



walkBoston

October 10, 2007

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

RE: Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF)
Meadow Walk at Lynnfield
MEPA # 09800

Dear Mr. Bowles:

We have reviewed the EENF 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 pleased that walking is being encouraged as a major organizing feature of the development - a worthy initiative. We are commenting because of the immense potential for incorporating extensive pedestrian access in mixed-use suburban development throughout Massachusetts.

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.

The proposed Meadow Walk at Lynnfield comprises 395,000 SF of retail space, 80,000 SF of office space and 200 housing units of which 40 are allocated to the Lynnfield Initiative for Elders (LIFE). It includes 3,438 parking spaces and will increase the number of vehicle trips generated by the site from 644 to 19,079 per day. The retail/office components of the development are designed to be a traditional Main Street where frontage is lined with retail outlets, and on-street parking and pedestrian amenities are key design elements.

The scale of the development is sprawling. Most of the buildings appear to be 1 story in the retail areas, with 2-story exceptions (shown in renderings of the central open space.) Buildings taller than 2 stories are included in the residential areas.

Summary of comments:

- The development appears to be primarily an outdoor mall, without roofed pedestrian walkways and with a street where an enclosed walkway inside a standard mall might ordinarily appear. Notwithstanding some token nods to pedestrians, the overall site is characterized by vast parking lots, relatively high-speed roadways around the lots, visibility from a major highway, and traffic that is dispersed around the site.
- Of the roughly 2 miles of roadway to be constructed, one half mile is truly pedestrian-friendly, while one mile serves solely vehicular traffic and another half mile serves the back side of the retail/office structures with little physical separation of pedestrian and vehicular movements.
- If pedestrian friendliness is to be a major selling point of the development, a great deal of

adjustment should be made to the current design to incorporate elements more specifically encouraging to pedestrians.

Overall site plan

- A high density of uses in the center of the development, tapering toward the perimeter, does not appear as a guiding feature of the plan. High density encourages walkability.
- The proposed development rigorously separates land uses. The retail/office uses are separated from the residential uses and open spaces. Uses are not mixed within single structures (except perhaps for offices). Residences are not planned above stores or offices, though that would encourage walking.
- The street network could benefit from full integration of the interior Main Street with parking service streets and from street connections to the residential area.
- The existing Boston Sports Club building and Sheraton Hotel, which are to remain on the site, have not been integrated in any way with the proposed development.
- The comparably-scaled Mashpee Commons on Cape Cod offers a useful contrast in pedestrian friendliness. A similar development of 250,000 SF of retail space with 90 stores, Mashpee Commons has residential uses above many retail outlets, creating walkability as a major feature. Its circulation plan emphasizes the creation of traditional city blocks, multi-story structures that hold both retail and residential uses, 2 main streets with connections to minor streets that lead to all parking lots, some very small-scale stores, and mid-block meeting places and walkways. Westwood Station, being planned at Rte 128/I 95, has 1000 residential units above or adjacent to retail.

Relationship to Traditional Neighborhood Development Planning

The development adopts many of the current concepts about traditional neighborhood developments without full embrace of them. In particular, it has these distinctions:

- A roadway solely for vehicles extends around the perimeter of the site for approximately one mile, and the interior pedestrian-friendly street is roughly a half-mile in length. The interior street is paralleled by a street on the other side of the retail/office structures that is also about a half mile long but with few pedestrian friendly features.
- Transit service does not connect directly into the site and is not within walking distance.
- Proposed pedestrian access ways are tied to streets. All pedestrians must enter the site at locations where vehicles also enter. Pedestrian circulation is entirely along the sidewalks next to the streets. No off-street pedestrian walkways for circulation or for access to the site or nearby open space areas are provided.
- Additional pedestrian access to the site could be added on the Walnut Street frontage of the site owned by the project proponent. Without this access, pedestrians arriving via Walnut Street must enter near the Rte 128 ramps, a location with heavy traffic volumes.
- On-street parking is permitted only on the Main Street, (making the sidewalks safer with the protection of a row of cars separating pedestrians from the roadway) and not on either the perimeter street or access ways into parking lots.
- The location of the site next to a protected environmentally sensitive site suggests the possibility of pedestrian walkways or jogging paths for recreation at the site perimeter. These paths might link to the Sheraton Hotel via the bridge over the Saugus River.

The retail/office components

- The roadway network for the retail and office elements consists of a perimeter road, with access into parking lots from 14 separate intersections. Five short streets connect the parking lots and the Main Street.

- The project's retail elements are organized around the spine of a traditional Main Street. The Main Street seems to serve a minimal circulation purpose, as it is a closed loop within the overall project, connected primarily at an entrance location to the Rte 128/I-95 access points for the project.
- The interior street is gently curved – a nice touch.
- The proportion of street frontage with active commercial uses that encourage walking may be limited because all of the stores will have entries facing both the street and the parking lots. Retail operations are unlikely to be able to support window displays or store-related activities on two street frontages of each site.
- All buildings appear to be designed for large-scale uses – perhaps big box stores that swallow up frontage unless broken up by smaller stores.
- Small structures do not appear to be included, but encouraging participation of small entrepreneurs can encourage outdoor browsing and pedestrian activity.
- Parking seems to be excessive. The 3,438 parking spaces for the development contrast with Mashpee Commons with less than half that number.
- Open space in the retail/office area is limited to the small central square while open space outside the perimeter road is relatively lavish, because of abutting wetland.
- The interior shopping street should have a dense tree canopy to encourage walking.
- Design standards for sidewalk and path construction were not provided. In some instances, greater widths will provide more public space and greater levels of activity.

The residential components

Residential units include luxury housing (160 units) and the LIFE component (40 units) wholly separated from retail/office uses by the perimeter street. This results in:

- The retail and office mall comes close to the residential units at the only part of the site without vast parking capacity on the mall side. Even here, pedestrians must cross the parking lots in front of the residential buildings before crossing the street into the mall.
- The residential access road (a part of the perimeter road around the site) is about 1500 ft long between parking access points and has only two access points into the residential parking lots. This layout suggests it may become a relatively high-speed roadway with hazards for walkers. Two pedestrian crosswalks are provided to cross this street at the luxury apartments. No crosswalks are indicated for the LIFE buildings.
- Residential buildings could be grouped to reduce the impact on this environmentally-sensitive location. Grouping would allow residential structures to be at a greater distance from the wetlands, while retaining the pleasant views.
- There should be direct pedestrian access between the residential and retail/office uses. (Sidewalks are not always shown on the plans.) The possibility of a more direct connection might result in locating the residences inside the perimeter roadway where they can be more immediately adjacent to the retail/office uses.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this document, which offers great promise for improvements for pedestrians in a suburban setting. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner