



walkBoston

February 15, 2011

Secretary Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF)
1265 Main Street
Waltham, MA
MEPA # 14681

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

WalkBoston is the Commonwealth's leading advocate for pedestrians and safe walking. We work throughout the state – encouraging walking, advocating for pedestrian improvements and working for design improvements. We have extensive experience helping residents and local government with pedestrian issues, safe routes to school and safer street crossings.

We have reviewed the EENF for 1265 Main Street, Waltham (formerly The Commons at Prospect Hill), a proposed mixed-use retail and office redevelopment at the site of the former Polaroid buildings.

The project at 1265 Main Street includes approx. 1.28 million sf of mixed office/retail uses in the proposed redevelopment. Phase I of the proposal will use existing buildings formerly occupied by Polaroid along Route 128 to accommodate these uses. Parking for retail and office uses will be shared to provide maximum and successive use of auto storage areas. Phase II of the proposal calls for new buildings scattered around the site.

WalkBoston's concerns focus on the fact that walking and pedestrians facilities do not appear to be a major component of the project, although the project is frequently called "pedestrian-friendly" in the document. Pedestrian accommodations are listed on p. 92 of the EENF as being primarily along or connected with the residential areas facing Main Street. Plans for the reconstruction of Main Street will surely include sidewalk replacement and widening. Sidewalk connections within the site and between buildings are not discussed, with the exception of the Wayside Trail, which will accommodate pedestrians in addition to cyclists.

WalkBoston is concerned that some opportunities may be lost which could help make walking a part of the project's benefits. These opportunities are concentrated in six areas:

1. Pedestrian access into the development site
2. Pedestrian connections to transit routes
3. Pedestrian access along the corridor of buildings
4. Pedestrian access along Wayside Trail
5. Pedestrian access into Prospect Park
6. Pedestrian access into Berry Farm

MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES MORE WALKABLE

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Each of these opportunities is considered below:

1. Pedestrian access into the development site is apparently to be incorporated into three proposed vehicular access routes into the site from Main Street on the south side of the site. The three access routes are Tower Road, the extension of Cutting Lane, and a new roadway that skirts the existing residential community along Hill Road to connect into Main Street at a new location. No access is provided from the north.
2.
 - The principal accessways into the western part of the site appear to be along Tower Road on the western edge of the site and the extension of Cutting Lane which goes up the middle of the site. Tower Road connects between all buildings to be reused as part of Phase I. The extension of Cutting Lane connects only to the first two buildings of the former Polaroid site, providing major existing pedestrian access points into the buildings.
 - Tower Road is already a major facility for access to the site and is likely to retain its importance as part of Phase I of this development. The proposal calls for two lanes of entering traffic on Tower Road, which suggests it will be carrying a major load of traffic in the future. It connects into the parking areas only indirectly. As such, Tower Road does not appear to be the most appropriate site for major pedestrian access into the site.
 - Pedestrian access into the development site is not indicated in the graphics of this proposal. However, the logical location for pedestrian access may be along the proposed new roadway between Main Street and the eastern half of the site. This road is proposed to be located on a new right-of-way that leads to the north part of the site. It provides access to an existing building near the south boundary of Prospect Park which (we assume) will be retained as part of this development. Sidewalks can be created on one or both sides of this new roadway to give access to the existing building if it is to be retained.
3. Pedestrian access to transit from the development site is discussed only vaguely in the EENF. Transit for people working on site and for visitors should be more thoroughly discussed as the project moves forward.
 - Transit lines along Main Street will continue to serve this development. At present there is one bus shelter located about one-quarter of the way from Tower Rd/Stow St. to Cutting Lane. Future connections to the transit services along Main Street should be closely connected to the principal pedestrian access within the site. As mentioned above, the future axis could be along the extension of Cutting Lane. If that is the principal on-site sidewalk, it suggests that the bus shelter and stop be relocated to be closer to that axis. Since this portion of Main Street is proposed to be widened and reconstructed, the new bus shelter can become part of that improvement.
 - The proponent has expressed a willingness to add a bus route within the site. A new line would be a welcome addition to the access to the site. The proponent should consider where stops will be located on site and whether there should be shelters at those locations.
3. A pedestrian access corridor through the site would be very useful. The proposed

development consists of a row of buildings parallel to Route 128/95. This single axis of buildings suggests a prime location for such a corridor.

- The extension of Cutting Lane is on an alignment that appears to be appropriate for pedestrian access to all of the buildings proposed to be activated by Phase I construction. Although there is no continuous roadway for vehicles on the east side of all the buildings, sidewalks and safe pedestrian facilities can readily be provided along this axis. This is particularly appropriate since some of the recommended pedestrian facilities are already in place outside the existing buildings, providing access to existing and proposed parking on the east side of the buildings.
 - The pedestrian access corridor would seem to be more efficiently and pleasantly located along the extension of Cutting Lane rather than Tower Road.
 - Pedestrian connections will need to be provided across the major parking lot located at the north end of the existing major complex of buildings on the site. This parking lot can be developed with safe pedestrian walkways across it to connect between all buildings on the site.
 - The Low Impact Development (LID) for Stormwater Design, calls for underground water storage facilities beneath parking lots. Specifically an underground stone reservoir is planned for the parking lot that is located between buildings. A long-range view of the grouping of buildings might include a building on the site of the parking lot. This in turn would tie the pedestrian portions of the site closer together, and not require pedestrians to walk across a parking lot for access to the buildings. Is it possible to design the underground water storage facility to permit construction of a future building above it?
4. Pedestrian access to the Wayside Trail is welcome. The proponent has generously volunteered to construct a portion of the Wayside Trail along the former railroad right-of-way that passes through this property. The trail is proposed for use by pedestrians as well as bikes. The use of the existing right of way meshes well with state-wide planning effort for this trail.
- On site, all street/trail intersections should be carefully protected. If traffic signals cannot be provided, traffic calming measures should be considered. Signing should be plentiful to warn motorists of the crossings by pedestrians and bikes.
 - Additional consideration should be given to the most appropriate location where the trail can safely cross Main Street. If the trail is located within the rail right-of-way, it will reach Main Street in the vicinity of either Cutting Lane or the new access road that skirts the Hill Road residential area. A traffic signal at either location would allow for safe crossings of Main Street. Alternatively, the trail could extend to Stow Street/Tower Road and cross at the signal proposed for that location, although the traffic at the Tower Road/Stow Street/Main Street intersection is expected to be relatively heavy.
 - If Main Street is to be widened as part of this project, it may be appropriate to incorporate the Wayside Trail as an integral element in the design of Main Street between the Hill Street residential area and Route 128/95. It might become a facility parallel to Main Street but somewhat separated from it. The trail could be on either side of Main Street, depending on the design. It is important to provide a sufficient width to

make this portion of the trail spacious for all users – a minimal sidewalk will not suffice.

5. Pedestrian access into Prospect Park is critical. One of the beauties of this site is the extensive background of nearby adjacent public parkland. People working on the site or visiting will be able to see the park and should be provided with options for walking or jogging in it.
 - Direct access to the parking is cut off by the Low impact Development (LID) for Stormwater Design, which calls for water quality swales to control runoff from nearby steep land. The proposal calls for 2 water storage areas in what appears to be the southeast corner of Prospect Park. These water storage areas are proposed to be bounded by a new site access road, which will ultimately connect to Route 128/95. Pedestrian access through these sites appears to be difficult but not impossible. Perhaps a landscaped walkway could connect between the park and the buildings lined up along Route 128/95. Consideration of this connection would add significantly to the amenities of the site.
 - Signing on walkways would be appropriate to lead walkers from business areas into the park's trails and potential jogging routes. Signs could also lead people from major parking areas and from site roadways into the park.
 - Use of the trails and walkways within the park should be encouraged through signage, promotion among employers on the site, and by sharing maintenance responsibilities between the City and the proponent.
6. The proponent will donate Berry Farm area to the city as part of this project. Pedestrian access into Berry Farm open space could result from this project. This will expand and greatly enhance the availability and accessibility of open space in the area.
 - A direct trail or walkway connection between the proposed Wayside Trail and Berry Farm should be considered. There appears to be a physical connection between the main portion of the farm and the former rail right-of-way. This "leg" of Berry Farm should be used to construct an entranceway into the farm. An area directly adjacent has been designated for parking for Berry Farm. This means that people can drive to both the park and the trail and have access from this site.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this EENF. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director