



August 15, 2008

Secretary Ian Bowles  
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, MEPA Office  
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900  
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Comments on Environmental Notification Form/Project Notification Form/Phase 1 Waiver  
Request for Bayside, Boston, MA  
EOEA # 14273

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Environmental Notification Form/Project Notification Form for Bayside in Boston, MA. The project occupies 28 acres, and at present contains buildings comprising 309,000 gsf. Some of the existing structures will be removed during the proposed Phase I building program. The planned Phase I construction includes about 250,000 gsf of new retail, a total of 105,000 gsf in new office space (in addition to the 120,000 gsf which now exists,) 300 new units of housing, and 78 new rooms added to the existing 197-room hotel. Phase I will result in a total of about 990,000 gsf. Related parking structures will comprise 463,000 gsf - some to support a supermarket, and the remainder to support the office, retail and residential uses. The full build out of the site will include an additional 650 residential units in 6 new buildings of varying heights (most are 7-8 stories but some may reach 21 stories.) About one-third of daily full-build trips are projected to be pedestrian or bicycle trips, including those that involve walking to transit.

All access to the site is from Mt. Vernon Street – a principal artery of the Columbia Point peninsula. The layout of the project is straightforward and pedestrian-based: Main Street will bisect the site and become a major east-west spine extending from the site entrance (near regional transit and vehicular routes) to the oceanfront at the existing DCR Dorchester Shores Reservation. Water Street will extend diagonally from a separate site entrance to join with Main Street near the waterfront. One cross street connects the two roadways, and two alleys provide access to parking structures and lots. Other street connections may ultimately link to the adjacent Harbor Point development.

#### **General Comments**

We are very pleased that the proponent is committed to creating a pedestrian-friendly and transit oriented development that will revitalize this portion of the City. The mix of uses, attention to the public realm, and additions to the public access network will bring important benefits to all users of the site.

In our reading of the document, we were curious about the ways in which pedestrian needs will be met. We have couched most of our comments as questions to be addressed in the next phase of project planning and environmental review submissions. Our technical questions focus on sidewalk widths, pedestrian safety at intersections and the character of streets/sidewalks differentiated based on use and volumes. We feel that the Phase I waiver is

not warranted until the proponent addresses specific issues that affect the well-being and safety of pedestrians. Because Phase I affects so many aspects of the project and sets up the framework for vehicular and pedestrian movement, many of these questions should be addressed before the project moves forward.

From a big picture perspective we are most concerned about pedestrian access to the Red Line's JFK/UMass MBTA station. This access is critical to the success of the project and is a key element in making the project pedestrian and transit-friendly. Two key issues need to be addressed:

1. While the proponent proposes a number of important off-site pedestrian improvements, it is not clear that they are to be constructed during Phase I of the project. In order to establish a strong transit use pattern, these improvements should be constructed in the very early stages of development. The current access is very difficult, via congested streets with heavy traffic. This situation must be improved to set the stage for significant transit use.
2. Notwithstanding the substantial improvements proposed, WalkBoston remains concerned that the quality of the walking environment between the site and the MBTA station will not be attractive enough to generate the substantial transit and pedestrian mode splits that are projected. We would encourage the proponent to think very creatively about this issue and to develop marketing and programmatic elements for the project to enhance transit and pedestrian travel.

Finally, we request that the next filing for this important project include a detailed description of how the pedestrian realm will serve as a model for transit oriented, pedestrian-friendly development. Among the elements of this should be intersection design (for example raised crosswalks, tight turning radii, and narrow lanes), signal timing that prioritizes pedestrians, and a maintenance plan that ensures shoveled sidewalks within the development and extending to JFK/UMass station.

### **Main Street – block by block**

Main Street is envisioned as a shopping concourse with substantial pedestrian traffic. The other streets are minor ways for both vehicles and pedestrians. A total of 2805 parking spaces will be provided; parking structures are primarily behind many retail/office buildings.

Virtually all of Main Street will be constructed during Phase 1, which will set up the retail heart of the site. The retail portion of the project, with office and residential space on upper floors, is about three blocks long, between Mt. Vernon Street and Water Street. One further block leads to the waterfront park but that extension is not included in Phase I.

- What is the anticipated volume of pedestrian traffic?
- What are the design standards for the width of sidewalks and space for street furniture, lighting, signage and trees along Main Street? In general, WalkBoston believes that sidewalks should be a minimum of 12' wide for busy sidewalks, and 5' to 8' in all other areas. 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. Smooth sidewalk surfaces are also an issue of great concern, and bricks or small pavers should not be used in the walking zone.

Although there is parallel parking along Main Street, access to the majority of the parking supply is from the side streets. At least three of the proposed Main Street buildings have

pedestrian tunnels through them between the parking lots and Main Street. This provides pedestrian access to the front of the stores on Main Street, and we hope will direct all pedestrian traffic to Main Street. If store entries are provided on the parking lot side, Main Street will not be used by many pedestrians. Similarly, office and residential entrances should occur on Main Street.

Two alleys connect with Main Street. Alley A is the one closest to Mt. Vernon Street and Alley B is the one behind existing Buildings C and D (the Hotel.) Both alleys appear to be designed to accommodate vehicular traffic going to or from parking areas. Alley A cuts between Buildings A and C, serving building entrances and the parking area behind Building A and along the northern edge of the property. Alley B serves as a route around the hotel and also connects to the large parking areas on the north side of the site.

#### **Main Street – Mt. Vernon St. to Alley A**

The principal entrance to the site is on Mt. Vernon Street, near its intersection with the Morrissey Boulevard access ramps, in a complex location near the Kosciuszko Circle where Day Boulevard and Columbia Road intersect. The Columbia Point/UMASS MBTA station is close to the Mt. Vernon Street intersection and within an easy walking distance to this site.

Main Street begins at Mt. Vernon Street in a driveway divided into two parts to allow for right and left turns onto Mt. Vernon Street. Alley A connects directly into the entrance driveway where these two parts meet. The intersection where Alley A joins Main Street will operate as a 4-way intersection; it raises questions of importance to pedestrian safety:

- Will Alley A operate as a one-way street, and if so, which direction will it serve?
- Will the northern half of Main Street between Mt. Vernon St. and Alley A operate as a one-way westbound street?
- Are the sidewalks along the northern half of Main Street intended to handle foot traffic to and from the subway/bus station? Will they be wider than other sidewalks to handle the pedestrian flow?
- How will the intersection of Alley A and Main Street be configured to maximize pedestrian safety? Will left turns be permitted?
- What are the widths of the sidewalks along Alley A?
- Crosswalks are shown where Alley A meets Main Street. Will the intersection be signalized with countdown signals for pedestrians?
- Can Alley A be redesigned so that it did not extend through to Main Street? Would it result in greater storage capacity on Main Street for vehicles entering and leaving the site? Would it be safer for pedestrians?
- Could the space occupied by Alley A be used differently? What if Buildings A and C could be physically joined together, perhaps with a common entrance on Main Street or on Alley B to eliminate the awkwardness and potential safety hazards for pedestrians at the intersection of Alley A and Main Street?
- Will the intersection of Alley A and Main Street be analyzed in subsequent submissions in sufficient detail to determine the potential hazards at pedestrian crossings?

#### **Main Street – from Alley A to Alley B**

Alleys A and B both appear to be relatively narrow. Alley B crosses Main Street to an intersection with Mt. Vernon Street.

- Will Alley A and Alley B operate as a pair of one-way streets north of Main Street?
- Will Alley B operate as a one-way street south of Main Street?

- What are the widths of the sidewalks along Alley B?
- Crosswalks are shown where Alley B meets Main Street. How will the intersection be configured to maximize pedestrian safety? Will the intersection be signalized with countdown signals for pedestrians? Will left turns be permitted?
- If access to existing Building C is to add at Alley B, as shown by sketches of a new bulb-out and crosswalk into the parking lot, how will pedestrian access be handled?
- The intersections where Alley B and Alley A meet Main Street are very close together. What does this mean for pedestrian safety?

### **Main Street – from Alley B to Alley C**

Cross Street, midway between Alley B and Alley C, connects to Water Street and appears to be a major entrance from Mt. Vernon Street into the site.

- Will Cross Street become an overflow entrance into the site when Main Street is at capacity?
- How wide are the sidewalks on Cross Street?
- An alley, unnamed and perpendicular to Alley B, parallels Main Street just to the north and less than a block away. What is its purpose? Are there dangers to pedestrians because it separates retail structures and parking lots?

### **Main Street – from Alley C to Water Street**

This block leading up to Water Street between Buildings I and R includes a median island that seems destined to become a major landmark along Main Street and a major element in the view corridor from Mt. Vernon Street to the sea.

- Would this be an appropriate location for a flagpole or sculpture to mark the view corridor and orient walkers?
- How does traffic pass through this space - on one-way streets?
- Is the intersection of Main Street and Water Street to be signalized?

### **Main Street – from Water Street to the Oceanfront Park**

This is potentially a very walkable block of Main Street, and could ultimately serve as one of the principal goals for walkers within the development. With a direct relationship with the ocean front park, its design should reflect its unique location.

- What kinds of retail activities are scheduled for this area? Is this an appropriate location for food and refreshment facilities at the entrance to the oceanfront park with takeout and picnic ingredients, or restaurants with park/ocean views?
- Building N is shown between large residential structures. Is this one building the only potential configuration for the retail activities? Will it block views from the sidewalks on the south side of Main Street?
- Can buildings on both sides of the block become a more vital part of the street edge, guiding pedestrians along Main Street up to the waterfront park?
- Is there only a single entrance to the Dorchester Shores Reservation?

### **Water Street – block by block**

Overall, Water Street has fewer pedestrian crossings than Main Street, and has much less retail activity. For these reasons, Water Street may serve as a bypass for traffic avoiding Main Street.

- If Water Street becomes a bypass, will this mean faster traffic speeds?
- How will street crossings, parking and sidewalks be handled to assure pedestrian safety on this street?

### **Water Street – from Mt. Vernon Street to Cross Street**

At Mt. Vernon Street, access into the site may become significant.

- Will there be a signal at the intersection of Mt. Vernon Street and Water Street?
- If so, will it include pedestrian countdown signals?

### **Water Street – from Cross Street to Main Street**

This is a long block that may be a back street in terms of significant retail activity.

- Could this possibly become a more inviting pedestrian space? How can it be enlivened to encourage pedestrian activity?
- How will vehicle speeds be managed on this segment of Water Street?

### **Water Street – from Main Street to Bayview Street**

An opportunity for enhancing pedestrian oriented open space may exist in this segment of Water Street. As now proposed, a long linear public open space about 1/4 acre in size is located between the north and southbound lanes of Water Street. It has been described as a view corridor focused on the Boston skyline. With a reorganization of the site, this open space might be much more useful nearer the oceanfront, where it could occupy part of a parking lot that now directly abuts the Harborwalk. The Harborwalk, which abuts about 300' along the edge of this parking lot, is extremely narrow here – little more than a sidewalk with a line of shrubs and light posts. (See Figure 2-3.) This narrow portion of the Harborwalk connects two large public open spaces – Carson Beach and the Dorchester Shores Reservation.

The existing parking lot is very close to the water's edge (it appears to be closer than 100'). Full-build calls for this site to be parking with residential units above, along with some surface parking. The proponents have committed to assuring that none of these buildings will be closer than 100' to the water's edge.

- Can the Harborwalk strip along the water's edge be widened into the parcels now used for parking to expand the parkland adjacent to the site? Can it be wider than the mandated 100' minimum from the water's edge?
- Would this expansion minimize potentially adverse impacts from this development on public recreation land?
- The public would clearly gain a valuable resource if the park were made wider. Would the additional public open space at the oceanside of this development add substantially to the benefits and setting of this development at full-build?
- These changes would affect future Buildings O, Q and R on Water Street. Can these buildings be reoriented to take greater advantage of the superb seafront location and skyline views, while preserving excellent pedestrian access to the waterfront?

### **Water Street at the North Entrance**

An existing street connection, called the North Entrance, extends from Day Boulevard into the development site. This vehicular way connects into the present parking lot of the Bayside Exhibition Center. Signalization of the North Entrance on Day Boulevard has been proposed as traffic mitigation<sup>1</sup>. (See Figure 5-7)

- Will the North Entrance continue to be used for general access into the proposed development site?

- Could the North Entrance driveway into the site, coupled with Water Street, form a connection for through vehicular traffic movement between Mt. Vernon Street and Day Boulevard?
- What measures have been taken to assure pedestrian safety in conjunction with traffic movement through the North Entrance?

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

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman  
Executive Director

Robert Sloane  
Senior Planner