



Are you on board?

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December 20, 2021

Via email: Stephen.j.harvey@boston.gov

Boston Planning and Development Agency
Attention: Stephen Harvey
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

Re: Expanded Project Notification Form – 800 William T. Morrissey Boulevard

Dear Mr. Harvey,

On behalf of Boston Harbor Now, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Expanded Project Notification Form (EPNF) submitted by Dorchester 2 – Michaels LLC and the Michaels Organization (the “Proponent”) for 800 Morrissey Boulevard (the “Project”). The project site, currently a Ramada Inn, consists of multiple parcels totaling approximately 89,261 square feet of land (2.05 acres) and is bounded by Morrissey Boulevard to the West, a proposed redevelopment at 780 Morrissey Boulevard to the North, Interstate I-93 to the East, and the Boston Bowl to the South.

Importantly, the project also abuts the proposed DCR Neponset River Greenway shared-use path, which is finalizing their design and permitting now to be constructed in the coming two years. This project is a critical segment in the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s long-term plan for the 10.5 mile Neponset River Greenway linking the Blue Hills Reservation in Milton to Mattapan Square and continuing to Castle Island, contiguous with the Boston Harborwalk north of Lower Mills. It is crucial that this project be seamlessly integrated to support and enhance the function of this path in order to provide this neighborhood with improved transportation options and access to open space.

Boston Harbor Now participated in the public meeting on this project on December 14, 2021, and now submits these comments based on the filing and that meeting.

Project Plan

As described in the EPNF, the proponent proposes to develop a six story residential building totaling approximately 202,210 gross square feet that will contain 234 residential units,

residential amenities, and one level of garage parking at ground level. Fifteen percent of the units will be affordable housing and will be provided on-site. We commend the proponent for providing on-site affordable housing opportunities.

The project will also include a bike lounge as an amenity with seating areas, bottle filling stations, and exclusive bike storage opportunities. Additional landscaping is proposed around the site and within the courtyard and amenity spaces.

Open Space/Public Access

As noted earlier, this project abuts the Neponset River Greenway extension. The EPNF explains how it will be integrated into that path by indicating that a “signature element of this Project will be expanding the Promenade, a multi-use connection that will be constructed by the neighboring 780 Morrissey Boulevard project, on the northern edge of the site to provide direct access from Morrissey Boulevard to the Neponset Trail which will enhance bicycle and pedestrian access to transit, jobs, and neighborhood amenities. Additionally, the Proponent will provide short-term bicycle racks for visitors, access to the bicycle-sharing service adjacent to the project at 780 Morrissey, and on-site bicycle storage, including a bike lounge amenity featuring visually appealing design elements with integrated casual seating areas, wall graphics, bottle filling stations and an area dedicated to working on bicycles, making this a destination amenity. Located at the Promenade connection to the Neponset Trail this feature amenity will feed additional bicycle- and pedestrian-focused activity into this new node.”

We commend the proponent for incorporating the path into the planning for this project. However, the construction of the promenade relies entirely on the construction of the project at 780 Morrissey Boulevard, and is independent of this project. At this stage, the degree to which this project will support the activation, use, and connectivity of the path is unclear. We would ask for clarification of this issue in future filings. In addition, the site plans for the project included in the EPNF show that one wing of the building will be quite close to the property line on the path side of the project, hemming in this public space. We would urge the proponent to explore pulling the building back from that edge to create a truly integrated edge with the path, provide a place for commuters and recreational users of the path to rest and get a drink of water. Finally, more thought needs to be given to how to integrate the project with the path given that the site will be elevated as a resiliency measure. It would be unfortunate if a user of the bike path felt walled-off from the site due to poor design.

Climate Preparedness/Resilience

The project is subject to the City of Boston’s Coastal Flood Resiliency Overlay District. While the EPNF indicates that the building will be built to the appropriate Sea Level Rise – Design Flood Elevation, it is unclear what the status of the exterior mechanical equipment is. The EPNF specifies that “the southeast corner of the site will be landscaped and is anticipated to contain some of the building’s exterior electrical equipment.” We would request that the proponent clarify the elevation at which the mechanical equipment will be built to ensure that it will be out of harm’s way for future flooding.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Toffler', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Aaron Toffler
Director of Policy
Boston Harbor Now