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February 24, 2022

Via email: [aisling.kerr@boston.gov](mailto:aisling.kerr@boston.gov)

Boston Planning and Development Agency  
Attention: Aisling Kerr  
One City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201

Re: 244-284A Street Supplemental Filing Comment

Dear Ms. Kerr,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Supplemental Filing for 244-284 A Street submitted by Channelside Acquisitions LLC, an affiliate of Related Beal. Boston Harbor Now has been following this process for the past two years and has previously submitted comments in September of 2020 and August of 2021. We have been impressed both by the proponents' willingness to create a more robust public process beyond the official meetings and by the level of commitment that the community has shown in tracking the project and offering substantive and detailed recommendations for improvements to the site.

This project, currently a surface parking lot between the Fort Point Channel and A Street with boundaries marked by the extension of Necco and Binford Streets, would create 1,098,292 of new residential, office, and research buildings as well as Harborwalk and public realm improvements and two new parks—Fort Point Channel Park and Necco Street Park. The present strategies proposed to address climate change impacts are commendable, and the designs of the park have improved significantly as they've been refined; however, the vagueness and limitations of the ground floor uses at this stage in the process give us pause.

We use the term "Harborwalk 2.0" to capture the aspirations of this work to ensure that the design of the waterfront is accessible and welcoming, is prepared for the coastal impacts of climate change, and centers equity and inclusion in its design and programming. In this project, we are pleased by the resilience and adaptation measures but less confident that the site plan as a whole addresses inclusiveness sufficiently.



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### *Coastal Resilience and Climate Adaptation*

The current designs show that there will be a consistently raised elevation of 21.5 feet (BCB) across most of the site parallel to the Fort Point Channel. This aligns with the City's design standards for 2070 in order to protect the area from a 1% annual chance storm combined with projected sea level rise and an additional foot of freeboard. That there is a continuous and accessible route to walk at this elevation should lower levels be flooded is a best practice. Further, rather than building only a walled or bermed elevation at this height with steep drop offs, the design proposes gradual sloping up to this elevation to make this protective feature blend elegantly into the landscape. The Harborwalk is also raised to a minimum of 15 feet, keeping it above the elevation of projected future nuisance flooding.

The southwest corner of the site, adjacent to the pump house and the extension of Binford Street, is the most ill-defined. We recognize that coordination with other private property owners, public agencies who control outfall pipes and tunnels under the surface, and the City of Boston's proposed berm project all complicate the design of this edge. Here, a combination of deployable barriers is needed in the short term, and hopefully a long term redesign can be proposed in the future to block this flood pathway more permanently.

The proponent has not proposed altering the seawall in any way, so in-water solutions may not be part of the coastal protection at this site. Nonetheless, thoughtful plantings and considerate design between the water and the highest elevations will ensure that the landscape can bounce back from future storm damage and withstand temporary salt-water exposure.

On the inland side of the site, the parks' ability to capture a substantial amount of the rainwater that currently drains from the parking lot directly into the channel is a marked improvement. The addition of trees and other shade structures coupled with the lawns and water feature will reduce the heat island effect on this site and provide a welcome respite on the increasing number of hot days that climate scientists have projected for Boston.

### *Harborwalk and Watersheet Activation*

Along the waterfront, we applaud the thoughtful design of the Harborwalk. At 18 feet wide, the walkway can serve a flexible array of uses and users. This



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dimension sets a clear precedent that should apply as properties are developed southward of the site, and the new width will be essential as the waterfront in this neighborhood attracts more users from new residents and workers as well as the surrounding community. The mix of seating along the Harborwalk and the frontage of the Fort Point Channel Park also invites users to stop and spend time rather than use it only as a place to pass through.

Rising from a minimum elevation of 15 feet to nearly 20 feet as it arches up to the elevated berm near the pump house ensures, as noted above, that it will remain accessible during all but the worst storms and not be subject to nuisance flooding as low-lying segments of the Fort Point Channel Harborwalk are today. Durable materials are essential for withstanding periodic flooding and cleaning off any debris that the flooding may bring with it.

The current design includes a fixed pier with a ramp down to a floating dock. We recognize that this is being proposed on land that the proponent does not own, that the design will be refined before or during the Chapter 91 process, and that numerous other sites along the channel are likely to include some kind of watersheet activation. Boston Harbor Now strongly advocates for diverse watersheet activation around the Harbor from sailing and kayaking to ferries and water taxis, but mere replication of an amenity already available on an adjacent parcel does not seem consistent with the level of creativity that has been shown elsewhere in this design. We appreciate that constructing new infrastructure in the channel requires substantial permitting and should be done thoughtfully and purposefully. If a fixed pier is built at the proposed location, it should be better integrated into the amphitheater with careful design. If a floating dock is created to provide additional boat launching opportunities, then meaningful boat storage facilities should be incorporated into the design as well as better access for people to drive their vessels closer to the water. A pier or other structure could be built further south on the site to connect around the pump house to the Binford Street Park, providing better access and connectivity. If activities from STEM education to food trucks to performing arts are likely to be provided on movable barges or floats, then an entirely different facility may be warranted. Regardless, a more detailed program plan is needed to support a more innovative design of the watersheet activation infrastructure, and our organization would be happy to support the development of such a plan in conjunction with a meaningful public process.



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### *New Parks*

Fort Point Channel Park and Necco Street Park build on substantial community input from the 100 Acres Master Plan Open Space planning process of 2019 and 2020. Together they provide meaningful new green space in an area with an almost exclusively industrial past and limited public parkland. They offer a much-desired amenity in a rapidly developing area and are sized to serve a growing visitor, resident and work force population. As such, these two new parks are a significant improvement over the existing conditions and will be a welcome gathering place. They will, we hope, also become municipally owned parks in perpetuity after they are completed.

We applaud the inclusion of public art, a variety of seating options, the water feature and play area, and the range of users and uses that can be accommodated in the parks. We remain concerned that many of the vantage points shown in renderings seem to come from within the vegetation and do not capture the lived experience of actually using the park in the future. Similarly, the experience along Necco Street where the two parks are bifurcated by a 40-foot-wide cross section has not been adequately discussed or addressed.

One particular and longstanding concern is the character of the entrances to Necco Street Park from A Street. Though two blocks from the water, these entry points set the tone for the entire site and can serve as an invitation or deterrent to approach the waterfront and spend substantial time in the area. The desire of some community meeting participants to feel adequately screened from the traffic on A Street has meant that rather than a sweeping entrance from the corner of A Street and Garage Access Way that welcomes people into the park, they have to navigate long benches, squared off planting areas, and a rectilinear surface pattern rather than the kind of curves that will invite them into the park. Walking from Broadway and rounding the corner of the G6 Building leads people past what might be private cafe seating and a series of jogs to reach a park entrance without definite site lines into the park and its Civic Lawn. More can be done to make this park intuitively welcoming for everyone.

### *A Durable Performing Arts Space*

Fort Point Channel Park feels relatively consistent with the Fort Point 100 Acres Open Space Concept Plan with its mix of trees, water features, and



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amphitheater as well as the gradually sloped elevation that provides a more expansive view of the Channel from further inland than a traditional berm would allow. In its conceptual form, it showed a set of grassy terraces that curved to make an abstract amphitheater that could be used to watch the channel and the occasional small performance. Since then, local residents have partnered with performing arts groups from across Boston to develop a plan to create a robust outdoor performance space that is unparalleled in the Greater Boston Area. Today, many of the most recognizable outdoor venues rely on dry grass lawns to perform such as at the Hatch Shell on the Esplanade or in front of temporary stages built in Boston Common. This location has the potential to create a flexible and permanent amphitheater for a range of artists and genres. We have been impressed by the comprehensive and professional research and the collaboration between arts groups and designers to provide a road map for a one-of-a-kind venue and hope that the proponents adopt the recommendations. Though this is a departure from the original conceptual plans, we are firmly supportive of the new, more structured amphitheater they are proposing, because we believe it will support an unprecedented diversity of uses. If implemented with careful attention to detail and function, it can make performance staging more affordable for the myriad nonprofits interested in using this unique space.

#### *Additional Public Realm Attributes*

The creation of a high quality Harborwalk and two new parks has meant that generally less attention has been paid to the areas around the three new buildings. The experience for people walking and cycling seems to be well considered. The new route for the South Bay Harbor Trail reflects the realities of how people want to travel and connect to the existing bike network. The raised crosswalks on Necco Street represent best practices for slowing traffic and prioritizing the link between the east and west sections of the park for people on foot. A quality pedestrian crossing is essential here, but we suspect that a street mural is not likely to be approved by Boston's Transportation and Public Works Departments.

The quality of the public realm along Binford Street has improved to be more clearly planned with a good mix of walking paths and green space, though it may need continued adaptations to integrate with the City's proposed berm and the redevelopment of the southwest side of Binford Street. Should further design changes occur, it is critical that this feel more like a park and not more like the private plaza for the ground floor uses. New park space



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around it should not displace the public park elements of the design but rather integrate the several clusters of green space that may be proposed in close proximity.

We applaud the concept of various “art trails” through the site and hope that the implementation of these routes focuses in particular on what could otherwise be a rather bleak passage between buildings G4 and G5. People on foot should feel safe and interested in walking here whether it is towards the water or away from it. The broader concept offers numerous ways to engage the high density of artists living in the area and the future artists accommodated by the affordable live work spaces promised within the residential building.

#### *Facilities of Public Accommodation and Ground Floor Uses*

As a project subject to Chapter 91, facilities of public accommodation are required. The project initially proposed some very specific uses and tenants, and the proponents have retracted many of their suggestions, noting only that they will have “mixed-use ground floor spaces [with] over 60,000 sf of traditional ground floor retail space [and] up to 15,000 sf civic/cultural space with free base rent.” Prior to approval by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) board, further clarification is needed. If they are to be designed in consultation with the neighborhood and respond to the needs of the park, the final locations and uses of these space cannot be left to the Chapter 91 process, which lacks the level of public engagement and conversation needed to clarify the dimensions and use of these spaces.

From conversations with Grub Street and other nonprofits who have tried to build out and utilize similar spaces, it is clear that the civic and cultural tenants need to be selected prior to finalizing the building design in order to ensure that their needs are met during the build out process and avoid unnecessary expenses that can overextend the financial resources of non-profit tenants. Similarly, the selection process should consider how indoor uses can be integrated with the design of the outdoor spaces as appropriate. It should be clear which parts of the building are available for civic and cultural uses and then determine how they can support outdoor activation. In particular, we recommend placing public gallery space or other features that would support the performing arts venue along the parks. While restaurants with outdoor seating can activate the spaces, some high end dining may create



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a privatized feeling along the edge of the park. Further, a range of price points for the retail offerings is strongly encouraged.

Of particular concern in the current design is the availability of only two public restrooms, each one unisex stall, to serve the two parks, waterfront performance venue, and Harborwalk. With a different configuration of ground floor uses, a more expansive set of public facilities can serve multiple tenants as well as members of the public coming indoors from the park. The inclusion of the water feature and children's play area outdoors also point to the need for children and their families to have somewhere warm and dry to come inside and change or rest.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. With the thoughtful and considerate process that has shaped the 244-284 A Street project to date and the engagement of residents who have submitted implementable recommendations for improving the project, we hope that the final result can provide the inclusive and resilient project that we believe is possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Abbott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kathy Abbott  
President and CEO  
Boston Harbor Now