



Are you on board?

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Via email to: Alexander.Stryisky@massmail.state.ma.us

Secretary Matthew Beaton
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
MEPA Office Attn: Alex Stryisky, EEA#8161
100 Cambridge Street, Ste 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park Master Plan Update, EEA#8161

Dear Secretary Beaton,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park (RLFMP) Master Plan Update. Boston Harbor Now's predecessor, The Boston Harbor Association, commented extensively on the 1999 Boston Marine Industrial Park Master Plan (BMIP), and the 2005 BMIP Chapter 91 Master License.

Maintaining a robust working port in Boston is a priority for us as we know it is for the State and City. To that end, on January 23 and 24 Boston Harbor Now is hosting a working port symposium that will convene national and local experts for a discussion about current working port successes and challenges in the hope of building a broad consensus about the future of Boston Harbor's working port, including the Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park. A complementary working port report will be released in the coming days. We hope the State and City agree that their decision making about the RLFMP should account for the data reflected in this report and the consensus building we hope will begin with our symposium.

We support the Boston Planning and Development Agency's (BPDA) decision to evaluate the role of the RLFMP as a key contributor to Boston's maritime industrial economy and to explore ways the RLFMP can be improved. Although Boston's maritime industrial sector and support services have changed over time, they remain a critical component of the region's socioeconomic well-being. Periodic assessments of our maritime industrial economy help policymakers understand the current condition of Boston's Designated Port Areas and provide opportunities to increase their innovation and profitability.

Project Description

For the BPDA, the RLFMP Update will serve as a guide to incorporate new innovation economy and flex-industrial spaces within the Park while protecting well-paying blue-collar jobs and future maritime industrial uses.

A major conclusion of the RLFMP update is that a robust industrial district needs significant and continuous investments to maintain existing infrastructure including roadway and waterside improvements (RLFMP Master Plan p.22). As a result, the RLFMP Update envisions a mixed industrial-commercial use that takes advantage of the real estate value of land within the RLFMP. However, the RLFMP Update proposes revisions not currently supported by applicable regulations. Boston Harbor Now thinks further study is required before regulatory revisions should be made to support certain of these revisions.

The BPDA proposes the following regulatory changes:

1. Increase the Chapter 91-allowed Supporting Uses allowed from 33% to 49% while reducing the Marine-Industrial Uses requirement from 67% to 51%.
2. Allow supporting uses on pile-supported piers.
3. Only count ground floor uses toward the total allowed percentage of non-water dependent industrial uses.
4. Allow construction of upper floor commercial/supporting industrial space without penalty.
5. Increase the cap on allowable commercial uses.
6. Include commercial trans-shipments from Logan Airport as a water-dependent industrial use and eliminate the ship-to-shore requirement.
7. Tighten the definition of research and development to maintain industrial capabilities & infrastructure, and
8. Consider revising the South Boston DPA boundary.

In a public hearing held last Spring, the BPDA framed the RLFMP Update as an initial “visionary” document to promote public engagement and input. According to BPDA staff, the menu of suggested changes to state regulations and the RLFMP master license presented on page 67 are not all expected to be approved. We wholeheartedly agree with the BPDA.

That said, the changes recommended in the Plan are substantial enough to warrant the establishment of an advisory group made up of the State, City, industry experts, and stakeholders for a deeper and more comprehensive discussion beyond the current public process. Such a group should focus on the following issues:

- Ensuring that best available and up-to-date data from a variety of sources is used before policymakers commit to any specific updates and regulatory changes—much of the data in the RLFMP dates back to 2014;
- Understanding and optimizing larger regional implications of any local changes requested by the BPDA not just for the South Boston DPA but for the entire state; and
- Ensuring marine industrial uses are maintained as the highest priority for the RLFMP, with conflicts between working port and other supporting uses minimized.

Recognizing the importance of the working port

The Port of Boston is a fully-functioning international port and the largest port in New England. Even so, the value of Boston's working port is not as visible to the general public and decision makers as other components of our regional economy. We note that working port constituents are rarely at the same meetings as commercial developers and other civic leaders. There is cause for concern that our leaders are not sufficiently aware of the value and advantages of Boston's working port compared to other components of the regional economy. As a consequence, working port challenges, opportunities, and potential synergies sometimes are not sufficiently valued in broader planning and policy arenas.

For example, one of the key reasons cited for pursuing the RLFMP Update is the lack of demand for maritime industrial space. In fact, Massport reports that there is an existing demand for processing space at Fish Pier and Eastern Salt Company recently expanded its operations from Chelsea Creek to the Quincy Shipyard. While it may be true that some sectors are declining, reports from Massport and local maritime businesses suggest increased growth and demand in at least some portions of Boston's working port.

Done right, the Master Plan update for the Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park has the potential to increase the profitability and viability of water-dependent industry by subsidizing infrastructure investments that would otherwise be unaffordable. Boston Harbor Now agrees that this might require significant changes to current Chapter 91 regulations and a potential review of existing Designated Port Area boundaries.

Statewide implications of local changes

Boston's four Inner Harbor Designated Port Areas are situated within very different contexts than the other six DPAs along Massachusetts' coastline. Any proposed regulatory changes should be mindful of modifications that may work in one locale but not another. As this proposal moves through licensing, local government and the State must work to engage those most affected by these changes to participate in a robust and detailed discussion of the array of options the BPDA has put forth.

To that end, Boston Harbor Now recommends the following means of engagement:

- Public and private input through an RFI or RFP process,
- Short-term pilot programs, and
- Workshops on financing solutions, future growth areas, and innovative uses.

Prioritizing marine industrial uses

One of the BPDA's proposed changes is to increase supporting uses in the RLFMP from 33% to 49% and reduce marine-industrial uses from 67% to 51%.

Funding Scheme

As longtime advocates of the working port, Boston Harbor Now recognizes the importance of continued investment in working port infrastructure. We also understand that upper floor non-maritime industrial tenants can help subsidize improvements to existing infrastructure and ground floor maritime industrial uses. An inherent challenge with this strategy, and common to any proposal that combines maritime and non-maritime uses, is to manage conflicts between potentially less-profitable maritime industrial tenants and economically dominant non-water-dependent tenants.

Transportation

Currently, Parcel Y is the only dedicated parking structure in the entire RLFMP. Parking is a major concern for many of the current tenants, visitors, and seasonal cruisers utilizing the RLFMP. Page 61 of the RLFMP Update acknowledges that parking is the biggest limitation to future development in the Park. The BPDA understands that increasing the amount of development and tenants will put additional stress on an already maxed out system. Before the BPDA promotes new mixed-use development and adds new tenants as a means of increasing rental revenue, it should implement a transportation and parking plan that is able to handle the current and projected density. A possible solution mentioned in the current update, and worthy of a longer discussion, suggests creating a combination of open space/water dependent activities at Dry Dock 4, similar to operations at Long/Central Wharf in Downtown Boston. (RLFMP p. 37)

Open Space

The Plan calls for improvements to pedestrian access and increased open space. It specifically highlights opportunities for open space expansion at Dry Dock 4, Parcel W, and V1—three parcels clustered together and located at the northern edge of the Park. We agree with the BPDA that improving public access has the potential to benefit not only visitors and users of the park but also truck access, a critical contributor to the success of Boston's working port. While open space is not an allowed use in current DPA regulations, interest in Dry Dock 4 and peripheral areas of the park indicate that a broader planning and policy conversation about mixed use open space is long overdue.

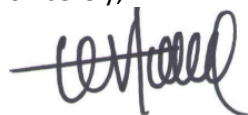
The highest and best use for the Raymond L Flynn Marine Park, as noted in its Master License, is for marine industrial uses. We support proposed changes that will serve to enhance critical infrastructure and increased viability of the working port and waterfront such as allowing supporting uses on pile-supported piers, including commercial trans-shipments from Logan Airport as a water-dependent industrial use, and tightening the definition of research and development to maintain industrial capabilities and infrastructure.

In the absence of comprehensive discussions led by a deliberately chosen advisory group, Boston Harbor Now is concerned about proposed changes that potentially undermine the working port's long-term viability. These changes include reducing the marine-industrial use requirements at the Park, only counting ground floor toward the total allowed percentage of non-water dependent industrial uses, and allowing construction of upper floor commercial/supporting industrial space without penalty.

Piecemeal revisions of DPA boundaries do little to promote the use of resources across working port areas. One DPA might excel in a particular industry where another may not; if reviewed on a larger State-wide scale these areas would benefit from shared interests, funding models, and increased efficiency in ways each area individually may not.

We look forward to contributing to the public dialogue.

Sincerely,



Jill Valdes Horwood
Director of Policy