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April 18, 2022

Via email: sarah.black@boston.gov

Boston Planning and Development Agency
Attention: Sarah Black
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

Re: 425 Medford Street PDA Comment

Dear Ms. Black,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Proposed PDA Master Plan for 425 Medford Street in Charlestown submitted by The Flatley Company. Boston Harbor Now has had an opportunity to meet with the proponent and attended the public meeting held on February 28th in addition to watching the recordings of the two subsequent virtual meetings. We appreciate the attention that has been given to the shoreline, public open spaces, and pedestrian connectivity both within the 25-acre site and extending into the existing Charlestown community as well as efforts to comply with Chapter 91 at the outset.

Recognizing that this project is early in the development process, we would like to highlight several areas that we hope are comprehensively addressed in future phases of planning along the Harborwalk and throughout this waterfront site. As concepts are developed in more detail, we hope to see evidence of “Harborwalk 2.0” -- Boston Harbor Now’s aspirational standards for ensuring that waterfront parcels will be accessible and welcoming, be prepared for the coastal impacts of climate change, and center equity and inclusion in the design and programming. The significant recent changes to the design have addressed many issues of open space and urban design, but they have been vague about what the waterfront infrastructure and open space will entail.

Access to the Waterfront

Throughout the proposal for this project, pedestrian connectivity has been emphasized. By building/rebuilding the entire Harborwalk from the City of Boston’s Ryan Playground to the Massport-owned designated port land, people traveling on foot can travel and spend time along the Mystic River.



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The improvements to the community path along the rail corridor, pedestrian pathways through the site like “Olmsted Way,” and an emphasis on making the site feel transit accessible to Sullivan Square will allow local residents as well as people relying on trains, buses, and bikes to connect to this section of waterfront. The opening of the completed path behind the MBTA bus yard north of Alford Street will provide connectivity to a whole network of trails further up the Mystic River as well.

The Proposed Harborwalk

Plans for the Harborwalk itself are comprehensive. According to the filing documents and the February presentation, a formal Harborwalk path along most of the site, which should be 12 feet or wider, is flanked by other open space amenities including a stepped terrace, a lawn, a playground, sports courts, lookout areas, the existing fixed pier, improved boat launches, seating, and a fountain. That there is consistently a path along the water and alternate inland routes parallel to and with views of the water has created two distinct and welcoming experiences.

Though the lengthy list of features is commendable, we hope that the final site design comes together comprehensively and includes the particular amenities that meet the needs of the neighborhood and the future residents and visitors to the site. The design of the sea steps is particularly appealing because they provide a series of slopes that allow people with limited mobility to travel down them gradually on ramps, a feature that was not incorporated into other stepped features built recently on other parts of Boston Harbor.

The curving boardwalk proposed gives us pause as we consider whether it offers a design solution or complication. Though it is an aesthetically pleasing feature that brings people closer to the water, we hope that if it requires new pilings in the water that it will also provide a resilience functions rather than complicating the implementation of nature-based shoreline protections. Further, it seems to be included in the open space calculations, which may be relevant to BPDA and DEP permitting processes. We believe that only existing land and structures should be included in these metrics and that decking like this is not a tradeoff to providing open space on existing land.



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Coastal Resilience and Living Shoreline

It is worth noting that this proposal adheres to many of the design principles and elevations recommended by City planning processes, including *Coastal Resilience Solutions for East Boston and Charlestown* (2017). According to the cross sections, diagrams, and other figures in the filing and public presentation, the site will be protected by integrating a continuous raised berm at elevation 22 to 24 feet (BCB), meeting or exceeding 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. This promises to protect the site from most coastal climate change impacts through the next half century and, if linked to other coastal protection measures proposed by nearby City projects, will offer protection to inland areas as well.

Several sections of the shoreline incorporated nature based solutions including a living shoreline and some other renderings with vegetation in the water. We encourage the proponent and their design team to work closely with the Stone Living Lab to develop a shoreline that enhances the protection of the site and contributes to the local ecosystem. The "living shoreline" and the "harborwalk overlook" should be paired with care. We would also like to learn more about the design and intended function of the "water treatment terrace."

Community Building and Facilities of Public Accommodation

The proponent previously included a two story, 6,000 square foot community building adjacent to the path and proximate to Medford Street. We were pleased to see it incorporated into the ground floor of a proposed building in order to increase the available and permeable open space on site. The expectation that this square footage will provide public meeting rooms and other non-commercial spaces that serve the needs of present and future residents. Ideas for how this space will be utilized and operated should be developed in tandem with the other design considerations and not left until the Chapter 91 process.

We also hope to see additional public spaces with some of the proposed community-service uses integrated into the ground floor of the other new buildings with some closer to the water. As a site subject to Chapter 91, providing additional facilities of public accommodation and civic uses would help to meet those requirements and bring more diverse users into and



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through the entire site. Ideally, Chapter 91 spaces that can be offered with long term leases to non-profit tenants would go through a transparent selection process with a public RFP. Additional amenities like public restrooms, gallery spaces, public lookouts from interior spaces, storage for kayaks, wayfinding signage, and historical interpretation should be integrated into user-friendly locations closer to the water to support the activation of the Harborwalk and waterfront.

Water Transportation

As an additional alternative to individuals driving alone or being driven to the site, we encourage the provision of water transportation services. Prior to the build out of this site, there may not be sufficient demand for regularly scheduled ferry services; however, including water taxi landings in the design or redesign of the pier will allow on-call service until regularly scheduled service can be supported. As additional residents and employees populate the completed project, Boston Harbor Now would be happy to work with the proponent on planning for expanded water transportation services.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. In particular, we hope that the abovementioned public benefits will be incorporated as conditions in the PDA approval. We look forward to remaining engaged with this dynamic project throughout the anticipated development review and state permitting processes in anticipation of a final result that can provide the inclusive and resilient project that we believe is possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathy Abbott", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katherine F. Abbott
President and CEO
Boston Harbor Now