



WalkBoston

January 15, 2010

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

Director John Palmieri
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square, 9th floor
Boston, MA 02201

RE: Comments on the Draft Project Impact Report/Draft Environmental Impact Report for
Seaport Square in Boston
EOEA #14255

Dear Secretary Bowles and Director Palmieri:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Project Impact Report/Draft Environmental Impact Report for Seaport Square in Boston. The current document continues the planning process for a large, relatively dense area that will include some 20 buildings interconnected by a series of wide pedestrian ways – both along streets and frequently by paths internal to city blocks.

WalkBoston is pleased that the proponent has continued to emphasize pedestrian activity in the proposed development, and we think that the evolution of the project has led to a strengthening of the proposed pedestrian network. Our comments focus on several ways in which planning for the project could improve the pedestrian environment even further.

The plan continues to call for a major pedestrian axis along Summer Street, Seaport Boulevard and Northern Avenue, supplemented by the Harborwalk at the Fort Point Channel and Harbor Street. Current plans also include Congress Street as a major pedestrian access route. However, while Congress Street is shown with wide sidewalks, the street is located at the rear of many of the building sites that may limit its appeal to walkers. Congress Street has the additional difficulty of the being at a lower elevation than Summer Street which may also detract from its pedestrian appeal.

Along internal streets, pedestrians benefit from a clearer link between the ICA at the harbor's edge and Summer Street near the BCEC – dubbed the "Cultural Corridor." On this link, pedestrians are provided with a wide, on-street sidewalk along Harbor Street between Summer Street and Autumn Way, followed by a very wide pedestrian path, called Harbor Way, to reach Seaport Boulevard. This pedestrian route links directly to parks at the ocean's edge – the Seaport Square Green and the existing Fan Pier Park, by way of the intersection with Seaport Boulevard and Northern Avenue.

Signal protection will be essential for pedestrian crossings at Harbor Street and Summer Street, and at the two intersections where Harbor Street/Harbor Way intersect Seaport Boulevard and

Northern Avenue. Along Seaport Boulevard, similar care should be provided for the busy intersections at the entrances and exits connecting to the nearby freeway network.

A pedestrian way is proposed for the major passage between the Courthouse Silver Line station and Courthouse Square, which is also adjacent to the proposed entertainment center. This walkway will likely become an important facility for businesses and residences scheduled to be located in the vicinity of the station.

The Boston Public Library branch in this draft occupies a location at corner of Northern Avenue and Pier Street, across from the proposed Seaport Square Green and near the proposed headhouse for the MBTA Courthouse station. This location makes the library more accessible to the geographic center of the area north of Congress Street. However, while we are very pleased that the developer is including a site for the new library, this location might not be the best possible site for a facility to serve residents living in the large mixed-use, pedestrianized area that will stretch along the Fort Point Channel between the Harbor and the Gillette factory. It seems unlikely that two library branches will be warranted for this area and this location may prove to be off-center for major pedestrian access.

The pedestrian way between Autumn Way and Congress Street may lead walkers into the difficult crossing at the very busy intersection where Congress Street meets the ramps of Interstate 90. We urge the proponent to consider designing the pedestrian component of this large city block in a way that might lead pedestrians away from the intersection.

The redesign of the Square along Harbor Street on Seaport Hill is disappointing. Previous designs showed a squared-off open space surrounded by buildings – a landmark open space for the neighborhood. The current proposal shows the park divided by buildings added along Harbor Street. The park surrounds the buildings rather than the street. The more formal open space plan promised a more significant landmark for pedestrians passing through or living near the hillside park.

Links to developments outside the proponent's land holdings seem to be well considered, especially where the proposed development abuts the existing older buildings between Seaport Boulevard and Congress Street. However, links to the neighboring parcels on the west are not as well developed. Conspicuous among the missing links is access to the proposed Congress Street Hotel, which is handicapped by poor access to the MBTA stations, the waterfront, and Summer Street and the BCEC. An upper level link with this development might lead to improved access by connecting with the proponent's sidewalks leading to Summer Street.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Seaport Square proposal. Please contact us for any clarification or additional comments that you may need.

Sincerely,



Wendy Landman
Executive Director



Robert Sloane
Senior Planner