



Walk  
Boston

July 13, 2007

Randi Lathrop  
Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Room 910  
Boston City Hall  
Boston, MA 02201

RE: Comments on One Franklin, the Filene's Redevelopment DPIR

Dear Ms. Lathrop:

We have reviewed the DPIR for One Franklin, the Filene's Redevelopment project, which includes a 226-room hotel, a 125-seat restaurant, 469,000 square feet of office space, up to 166 residential units, retail space in four basement floors, and a health club or spa. The proposal includes below-grade parking for up to 299 cars. Access and egress from the parking garage will be from Hawley Street. All loading will occur on Hawley Street, including access to six loading bays and three trash bays located inside the building.

Our comments address the pedestrian environment, parking and proposed changes in traffic patterns that will affect pedestrians.

#### **Summary Comments**

- We appreciate the attention given to pedestrian circulation and the specific information that has been provided about pedestrian volumes and access.
- We like the mix of uses and are pleased that the project will enliven Downtown Crossing, add more street retail frontage and additional retail entrances, and keep Filene's Basement in its original location.
- We hope to see further details about improvements to the pedestrian environment in the next filings - for example an enhanced relationship to Washington Street pedestrian mall, improved landscaping, and the addition of seating on Summer Street and in Shoppers Park.
- We strongly recommend that the sidewalks be reconstructed with a smooth walking surface that is accommodating to all walkers including those with limited mobility.
- We strongly urge the proponent to develop drop-off and valet parking functions that use Hawley Street and oppose the opening of Franklin Street to general traffic because of its negative impacts on the pedestrian zone and pedestrian safety.

#### **Sidewalks around the project**

- The sidewalks on Washington Street will be maintained in their existing dimensions. We strongly recommend that the sidewalks be reconstructed with a smooth walking surface - this may mean without bricks, or at a minimum with the inclusion of a wide inset of concrete or stone. We hope that alterations to Washington Street remove curbs to create a smooth pedestrian mall from building face to building face, as is already in place on Summer Street. Truly vibrant pedestrian malls in Burlington VT and Charlottesville VA are

- examples of such spaces - and the BRA's recent Branding Study of Downtown Crossing recommended this approach.
- The addition of full retail frontage along Summer Street is a welcome element of the project. We hope that pedestrian amenities and maintenance of this area will be of very high quality, and that the proponent will work with abutting property owners to create a handsome and unified pedestrian environment.
  - The Franklin Street side of the parcel (Shoppers Park) will be reconstructed and made more attractive. The sloping plaza will be rebuilt with four levels (with steps between each) to accommodate the 10-foot drop in elevation from Washington to Hawley Street. The street and building edges of the park will have no stairs to allow for an accessible sidewalk; these edges should be paved with a smooth surface to accommodate those with limited mobility. The subway headhouse and entrance will be significantly altered and improved, resulting in a somewhat smaller footprint thus adding to the usable space in the park. A vehicular drop-off lane is carved from the Franklin Street side of the park - WalkBoston has serious concerns about both the lane and the traffic pattern that is proposed to use this lane. These concerns are discussed below.
  - The vehicular use of the Hawley Street side of the project will limit pedestrian access along that street frontage. Parking garage access and loading facilities will occupy the entire Hawley Street frontage except for a bay at each corner (to be occupied by retail spaces). However, given the fully developed nature of the parcel, Hawley Street is the logical location for this access as it is the single "back street" abutting the project. Luckily, the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street will be relatively free of vehicular activity. We appreciate the proponent's plan to provide a continuous, flat sidewalk along the entire length of the site, and the inclusion of appropriate signals and signs to warn of approaching vehicles.

### **Parking**

The project site occupies one of the City's premier locations for walkers and transit users - it sits above a station served by two transit lines and abuts the largest pedestrian zone in the city. We therefore believe that this is a project where parking should be kept to a minimum.

- We appreciate that the parking provided for office use is reduced from the number of spaces requested by the Boston Transportation Department, that the hotel will share the parking with the office spaces during the evening, and that no retail or public parking will be permitted.
- We believe that the number of residential parking spaces at this location should be reduced from the current proposal to provide a space for every unit. We note that the *New York Times* on July 12, 2007 contained an article stating that less than 1 percent of all co-op and condominium buildings in the city have private garages, and that the city of New York limits how much parking new buildings south of 96<sup>th</sup> Street can offer, allowing a maximum of one parking space per five housing units.
- The DPIR estimates that a very high proportion (70 %) of the residentially generated trips will be pedestrian or transit trips. We would like the parking program to reflect this estimate. Special efforts should be made by the developer to encourage walking and transit use, and residents should be given incentives to make use of other options. For example, the improvements to the transit station that are to be provided by the project should include elevators to provide a fully accessible station. Likewise, shared use cars

should be made very convenient for those times when a car is necessary. By way of background, shared car services already exist in the immediate environs of the project – across the street at 33 Arch Street and on Washington Street at the Pi Alley Garage. Provision for longer-term car rentals should also be provided within the project.

### **Franklin Street Through Traffic and Drop-off Lane**

The project includes the provision of a drop-off lane on Franklin Street, and the use of this lane for drop-off/pick-up and valet parking functions. WalkBoston consistently opposes drop-off lanes cutting into sidewalk space for downtown development. Franklin Street is sufficiently wide at this location that drop-offs can be made in the curb lane without impeding through traffic. This portion of Franklin Street is presently closed to all but commercial traffic from 6-11 AM, and taxis and buses on a 24-hour basis.

Based on our understanding of the project, the drop-off lane appears to be included to accommodate the opening of Franklin Street to general traffic to allow parking valets to pick up vehicles, then circulate around the block via Washington, Milk, Devonshire and Franklin Streets and enter the project garage via Hawley Street. This trip could be made much shorter and more efficient by providing drop-off and valet functions on Hawley Street where valets could enter the parking garage directly.

Our concerns about opening Franklin Street to general traffic are significant.

1. Opening Franklin Street to general traffic would also open several other street blocks to general traffic. All of these blocks are currently protected from general traffic because the Franklin Street prohibitions serve as the vehicular control point for this portion of the pedestrian zone.
  - Washington Street between Franklin and Bromfield Streets
  - Milk Street southbound between Washington and Arch Streets
  - Bromfield Street between Washington and Province Streets
2. There would be more traffic at several intersections within or near the pedestrian zone - each of which now carries relatively little traffic:
  - Washington/Franklin/Bromfield Streets
  - Washington/School/Milk Streets
  - Bromfield/Province Streets
  - Bromfield/Tremont Streets
3. Adding general traffic to these streets would transform the pedestrian district dramatically. It would have negative impacts on the safety of pedestrian crossings by increasing the number of vehicles and adding potential vehicle/pedestrian conflicts within the pedestrian zone. Altering this protection for pedestrians would require rethinking the function of the pedestrian zone - an area designed to keep pedestrians safe and attract more customers to Downtown Crossing.

Based on these negative pedestrian impacts WalkBoston is opposed to opening Franklin Street to general traffic and we strongly urge the proponent to develop drop-off and valet parking functions that use Hawley Street.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the DPIR. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments. We look forward to the revitalization that this project will bring to Downtown Crossing.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman  
Executive Director

Robert Sloane  
Senior Project Planner