15 State Street, Suite 1100
Boston, MA 02109
617.223.8671
bostonharbornow.org

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Via email to: *Rich.mcguinness@boston.gov*
chris.busch@boston.gov
Erikk.hokenson@boston.gov

Brian Golden
Director Boston Planning and Development Agency
Boston City Hall
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

Attention: Richard McGuinness, Chris Busch, and Erikk Hokenson

Re: 2016 Draft Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan

Dear Mr. Golden,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan (MHP). Boston Harbor Now has been honored to serve on the Downtown Municipal Harbor Plan Citizen Advisory Committee since its inception in 2013.

We want to acknowledge the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) and City's commitment to preserving the historical and water-dependent history of the Downtown Waterfront. We support the principles laid out in the public realm plan and agree that a central intent of the MHP must be to prioritize waterfront benefits. A thriving, inclusive waterfront provides economic opportunities for Bostonians at a variety of income and skill levels. An active waterfront should promote and incorporate a variety of open spaces, robust arts and cultural resources, and year-round programming that connects Bostonians and visitors with the natural, cultural, and the economic history of our waterfront.

We look forward to continuing to work with the BPDA and other partners to expand and achieve a truly great, pedestrian-friendly waterfront that is economically and culturally vibrant, climate prepared and welcoming to all. Our comments follow.

Substitute Provisions

A global comment: Municipal Harbor Plan exemptions are intended for use on an area-wide basis, coordinating across parcels to provide flexibility, while maintaining or increasing overall public benefits. The rationale and justification for an MHP significantly weaken when open space, lot coverage, and sightlines are analyzed on a parcel-by-parcel basis, as has been done for the Downtown MHP.

In light of the lengthy public planning process that this plan has undergone, this parcel-specific analysis is inadequate for creating the connectivity and pedestrian experience to and along the stretch of the waterfront that serves as the city's gateway to Boston Harbor. Instead, as has been shown in both the New England Aquarium and Wharf District Council proposals, the exemptions and public realm benefits for the Downtown MHP can, and need to, do so much more to optimize area-wide benefits. As the Citizen Advisory Committee has previously noted, we all want to see something much more transformative for the downtown MHP area.

Lot Coverage

The current total lot coverage for the downtown waterfront planning area is 39%. The remaining area is split between 53% publicly accessible space and 8% private outdoor space.

As proposed on page 39 of the draft MHP, the lot coverage calculation will be based on the standard Chapter 91 1:1 ratio -- for every square foot of lot coverage, there will be an equal amount of open space. Ideally, this standard would maintain at least 50% of the plan area as publicly accessible open space.

That said, we are concerned that beyond the three parcels mentioned below, the parcel-by-parcel recommended maximum lot coverage may potentially result in a *loss* of opportunities to increase the amount of open space in the area. We anticipate that future development interests will expect to be allowed to build to the BPDA recommended maximum lot coverage (70%) not the Chapter 91 compliant minimum coverage (50%). This standard directly conflicts with the intent of the draft MHP to maintain--and ideally increase--publicly accessible open space in the downtown waterfront. Instead, a lot coverage assessment needs to be completed for the MHP area in the aggregate in order to yield more than the current 53% overall open space, vibrant well-connected areas and improved connectivity between the waterfront, Rose Kennedy Greenway and inland neighborhoods.

Additional details of open space management in Section 3.3.2 of the draft, for parcels that may be considered for development in the future should include the following:

- How will BPDA determine which parcels will be allowed to cover up to 70% of their acreage?
- Will such requests be awarded on a first-come-first-served basis? If so, this risks undermining the public realm values of this important section of the waterfront.
- Who will be responsible for keeping track of the quantity, quality and overall consistency and connectivity of the open space in the district?
- Will the public be allowed to periodically review an accounting of the open space?

Water-Dependent Use Zone (WDUZ)

We agree with the draft plan's provision that the overall water dependent use zone must be equal to or greater than the Chapter 91 standards at 9.51(3)(c). This provision means that new public corridors in the area may be reconfigured, but cannot be reduced to less than 15 feet wide.

Currently, the only project affected by this substitution is the Hook Wharf development. We are glad to see this substitution is consistent with Chapter 91 standards. Although in limited circumstances public values, such as the Boston Harborwalk, can be improved through moving the WDUZ, in general, non-water dependent uses should not diminish the capacity of waterfront parcels to accommodate water-dependent uses. The final MHP should include language that requires future development to preserve WDUZs exclusively for water-dependent activities and public access –a central tenant of the Public Waterfront Act, Chapter 91.[1]

<u>Offsets</u>

Marriott Long Wharf

The draft MHP proposes that all structures seaward of the Marriott Long Wharf Hotel be limited to an additional two floors, not to exceed 30 feet above the current building height. In addition, the recommended substitution would allow 80% lot coverage to accommodate new ground-floor additions of facilities of public accommodation. Proposed public realm improvements to offset increased lot coverage for the Marriott Long Wharf include:

- Interior and exterior improvements to pedestrian walkway that runs through the center of the hotel and improvements to improve general public passage, and
- A year-round 500SF water transportation waiting room and ticket office.

[1] Given the increasing risk of coastal flooding along Boston's waterfront, we see pedestrian-friendly flood protection (Boston's "Dry Line"?) as consistent with Chapter 91.

[2] 850,000 ferry riders, 960,000 if we include Water Taxi Riders, and 1,640,000 combined Ferry, Water Taxi and Excursion riders from Long Wharf North and South. Ridership numbers taken from 2015 study conducted by Boston Harbor Cruises.

We do not see these offsets as appropriate to meeting the needs and opportunities of this section of the waterfront as a significant current and future harbor ferry terminus. The BPDA consistently refers to the Long Wharf area as the gateway for water transportation and its potential as an "exemplary 21st-century waterfront". (Draft 9-6-2016 p. 6, 25, 29; Public Realm 4-9-2014 p. 24-26). We wholeheartedly agree with this assessment. Given Boston's challenges with both road and public transit capacities, use of ferries and enhanced water transportation opportunities are only expected to increase.

In its 2013 Request for a Notice to Proceed, the City articulated six goals for the Downtown Waterfront – the second of these was to promote access to Boston harbor, the Harbor Islands, and water transportation. (Draft 9-6-2016 p. 24-27). The Long and Central Wharf areas include intermodal connections to the MBTA Blue Line, Hubway bicycle system, Zipcar, and other transportation options. The final MHP needs to do more to recognize the future of this area as a major ferry terminus needing more than a 500SF enclosed waiting room and ticket office. Our recommendations follow.

Improving Long Wharf's Ferry Infrastructure and Passenger Experience

Today, the pedestrian experience at Long and Central Wharf does little to inspire, excite, and orient visitors preparing to board ferries and experience the harbor. Instead, passengers are often left to their own devices to find the correct boarding area, shelter from the elements, and safely navigate through a dangerous maze of tourist buses, trolleys, cars, and delivery trucks.

The City's recently released *Imagine Boston 2030* draft plan talks about creating a waterfront city that better connects Bostonians to the harbor. We believe that part of this vision involves a destination ferry terminal at Long Wharf that draws visitors from the Faneuil Hall Visitor Center through the Boston Harbor Islands Pavilion on the Greenway down to the water.

We need a more comprehensive approach to water transportation than currently exists at Long Wharf and Central Wharf. As a planning document, the draft MHP should include updated calculations of ridership numbers; passenger support needs based on those numbers; and the ticket/backhouse space required to adequately support ferry operations.

In 2015, 1,640,000 ferry passengers came through Long Wharf North and South[2]. With future ferry lines from Everett and likely elsewhere, Long Wharf needs an all-weather, passenger-friendly transportation hub. Just as North and South Station include inside passenger waiting areas, retail commerce and multi-modal connections, a Long Wharf ferry building should include a scaled-down version of the same.

[2] 850,000 ferry riders, 960,000 if we include Water Taxi Riders, and 1,640,000 combined Ferry, Water Taxi and Excursion riders from Long Wharf North and South. Ridership numbers taken from 2015 study conducted by Boston Harbor Cruises.

Instead of a 500SF waiting room, we recommend that BPDA examine the possibility of using the current Chart House parking lot as an alternative location to accommodate a larger terminal building for ferry passengers using both Long Wharf North and South. This site is located along a direct sightline to the waterfront that could attract pedestrians as far inland as Faneuil Hall. As a partner of the National Park Service, Boston Harbor Now is committed to improving the existing Boston Harbor Islands Pavilion to serve as a link between Faneuil Hall and the waterfront for ferry users.

In addition, the flow of the area might be best served with a dedicated passenger pick-up/drop-off area to ensure pedestrian safety. This would not only help separate pedestrian areas from vehicular access but would also benefit patrons of nearby water-dependent businesses.

Harbor Garage

As presented in the draft MHP, the proposed substitutions would allow a structure not taller than 600 feet, 900,000SF total massing, lot coverage up to 70%, and oriented to minimize net new shadow. In exchange for the proposed substitutions, the BPDA is recommending the following offsets totaling at least $18.55 million:

- No less than $250,000 to fund the City's design and use standards
- Converting the Chart House parking lot to public open space for an adjusted 2016 estimated cost of $3.8 million
- $3.2 million to transform Old Atlantic Avenue into public open space
- $7 million to renovate Central Wharf in conjunction with NEAQ plans
- $4.3 million to renovate the BPDA property in front of the Harbor Garage and the Aquarium plaza above any mitigation for the use of the site by private development.
- Other open space improvements within the MHP area

We believe these offsets fall short and are not commensurate with such a significant increase in building size/mass, over as-of-right standards. This proposal reduces standard open space requirements and grants significant additional height allowances for development sites in exchange for inadequate public access, interrupted harbor sightlines, and poor pedestrian circulation.

The intent of Municipal Harbor Plans is to achieve appropriate benefits, so the public use and enjoyment of Commonwealth Tidelands are promoted to a degree that is fully commensurate with the proprietary rights of the public. *Private advantages of use are not primary but merely incidental* to the achievement of public purposes. (310 CMR 9.53, emphasis added).

This means that MHP deviations from Chapter 91 numerical standards in height, open space and lot coverage must ensure that developments remain necessarily condensed in footprint and result in increased amounts of public benefits. In other words, the public benefits must *far*

outweigh the public cost to support the BPDA's suggested height and massing. In sum, we agree with the BPDA that the goal of the MHP should be to build a well-planned, inviting, and truly great pedestrian waterfront; we do not believe that these offsets achieve this goal, as currently proposed.

Hook Wharf

Hook Wharf, Coast Guard Building, and the Northern Avenue Bridge sit on the outer edge of the Downtown Waterfront and serve as the gateway to the Innovation District. Due to the Wharf's key location, any future development on the site should be flexible in its design to accommodate future renovations to the Northern Avenue Bridge and maintain critical North-South links to the Innovation district and East-West connections to the Financial District.

The draft MHP includes two potential design scenarios for this site. The first contemplates a 305-foot tall building with lot coverage not to exceed 55%. The second, more conservative, scenario proposes a building 55 feet tall with lot coverage up to 15%. In all cases, the MHP substitutions would allow up to 70% lot coverage. As presented in the MHP, the current offsets proposed for this site include:

- Creation of an interior Special Public Destination Facility (SPDF)[3] that includes open space areas and deeded restriction for water-dependent uses
- Removal of the MBTA pump house and piling in the Fort Point Channel in exchange for equivalent area of pile-supported deck to enhance the Harborwalk
- Over-the-water ADA connection between the project site and 470/500 Atlantic Avenue

This site plays a vital role in connecting nearby neighborhoods and the waterfront--a key focus of the public realm plan. We commend the BPDA for acknowledging the "crossroads" character of this location in the public realm plan.

The draft MHP includes two potential development scenarios for this site, however does not include two potential corresponding offsets. The range of development size within the two proposed scenarios is substantial and deserving of a more thorough analysis of corresponding offsets. Despite recognizing this as "crossroad parcel" connecting three different neighborhoods, the draft does not discuss potential designs, cost estimates, and whether the Harborwalk connections at the Northern Avenue Bridge and Moakley Bridge would run over, across, or underneath existing structures. We note that the Harborwalk connections that run under the Moakley Bridge and North Washington Street Bridge were both submerged during October and November 2016's King Tides. We would not support future stretches of the Harborwalk being similarly constructed, so a creative solution should be developed for these connections to endure in the decades ahead.

[3] This is a Downtown MHP specific amplification/enhancement of Chapter 91 *Section 9.53: Activation of Commonwealth Tidelands for Public Use*.

Additional Offsets

Blueway and Harbor Sightlines

In the weeks leading up to the final MHP meeting and in response to a call for "transformative" ideas, the New England Aquarium (NEAQ) and the Wharf District Council (WDC) shared plans of their respective visions for the Downtown Waterfront. Although the current draft does not incorporate elements of each plan, we understand concepts that align with the existing public realm plan may be incorporated into the final draft plan.

Both plans received wide support from the community. We look forward to reviewing a final draft of the MHP that incorporates a number of these concepts, including the Blueway, harbor sightline connections, a comprehensive ferry terminal, and improved pedestrian connectivity.

A core component of Boston Harbor Now's mission, shared by BPDA, is to encourage residents and visitors from inland neighborhoods to visit and enjoy the waterfront. We strongly support increased access to the Harbor, reinforcing lateral connections across the Greenway, and the Aquarium's proposed Blueway concept. Through decades of experience and millions of visitors, the Aquarium has developed a working knowledge of the pedestrian experience at Central Wharf. Because the aquarium serves as an anchor cultural establishment on the waterfront and is designated in the draft as the primary Special Public Destination Facility (SPDF)[4] in the planning area, including elements of the Aquarium's plan is vital to the improvement of the waterfront experience. In particular, expanding visual corridors, providing ways to interact with the water, improving the pedestrian network, and increasing the open space area will serve to improve the district-wide experience.

We agree with the WDC that navigation to the waterfront begins beyond the Downtown Municipal Harbor Plan jurisdictional lines. The plan identifies key views and pedestrian access points across the Greenway and further inland through key corridors like Central, Milk, India, and Broad Streets. Increasing the width of visual corridors and promoting signage beyond the Greenway will help draw residents, visitors and programming to the waterfront.

Northern Avenue Bridge

The Northern Avenue Bridge is an important contributing element to the downtown waterfront and a critical piece of the existing Harborwalk. We were glad to see that in the draft documents the BPDA agrees the Northern Avenue section of the plan is a key connection both North/South and East/West. While the City continues to work towards a feasible and adequate solution to the Northern Avenue Bridge reconstruction, it should also focus on an immediate interim measure to dramatically improve the existing Harborwalk connection.

[4] This specific amplification/enhancement of Chapter 91 *Section 9.53: Activation of Commonwealth Tidelands for Public Use* is intended to preserve water-dependent uses and ensure they are not displaced by the design, construction, intended uses, or density of any new building proposed under the substitute provisions of the Downtown Waterfront MHP.

Part of the Downtown Waterfront public realm plan vision includes clearly defined connections among well-organized, high quality, and walkable pedestrian links. This draft needs to include a meaningful discussion of benefits and proposed interim connections to the Northern Avenue Bridge as part of the broader district wide harbor plan. This connection should be an early action item with enough built-in flexibility to accommodate a more permanent future link to a restored Northern Avenue Bridge.

District-wide improvements

We continue to believe that initial harbor plan offset dollars should be allocated to create an overall cohesive design concept from Christopher Columbus Park through to the Hook Wharf site to ensure a waterfront experience that feels continuous, well connected and welcoming throughout the entire Downtown Waterfront. Because this section of the waterfront is densely populated and mostly built-out, we suggest incorporating the following design features to activate ground floors to further enliven key sections and direct pedestrians towards the waterfront:

- Orient main building entrances toward the waterfront.
- Provide double building frontages that internally connect inland and waterfront walkways.
- Reduce the visual impact of parking and service areas, restricting them to designated out-of-sight locations or screen them through plantings, artwork, or other devices.
- Include recesses and articulation along long building frontages to create a more engaging building wall. Avoid blank walls.
- When considering a cluster of buildings such as proposed for Central Wharf, site them to define a cohesive waterfront outdoor space as a public focal point.

Preparing for Climate Change

Because of their low site elevations and exposure to Nor'easters, structures in the Downtown Waterfront area are especially vulnerable to projected sea level rise and coastal flooding and require responsible planning and preparedness measures. We applaud the BPDA for including a robust section on "preparing for climate change" that includes existing city requirements, current planning processes, district vulnerabilities, existing district-wide conditions, and best practices.

We applaud the City for proposing that the Downtown Waterfront be the city's first Flood Resiliency District. This recommendation is highly consistent with the priorities of the Climate Ready Boston project (see below). We look forward to supporting BPDA's efforts to institutionalize climate change preparedness and planning as an integral part of development and a key measure of success for the Downtown Waterfront.

BPDA acknowledges that climate impacts like sea level rise will have a detrimental effect on public open space, continuous public access, and future development. As a result, the draft proposes amplifications that will require open space improvements to elevate exterior areas to ensure continued use by the public after periods of inundation (Draft 9-6-2016 Downtown Waterfront District Municipal Harbor Plan p. 54). Boston Harbor Now documented flooding from the land and from boats during the October and November King Tides. Portions of Long, Central and India Wharves flooded during tides 12.5 feet above average with *flat* seas. To defer chronic flooding in this area we encourage elevating those portions of the downtown Harborwalk to equal the height of Rowes Wharf and Hook Lobster.

Phase II of the Climate Ready Boston study will prioritize development of a neighborhood resiliency plan for the downtown waterfront. This MHP should include language automatically linking the current draft to CRB Phase II results and future updates of climate projections.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to the completion of the municipal harbor planning process and continuing to work with the City to create a Downtown Waterfront that is an international example of a vibrant, welcoming, climate-prepared, accessible waterfront.

Sincerely,

Julie Wormser
VP of Policy and Planning

Phil Griffiths
VP of Operations

Jill Valdes Horwood
Director of Waterfront Policy