



WalkBoston

March 21, 2008

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114
Attn: MEPA Office, Anne Cannaday, MEPA Analyst

RE: Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)
Meadow Walk at Lynnfield
MEPA # 14096

Dear Mr. Bowles:

We have reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Meadow Walk at Lynnfield, a proposed mixed-use retail, office and residential redevelopment of a portion of the Sheraton Colonial Golf course in Lynnfield and Wakefield. We are encouraged that walking is such a major organizing feature of the development and that the Town of Lynnfield is firmly implementing its design standards for the project.

We are commenting because of the need to continue promoting new ways to encourage pedestrian safety and access in suburban development throughout Massachusetts. In this project, the design details can help in making it pedestrian friendly.

Summary of comments:

- A change has been made in parking lot design to incorporate landscaped swales. These swales could be used creatively to offer an opportunity for pedestrian walkways through the parking lots. If equipped with walkways, the swales could be integrated into a network of pedestrian ways. New safety measures such as crosswalks and signage should be added.
- As proposed, the perimeter road remains a relatively high-speed roadway. Speeds should be mitigated by signage, traffic control measures and traffic calming installations.
- Because the residences and the town center are separated by the perimeter road and parking lots, it remains difficult to imagine much walking between these two components of the project. It would be more encouraging for people to walk if the two were located closer together, and were not divided by so much vehicle circulation.
- Pervious sidewalks are now a feature of the design of the residential areas. Walkways at the edges of water and marshy areas should also be paved with pervious materials.
- The former golfing fairway between the Saugus River, the Lynn Canal and Route 128/95 should be designated as open space with walkways. If signage for the shopping center is needed in this area, it would not substantially detract from this use.
- Guiding principles for this project call for the use of traffic calming techniques, traffic controls and signage elements. All should be detailed and mapped in future documents.
- Paving materials that are selected and put in place should maximize wide, smooth surfaces where wheelchairs or carriages can be used in comfort.
- Retaining an option for additional pedestrian access between site walkways and Walnut Street will make a future walking network more complete.

Walking in the parking lots

Town design standards for Meadow Walk at Lynnfield call for large parking lots to be divided into blocks of no more than 200 spaces, with each parking block separated from others by a landscaped area that is a minimum of 10 feet wide. Standards also call for 7 percent of the area of large parking lots to be landscaped. The town design standards do not address the safety of walking in the parking lots.

In following these directives, the proponent has begun to humanize the site's large parking lots by dividing parking areas into blocks of 200 cars or less divided by long, rhythmically spaced, vegetated biofiltration swales perpendicular to the service drives at the rear of Main Street's business structures and the perimeter road. The swales are designed as 10-foot wide landscaped, unpaved areas that collect and distribute runoff from the parking areas and filter it through soil and plantings.

From review of diagrams in the report, it appears that the swales, with design modifications and/or widening, could also serve as walkways. Flat walkways on each side of the sloped portion of the swales could be an integral part of the landscaping and provide safer walking through the parking lots. If built of pervious materials, the walkways would help with the biofiltration functions. The walkways would give safe access for walkers who otherwise are forced to wander among vehicles in the midst of the expansive parking areas. The walkways could be part of the 7% of the parking lot area that must be landscaped.

Safe methods for pedestrians to cross the parking lots exist only in a few locations via sidewalks along access streets. Figures 1.4 and 9.2 show the pedestrian network for the project. Based on Figure 9.2, up to 15 parking lot walkways could be assembled along the biofiltration swales and along with the sidewalks accompanying the entrance streets.

Crosswalks, traffic controls/signage and traffic calming

Crosswalks at street crossings within the shopping and residential areas should be identified as part of the pedestrian network for the site. Crosswalks should also be provided at all major access into parking areas, such as the entrances to the Main Street shop groupings. Crosswalks should also be provided at walkways that may be added to the biofiltration swales.

Grade separated crosswalks are cited in responses to our EENF comments (C-003-002), but are not shown in this document. A grade separated crossing for pedestrians within the parking area that connects the Main Street Village Development with the walkway to the Reedy Meadow is cited in responses (C-003-007), but not shown in maps.

Traffic controls throughout the project should be detailed, along with signage that helps direct traffic and make the area safer for pedestrians. Signage should include wayfinding signs and signs relating to the residential areas, as needed.

Traffic calming is hinted at but not fully described. (See Response C-003-009 mentioning a "flush plaza area." A full explanation of the traffic calming strategies is essential. These should include any raised intersections, narrowed streets, and curb extensions that make street crossings shorter and safer for pedestrians.

The Reedy Meadow/Saugus River/Lynn Canal Walkway

A walkway along the Reedy Meadow is proposed in Figures 1.4 and 9.2, (Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation Plan), extending along the edge of the Saugus River to the bridge where Route 128/95 crosses the stream. The open space associated with this walkway is shown on Figure 5.1. (Plan Changes Since MEPA Submittal.) All paving done to construct this walkway should be made of pervious paving materials to absorb and filter associated run-off.

Details of the walkway along the Saugus River are shown in Figures 3.4 and 3.5 (Buffer Zone Improvement Plan and Saugus River Buffer Zone Improvement Plan). The Lynn Canal, which transports water from the Saugus River to the City of Lynn, will remain a permanent feature. It should be treated in a sensitive way, similar to the plans for the banks of the Saugus River. A buffer zone along the full length of the Lynn Canal is not included. (Figs 3.5 and 5.1)

The Saugus River buffer area affects about half of the Lynn Canal, lying between the Lynn Canal and Route 128/95 in an area that once was a fairway of the Sheraton Colonial Golf Course. The entire former fairway – perhaps 800 feet long - should be part of the designated on-site open space. This would protect the edges of the Lynn Canal, provide additional space for walking and set a welcoming landscaped area for the on-site shopping area. Even if the land is intended for installation of a large shopping center sign, the open space could remain useful as watershed buffer and as an asset for walkers.

Pedestrian access to Walnut Street

Despite adverse local comment, we continue to think that the option for additional pedestrian access between the site and Walnut Street should be retained. With increasing numbers of walkers, future walking possibilities and the need for such connections cannot now be foreseen. Without this access, pedestrians arriving via Walnut Street must enter near the Rte 128 ramps, a location with heavy traffic volumes.

Connecting the residences and shopping components

The on-site luxury housing (180 units) and the LIFE component (40 units) are wholly separated from retail/office uses by the perimeter roadway. The layout is not designed to maximize walking from the residential buildings into the mall. Walking from the LIFE component will be a primary mode of getting to the shops other than driving, as the shuttle bus does not appear to provide this service. Two crosswalks of the perimeter road are indicated between the residences and the main town center buildings. These crosswalks are located at the luxury apartments. We remain concerned that the crossings are located on the relatively high speed perimeter. Raised crosswalks at these locations have been cited but not shown. (See Response C-003-011.)

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

Sincerely

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

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Senior Planner