq and the waterfront is an excellent idea that had been previously contemplated during the development of the Rose Kennedy Greenway. He suggested further potential opportunities for connections, such as the Custom Tower, that further integrates the various aspects of the district into a cohesive neighborhood.

Ms. Meredith Rosenberg, MHPAC Member, urged Mr. McGuinness to reconsider allowing the presentation of the WDC’s plan to the Committee.

Ms. Jill Valdes Horwood, MHPAC Member, applauded NEAq’s plan as transformative and asked how the plan would be incorporated into the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan. Mr. McGuinness answered that BPDA has encouraged NEAq to comment on the draft MHP. Ms. Horwood suggested that it be included in the actual MHP. Mr. McGuinness suggested a review of the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan at the next MHPAC meeting, during which WDC could provide specific comments.

Mr. Bud Ris, MHPAC Member, opined that if *the* water-dependent use in the MHP area is given ample consideration, then *the* neighborhood association of the MHP area should receive the same consideration. He noted that Climate Ready Boston has indicated Central Wharf as one of the most vulnerable sites in all of Boston to sea level rise, but wondered what was being done as it relates to climate resilience in addition to elevating the site. Mr. Reed explained that the site is incrementally elevated with floodable layers, including the plaza, and capable of storing water on-site. He stated that NEAq wants to serve as an example to others of strong, resilient design.

Ms. Hillgarth thanked the Committee for their compliments, but added that the Committee should consider the WDC plan.

Mr. Berman thanked NEAq for sharing their innovative and precedent-setting vision, especially in providing the public an opportunity to touch the water and for “coloring outside the lines.” He suggested that the proposed island be enlarged to provide protection to parts of East Boston and the Fort Point Channel. He added that nothing presented is precluded by the draft MHP or Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan, but that governance is integral to the success of the district. Mr. McGuinness noted that at some point in the MHP process, it had been suggested to NEAq that the IMAX theater be relocated, but NEAq declined to consider. Another similar instance was the proposal to activate “the Cove,” or the watersheet adjacent to Harbor Towers, which was also rebuffed. As a result, BPDA opted for a lighter touch in the development of the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan, but Mr. McGuinness expressed pleasure at NEAq’s reconsideration in the pursuit of a greater public realm.

Ms. Joanne Hayes-Rines, MHPAC Member, applauded both NEAq and the WDC for both of their plans, especially for their focus on pedestrian access and safety, and suggested that WDC be allowed to present their plan. Mr. McGuinness replied that the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan would be re-presented alongside the WDC plan.

Ms. Lois Siegelman, MHPAC Member, asked if NEAq has contemplated pedestrian circulation and access to and from the ferry. Mr. Krauss replied that traffic and circulation are being examined through a number of studies of both existing and future conditions and also includes a water taxi stop.

Mr. Berman requested a rendering of the proposed Blueway from a street-level viewpoint.

Mr. Dimino offered the services of his organization, A Better City, as it relates to transportation at Central Wharf. Though excited by the Blueway, he asked about the climate resilience of the proposed islands. Mr. Reed explained that Boston is not subject to a significant storm surge like New York City, but water levels still increase. The proposed islands would serve as wave attenuators during storms and also have floodable areas to accommodate stormwater and

storm surge. Mr. Dimino expressed skepticism about its sustainability, but expressed interest in learning more.

Mr. Berman asked where along the Blueway you would actually begin to see the water as you approached it. Mr. Reed answered as far back as the Ring Foundation on Rose Kennedy Greenway.

Mr. Margulies encouraged the Committee to remember that Harbor Garage is not the only potential development in the MHP area, but also the Hook Lobster and Marriott Long Wharf sites.

Mr. McGuinness asked NEAq to post their plan online and informed the Committee and public that the WDC plan is available on their website.

Mr. Dimino suggested BPDA also consider overlaying the NEAq vision onto the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan and encouraged BPDA not to neglect improvements to the Chart House Parking Lot through this process.

Mr. Ris commented that a consolidation of the plans would be transformative. He asked what the legal relationship between the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan and MHP is. Mr. McGuinness answered that it is the framework for public benefits to be realized through the MHP and also acts as a planning document for BPDA in the event there is no development in the MHP area. Mr. Ris asked if CZM reviews the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan and MHP together, which Mr. McGuinness confirmed. Mr. Ris also inquired about shadow impacts from the redevelopment of Harbor Garage on NEAq's site. Mr. McGuinness answered most of the area already experiences shadow, except for Long Wharf, which is why it was preserved as a shadow protection zone, but that it would be reexamined.

Ms. Rosenberg encouraged the consideration of other view corridors to Boston Harbor and how those relate to lot coverage of the Harbor Garage site.

Mr. Dimino encouraged BPDA to consider offsets adjacent to the MHP area, such as the Rose Kennedy Greenway, and also argued that the substitute provisions outline maximums and that 70% lot coverage should be an option to maximize flexibility and public benefit because there are trade-offs between limiting substitutions and maximizing offsets. Mr. McGuinness responded that public benefits outside of the MHP area, such as decking over the ramp parcels on the Rose Kennedy Greenway, but that the need for investment along the waterfront is tremendous.

Ms. Diane Rubin, representing Harbor Towers, suggested that the principles of the NEAq's vision should be applied to the entirety of the waterfront in order to transform the public realm. She insisted that the WDC plan be presented at the next MHPAC meeting.

Mr. Sy Mintz, member of the public, congratulated NEAq and their consultants on the Blueway concept and noted that BPDA recently and rightly unveiled its new identity as a planning and development agency. He suggested that it was worth delaying the MHP process for a month or two to incorporate NEAq's and WDC's plans into the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plans.

Mr. Tom Palmer, representing Harbor Towers, seconded Mr. Mintz's comments. He asked for specific justifications for the proposed substitutions, but stated that he was not expecting an answer. He continued that the Harbor Garage should be redeveloped, but is not interested in allowing any additional deviations from Chapter 91's dimensional regulations. He suggested that the Public Realm Plan and Watersheet Activation has been unnecessarily presented continuously and hopes that moving forward an inordinate amount of time will not be spent on it.

Mr. Ethan Nessen, member of the public, thanked NEAq for their vision and the Committee for their dedication to the process.

A member of the public, concurred with Mr. Mintz that a short delay to consider and incorporate NEAq's and the WDC's plans is warranted and asked Mr. Krauss if there is a schedule for the phasing of the development of the Blueway. Mr. Krauss answered that a schedule is being developed, but that there would be a capital campaign to supplement any offsets received through the MHP process.

Mr. Norman Meisner, member of the public, praised NEAq for the Blueway, but stated that the renderings don't show any redevelopment of the Harbor Garage.

Mr. Allan McIntosh, member of the public, exhorted the Committee and public to embrace the vision presented today and at previous meetings to complete the MHP process and move forward to allow the proposed developments that will provide a portion of the funding toward the realization of the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation and NEAq's plans.

Ms. Mary Holland, member of the public, requested that the WDC should be allowed to present their plan at the next plan. Mr. McGuinness answered that the WDC plan will be presented alongside the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan to compare and contrast them.

Ms. Pamela Humphrey, member of the public, applauded NEAq's vision and concurred with Mr. Mintz's suggestion to delay the process to incorporate the NEAq's plans into the MHP. She lamented previous missed opportunities for a vibrant public realm, such as City Hall Plaza and the Seaport.

Mr. Victor Brogna, member of the public, also agreed that the WDC plan should be presented and thanked the WDC and NEAq for their plans.

A member of the public agreed with Mr. McIntosh that the plan should not be delayed any longer.

Mr. Don Chiofaro, Jr., Chiofaro Companies, thanked NEAq for the expedited development of their vision and expressed his interested in working together to realize both the Blueway and the redevelopment of the Harbor Garage.

Mr. Jonathan Berk, member of the public, commended NEAq for their vision and the Committee's dedication, but urged for the advancement of the plan.

Mr. Duncan Gratton, member of the public, agreed that it is time to move forward with the plan to allow for the redevelopment of the Harbor Garage and Hook Lobster sites, especially given the cyclical nature of real estate development.

A member of the public agreed with Mr. Gratton and expressed the urgency of advancing the plan to avoid further delays that would accompany a market downturn.

Mr. John Copley, member of the public, also expressed support for moving the plan forward.

Ms. Sarah Barnat, member of the public, opined that now is the time to act on the plan and move to its implementation.

Ms. Rubin reminded the public that the BPDA had cancelled a number of meetings that delayed the process and a few more months are necessary to ensure a transformative plan.

Mr. Ris countered that he would like to see the various plans incorporated in the MHP and Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan without any further delay.

There being no further questions or comments, Mr. McGuinness reminded the Committee and public that the next meeting would be on Wednesday, October 19, 2016 at 6 PM in the Piemonte Room on the fifth floor of City Hall, Boston, MA. He ended the meeting at 4:40 PM.