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March 10, 2017

*Via email to: [frank.taormina@state.ma.us](mailto:frank.taormina@state.ma.us)*

Frank Taormina  
MassDEP Waterways Regulation Program  
One Winter Street 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Marine Wharf Waterways License Application, W17-4863-N

Dear Mr. Taormina,

On behalf of Boston Harbor Now, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Waterways License Application for the Marine Wharf Project noticed in the Environmental Monitor on February 8, 2017. Boston Harbor Now previously commented on the Chapter 91 determination of applicability, the Expanded Project Notification Form and the Environmental Notification Form and attended the public hearing held by the Boston Planning and Development Agency on September 13, 2016. Our comments follow.

**Project Description**

Located in the Raymond Flynn Marine Park, the 50,993 SF site is one of two parcels within the Park that is not in a Designated Port Area and therefore may be developed for residential and commercial uses. The Economic Development and Industrial Corporation of Boston (EDIC) owns the site and has agreed to a 90-year term ground lease with the proponent.

As described in the Waterways License Application, the proposal involves the construction of a 320,000 SF, 411-room, 15-story hotel co-branded Hampton Inn/Homewood Suites by Hilton. The plan also calls for 3,500 SF of ground-floor retail and restaurant space, ground floor public restrooms, second-floor level parking for 75 vehicles, 14th floor terrace available to the public, open space and access to an

existing dock along the Reserved Channel. The proponent has also agreed to maintain the 22,493 SF park owned by EDIC and adjacent to the project site.

The entire parcel sits on filled tidelands, though only 36,202 SF falls within the Chapter 91 boundary line; the remainder of the site is made up of landlocked tidelands. Despite its proximity to the Reserved Channel, the project does not abut a waterway or have a water-dependent use zone. The project design, as proposed in the License Plans, complies with Chapter 91's as-of-right building height, open space, and ground floor uses.

### **Climate Change Preparedness**

#### *Future Flooding On-site*

Based on the BPDA climate change checklist submitted by the proponents earlier in the permitting process, the site elevation ranges from 15-17.5 Boston City Base and the expected lifespan of the project is 50 years. Currently Boston's high tide (mean higher high water) is approximately 11.2 feet BCB, and the predicted 100-year (1% annual probability) storm surge is about 5 feet. In our previous comment letter we strongly encouraged the proponents to supplement the FEMA FIRM maps information with more recent and forward-looking projections. We commend the proponent for including data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the MassDOT report, which is consistent with the more-recent Climate Ready Boston projections.

Climate Ready Boston, a report designed to achieve scientific consensus on the climate change impacts facing Boston in the years ahead, was prepared for the City of Boston by a team of highly credentialed scientists led by researchers at U Mass Boston. They project 4 – 8 inches of sea level rise by 2030, up to 1.5 feet by 2050 and 2.4 to 7.4 feet by late century. (The lower end of this range assumes moderate cuts in greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, while the higher end reflects more of a "business as usual" scenario for future emissions.)

Based on these projections, Boston Harbor's high tide plus 1% storm surge may reach 16 feet BCB. By the end of the project lifespan, a similar intensity storm could reach 19 feet BCB. As presented, the building flood proof elevation will be 16.46 and 18.46 BCB with the first floor elevation at 17.5 and 19.0 BCB. According to the Waterways License Application, the proponent may incorporate a number of potential mitigation and preparedness measures including placing vital mechanicals above future flood levels, watertight utility conduits, wastewater backflow prevention, resilient first-floor materials, and increasing the height of the ground floor so that it can be raised in the future. We strongly encourage developers to incorporate these resiliency measures into their initial design.

#### *Extended Term License*

The project proponent is requesting an extended license term of 99 years. We are supportive of the project and the public benefits package proposed, but we are hesitant to agree to a 99-year term license. As presented in the Waterways License Application, this site is in Zone AE of the FEMA flood maps and will experience increased flooding in the next 50 years. Climate science predictions for the latter half of the century have a high level of uncertainty as they are related to future greenhouse gas emissions. Significantly limiting Boston sea level rise by the end of the century will require massive and unprecedented cuts in greenhouse gases worldwide. For this reason, we would suggest a 50-year license

term that addresses climate predictions through the 2070 MassDOT report numbers referenced in the Waterways License. When the license is renewed in 50 years, a reassessment of flood preparedness measures and mitigation can be guided by updated climate science predictions.

## **Public Access**

### *Public Dock*

Although the Marine Wharf site is not immediately adjacent to the Reserved Channel, it is in a prime position to improve access to the existing public dock located parallel to Summer Street. One of the existing uses for the dock is the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center (TIOBEC) day-to-day operation. For almost two centuries years, TIOBEC has brought Boston's urban youth to Thompson Island and through innovative educational programs has empowered them to become leaders in their community. Today TIOBEC hosts the majority of youth education programs within the Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area.

In exchange for extending the Waterways License beyond the standard 30-year term, we recommend that proponents contribute funds to help upgrade the existing infrastructure to a fully ADA-compliant dock. This infrastructure improvement will enhance existing uses and create the potential for future water-dependent opportunities like a scheduled public ferry stop in Boston Harbor and water taxi location. A contribution to the water-dependent operations adjacent to the proposed development is an opportunity for this project to show support for and highlight the principle of the Waterways Regulations: to "protect water-dependent uses [and] preserve water-related public rights."

### *Parking & Transportation*

The project will provide bike racks, an electric charging station for two cars, and three preferred parking spaces for cars or vanpools. There are currently two Hubway stations and three car-sharing stations within walking distance of the site. In the future, and with the expected increased foot traffic, it may be necessary to include a third Hubway station at the intersection of Drydock Avenue and Summer Street.

Given how flood-prone this portion of Boston's waterfront is, we support the project's plans for second floor parking and encourage developers to minimize below-ground construction that can be harmed by salt water inundation. As public transit, car-sharing and driverless cars become more prevalent, the hotel may need fewer parking spaces in the future. We continue to suggest that the parking area design include options for future conversion to alternative uses.

The proposed development sits between Summer Street, the major truck route serving Conley Terminal and the main entrance to the Marine Park with heavy industrial traffic at all hours of the day and night. Due to the proximity of the proposed development to marine industrial properties, we suggest including a covenant or alternative clause in property leases and sales that preclude subsequent owner complaints regarding truck traffic, noise, and other impacts resulting from the marine industrial properties. Additional opportunities for soundproofing should also be explored.

We are encouraged by the proponent's commitment to enhancing public amenities on site and maintaining the adjacent Marine Park Plaza. It is our understanding that a site-specific draft management plan will be developed after the design of the project is finalized. We ask that a copy of the

management plan be circulated for public comment. As a longtime advocate of accessible, public and open spaces Boston Harbor Now would be glad to work with the proponent to develop a draft management and activation plan.

This proposal will provide retail opportunity, food services, and public meeting spaces to support the water-dependent operations of Black Falcon Terminal, Cruiseport Boston, and sections of the Raymond Flynn Marine Park. We look forward to the completion of this project.

Sincerely,



Julie Wormser  
VP Policy & Planning



Jill Valdés Horwood  
Director of Waterfront Policy