



walkBoston

September 9, 2011

Secretary Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
Attn: MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston MA 02114

RE: Comments on Expanded Environmental Notification Form with Phase 1 Waiver Request, New Quincy Center Redevelopment, Quincy, MA

EOEA No. 14780

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Expanded Environmental Notification Form with Phase 1 Waiver Request for the New Quincy Center Redevelopment. The project comprises 30.8 acres, with a total of 3.4 million square feet of space in more than 15 buildings, containing office, retail, hospitality and entertainment uses, and 1210 residential units. It is planned for construction in four steps over 7-10 years.

The proposal will have very significant impacts on future pedestrian activity in the central area of the city of Quincy. We are concerned that the potential for improving walking for users of the project area has not been examined in an intensive way. The proponent will need to be cognizant of detailed pedestrian needs throughout the development, because the pedestrian aspects of the site will play an extremely important role in the way it meshes with its surroundings and the possible help in alleviating traffic congestion.

Summary of key points:

- Analyze pedestrian traffic at levels matching vehicular traffic analysis.
- Maximize use of Adams Green project as gateway.
- Need to establish plans for interim periods to ensure pedestrian activity.
- Consider use of small-scale retail frontage for lively places.
- Address pedestrian safety in traffic plans.
- Establish sidewalk and amenity standards to ensure quality.
- Integrate open space/pedestrian space as integral to the big idea – not yet expressed in the plan

In our comments below, we have outlined some of the ways pedestrian planning could benefit the project and the city.

Planning for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic

Project vehicular traffic is projected to increase by 15,479 trips per day, making a total of 37,256 trips total each day. The project envisions mitigation measures including the widening of 6 streets in the area, restriping for exclusive left-turn lanes, and signal changes at 2 intersections to provide concurrent pedestrian phasing. (other intersections are not cited for measures dealing with potential pedestrian conflicts and safety.) In addition a new bridge over the MBTA tracks is deemed important and has become the focus of a proposed Phase 1 waiver.

Discussion of auto traffic in the report consumes 47 pages of text and 66 figures of traffic analysis, leading to discussions of parking garages, street improvements, traffic lanes, turns, and signals in some detail. Mention is also made of relaxed parking requirements to handle vehicle demands.

In a major information gap, existing and anticipated daily walking trips are not discussed in the report, nor are there suggestions that future planning will include such analysis. It is essential to have some notion of the overall number of walkers to plan adequately for pedestrian connections between building sites. Based on information about numbers of walkers, it would then become possible to think about incremental features that might benefit pedestrians.

Standards for sidewalk widths are not discussed in the report, suggesting that there may be reliance on either state or local standard widths that have not been included or referenced in this report. The widths of the sidewalks should be adequate to address the volumes of traffic that are anticipated, while adding sufficient space for trees, street furniture and signage in a way that does not interfere with pedestrian throughput. We suggest that the proponent use state design standards for sidewalks in central areas that provide a minimum of 12' for heavily-used sidewalks, and 6' in all other areas. In areas of heavy foot traffic, the width should be related to anticipated pedestrian volumes. These widths should be clear and continuous in all affected blocks. Street trees, lighting fixtures and other street furniture should not intrude on these minimum clear and continuous widths. Sidewalk paving surfaces should be smooth and easily shoveled during winter snowstorms. Curb cuts for vehicles should be severely limited.

On streets along the sidewalks, retaining a pattern of two lanes of parked traffic is best for pedestrians, because parking on both sides of the street acts as a buffer between moving traffic and pedestrians walking alongside.

Each of the proposed pedestrian corridors follows streets (open space internal to structures does not appear to be available for general foot traffic.) Each street can be classified distinctively, based on a street typology and character as a general guide to function and potential design. Although it is not yet known what pedestrian traffic volumes and issues may arise, each of the streets seems to deserve unique treatment, as far as pedestrian service is concerned.

- **Temple/Hancock/Granite Streets** is a new facility and a major route for vehicular traffic. It appears to be set to act as a pedestrian promenade at the edge of the development. The boulevard's frontage may become a retail focus serving primarily pedestrian traffic.
- **Hancock Street between Granite Street and QC Concourse** appears to be envisioned to be a local street – not a major vehicular thoroughfare. The street could become a very interesting, relatively quiet and rewarding pedestrian corridor, especially because it is a direct extension of the pedestrian promenade of Adams Green. Sidewalks along Hancock Street can become integral portions of the open space network, with off-sidewalk paved areas to enlarge upon the feeling of openness, creating at the same time places where people could congregate, meet, sit, watch, and enjoy the daily progression of walkers through the district. This may involve widening the sidewalk in some instances to provide inlets or off-sidewalk squares as useful spaces for walkers. Staging of the Hancock Street portions of the project may allow re-use of existing small-scale commercial uses. Retaining Hancock Street as the focus of the new development is exciting and, we think, essential. There are several elements of the design that would be useful to better understand. Only a few of the existing small-scale businesses appear to be dislocated by Step 1 of the proposed development, and not until the arrival of Step 3 will all of the existing commercial along Hancock Street be replaced by new buildings.
- **Revere Road/QC Concourse** will complete a ring-road around downtown and the Quincy Center project. This road will not be expected to facilitate commercial development to a great extent, although a major large retail facility is proposed for the block closest to the bridge over the MBTA tracks.
- **Ross Way** appears to be primarily an access road for parking garages, vehicular deliveries and service access. If so, it will be a difficult area for pedestrians to navigate, especially because it will require numerous curb cuts.
- **Chestnut and Cottage Streets** will both be minor collectors that might become useful locations for small businesses (some existing buildings are to be retained) because the location of

- the two streets may provide spillover space linked to retail opportunities along Hancock Street.
- **Hancock Market Square Connector.** This new street seems designed to provide access directly into parking structures. It seems unlikely, from the limited information available that this street will attract walkers. However, the market square located at the Hancock Street intersection holds a promise of a retail focus for pedestrians.
 - **Pathway along the MBTA tracks.** The project includes paths immediately adjacent to the MBTA tracks that seem unconnected to a larger network. The function of these paths is unclear.

Intersection design is important for pedestrian safety. Potential vehicular/pedestrian conflict areas exist in several locations. Already noted are potential conflicts in the Adams Green area, where pedestrian volume from the MBTA stations, the schools and other uses result in walkers crossing busy streets. The entrances to the project on Granite Street where it meets Hancock and Chestnut Streets are likely to have significant areas of conflict. Within the project boundary, all intersections may have significant conflicts and should be analyzed.

Pedestrian-oriented open space

Adams Green, immediately adjacent to the north side of the Quincy Center project, encompasses over 10 acres, a significant addition to the overall open space in the area. Served primarily by walking and transit, the project will include existing open space and the Hancock Cemetery, augmented by open space that re-uses the existing paved area of Hancock Street to form a pedestrian plaza and a major axis of usable open space for walkers. This axis will extend into the Quincy Center project.

The Adams Green project will renew an existing focus for pedestrians in the area, capitalizing on the proximity of Quincy High School, the South Shore YMCA, Quincy College, City Hall, Crane Public Library, the MBTA rail and rapid transit station, Stop and Shop national headquarters, and the U.S. Post Office. This aggregation of uses is unique to Quincy, and forms an exciting base for the success of the proposal. The Green appears to play a very large future role as the principal open space for the entire area and as the gateway to the Quincy Center project.

The Quincy Center plans show little additional open space, though open space is stated as an essential element in the overall design. Instead, the proposal calls for large-scale reliance on sidewalks and their landscaping as open space. However, the design standards for sidewalks and how they will function as open space additions (including both walkways and landscaping strips) are not defined.

The principal new open space within the project appears to be a market square on Hancock Street near Revere Road/QC Concourse. Other green space may be located internal to proposed residential or office structures, in places that may not be available to the general public. The acreages of proposed open spaces in the project should be quantified in the report. This could aid in public understanding of the project and help in marketing sites, gaining retail attractions, and bolstering business opportunities.

The text suggests that public gathering places will be added as social focal points, venues for seasonal events, and outdoor marketplaces, each connected to others via the public sidewalks and designed with a clear relationship to the proposed pedestrian network. It would be very useful to know where these open spaces will be located and how they relate to sidewalks, as they are intended to engender pedestrian movements.

Activities needing pedestrian access – Quincy Center

The proposal for this project does not include anchors of activities such as those surrounding Adams Green. In fairness, it may be too early in the process to identify specific uses, but a hint may arise from one of the existing strong points of the existing Hancock Street retail area - its human scale. Building frontages are relatively narrow, uses change every few feet, activities spill out onto the street and it can appear that a great deal of human activity is taking place. Retaining the human scale should be a

guideline for future development.

The proposal seems designed to guide the area toward larger scale (large-format) retail activities. Many of the proposed buildings will have first floor retail uses, and the vast spaces envisioned for retail suggest a sort of outdoor shopping mall. The conceptual plans and proposed construction schedule do not seem to construct the retail spaces all in one step. We are concerned that much of the retail space may not be occupied until the project reaches full build-out, leaving vacant space and possibly rather empty sidewalks that are uninteresting and perhaps not comfortable for pedestrians walking alone. Ultimately, the retail market will fill the space; in the meantime (perhaps over many years) pedestrians may have neither a lively nor a safe environment in which to walk. It is important to ensure that existing and new small-scale uses will be accommodated by the phasing of the proposed large-scale uses. An area with many activities to be found within a small area is perfect for pedestrian access for errands, other shopping or services and for strolling. One potential approach might be to encourage restaurants and uses appealing to pedestrians along Hancock Street, much like Moody Street in Waltham, to draw walkers into the district and provide essential services for new development.

Perhaps one of the most pedestrian-friendly approaches could be establishing a permanent focus of retail uses that are small-scale and attractive to pedestrians. This focus might be an appropriate portion of the first stage of development, located in the blocks adjacent to the Adams Green project. The area could then grow along Hancock Street as demand for services expands.

A second approach is the development of an entirely separate focal area around which retail uses might concentrate. One such location is the proposed market square, which appears to be partly included in Step 1 activities. The market square has the advantage of providing an anchor to draw pedestrians through the area between Granite Street and the QC Concourse road.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. Please feel free to contact us if there are questions.

Sincerely,
Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner