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Sept 19, 2022

Via email: michael.a.sinatra@boston.gov

Boston Planning and Development Agency
Attention: Michael Sinatra
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

Re: 244-284 A Street PDA

Dear Mr. Sinatra,

Boston Harbor Now respectfully submits the following comments on the *244-284 A Street PDA* submitted by Related Beal (the proponent). Our organization has been following this project since its inception and has previously provided comment letters over the past two years, with our most recent submitted to the Boston Planning and Development Agency in February 2022. Since then, we have attended both the August 16th, 2022 IAG meeting and the September 12th, 2022 Public Meeting and have also had the opportunity to meet directly with Related Beal about this project, which encompasses three new buildings, significant new open space and parkland, and an elevated Harborwalk.

As longtime stewards of the Boston Harborwalk, Boston Harbor Now is committed to ensuring that the waterfront we build today is designed for a more resilient and inclusive future. In addition to transforming an underutilized parcel of land that is currently dominated by surface parking, we see this project as a way to advance the goals of Harborwalk 2.0, a vision for a waterfront that is accessible and welcoming, prepared for the coastal impacts of climate change, and centers equity and inclusion in its design and programming. An accessible Harborwalk should have both linear and lateral connections between the city and the water as well as numerous activation strategies to serve all Bostonians. A resilient Harborwalk includes a variety of climate adaptation strategies to protect and serve Boston at a district scale. To center equity in Harborwalk design is to focus on strategies that make the waterfront feel safe and inclusive through lighting, multilingual signage, full ADA accommodations, and the elimination of features that make users feel unwelcome or excluded.

We believe that this project addresses these three tenets of Harborwalk 2.0, and more specifically, that it has made immense strides in creating a project that has tiered protection against anticipated coastal flooding and is testing inclusive best practices in their park design, arts accommodations, and ground floor tenant application process. Building on past planning efforts, the proponent's design has resulted in climate resilience measures that both tie into the flood protection infrastructure of adjacent properties and has the added benefit of incorporating an amphitheater that will be able to host hundreds of people for a performance and introduce new audiences to the Harborwalk. We expect that the indoor and outdoor public spaces will feel more welcoming to the public because the proponent will be



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transferring ownership of the parks on site to the Boston Parks and Recreation Department and opening up discussions of civic and cultural space activation with the community through an RFP process. With the potential volume of people using this space and coming to visit the park and waterfront, we would like to see more public amenities, like bathrooms, on site to accommodate the projected crowds. On the whole, this project has raised the bar for waterfront developments. We hope that much of their work is a model for other projects to emulate.

Preparing for Coastal Flooding

The 244-284 A Street development, located within the 100 Acres Master Plan area, is in a part of South Boston that has the highest risk of future flooding. This area currently experiences nuisance flooding during astronomical high tides, and it is expected to flood more severely during the 2030 10-percent annual coastal storm event if protective infrastructure is not built. With such frequent flooding and the potential for more severe flooding as a result of climate change projections, it is imperative that future development projects located in the 100 Acres Master Plan area coordinate with each other, the City, and other property owners like MassDOT to create a continuous line of defense to protect individual the waterfront sites and the inland Fort Point neighborhood overall. We highly commend the proponent for their thoughtful coastal storm flooding plan, and their dedication to ensuring a continuous line of flood protection. This project site gradually rises to 21.5' BCB to seamlessly tie into the City's future berm while also ensuring that it connects to the line of protection being built into the development of 15 Necco to the north. Additionally, the proponent has committed to collaborate with the future development at 232 A Street to guarantee that an unbroken elevated line of coastal defense will connect to the south as well.

We applaud the proponent for designing the site to protect the neighborhood from flooding while creating an accessible and activated waterfront. Not only will this project incorporate coastal storm flood protection measures, but it will also become a valuable public realm asset for the neighboring community. Specifically, the increased site elevation will allow for the creation of an amphitheater and seating overlooking the Fort Point Channel. The proponent also plans to elevate the Harborwalk along the shoreline to 15 feet BCB, keeping it above the elevation of projected future nuisance flooding, so the Harborwalk will be accessible in all but the most severe storm conditions where sea level rise, high tide, and storm surge are concurrent. We also appreciate the creation of a new dock and its new proposed location, which will allow for better access from the site and connectivity to the watershed. We will continue to follow the development of the design of the dock and the art launch, and we hope the proponent supports these uses with the necessary land-based infrastructure and funding to ensure their success.



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Visual Connectivity and an Inviting Site

While we are pleased with 244-284 A Street's climate resilience strategy of gradually elevating the site to meet the City's berm and the adjoining flood infrastructure, we realize that this comes with additional design challenges. Most notably, this strategy complicates the visual connection between the Fort Point Channel and Fort Point neighborhood east of A Street. Although the site at present is empty and underutilized, there is a visual connection to the channel for people traveling on A Street. We hope that sightlines to the shore continue to exist when the project is fully built. Although the elevated berm section will block direct views of the channel, paths to the waterfront should be inviting and clearly marked to connect to the boardwalk. Sightlines between the channel and neighborhood should exist at Binford Street, the alley between Buildings G5 and G4, and throughout the Necco Street and Fort Point Channel Parks. Similarly, those using the Harborwalk along the water should understand they can easily connect through the site directly to the Fort Point neighborhood.

Regardless of sightlines, we would like this site and its connection to the waterfront to be celebrated and immediately clear to those walking in this part of the Fort Point neighborhood. The park entrance should serve as a gateway, and it should be designed to invite people to explore the park and channel. A comprehensive wayfinding plan should inform people and direct them between A Street and the Fort Point Channel/Harborwalk.

Supporting the Amphitheater

As noted, Boston Harbor Now is excited to see the site's climate resilience measures being integrated into the activation of the site. The amphitheater has great potential to serve as a venue for the local artists and to introduce new audiences and performers to Boston Harbor. Done well, this space will attract high quality art productions and, by extension, large crowds to watch the performance and experience the waterfront.

The proponent's vision and implementation plan for the amphitheater are distinctive. We commend their work engaging the local arts community and hiring lighting and audio consultants to ensure that the space is outfitted with the necessary equipment. As designs for the amphitheater are further refined, we expect the proponent and future property owners will continue to collaborate with local operators to ensure the space is constructed and programmed effectively. Today, there are few venues like this that support live performances along the waterfront, and none of the spaces currently offering free performances in this area have been purpose-built and include the staging infrastructure necessary to enhance the audience experience.

The amphitheater and the proposed fountain on the inland side of the berm have the potential to attract large crowds; therefore, the site should be designed to



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accommodate large crowds. Providing adequate public restrooms will be particularly important. At present, the design includes a total of 10 stalls and urinals split between two buildings and a combination of gendered restrooms and unisex facilities. Five of them are located along A Street and the remainder are located adjacent to the Fort Point Channel park. The proponent should confirm these facilities are adequate to serve the two parks and the Harborwalk, let alone accommodate a performance venue that may serve hundreds of people in peak conditions. A plan for supporting larger events with temporary facilities is warranted.

Future Operations

A unique process will be used to identify tenants for certain Chapter 91 spaces on the site. It is our understanding that the proponent will be holding an extensive RFI/RFP process to choose what organizations will occupy the 15,000 square feet of civic/cultural space across the three proposed buildings. The public RFI/RFP process will be organized by a third party, and the proponent has hired a DEI consultant to help implement RFI/RFP best practices. A range of organizations will be invited to apply, including those unfamiliar with RFI/RFP processes or those with less organizational capacity than groups historically more likely to respond. To ensure the RFI/RFP process is accessible to a range of potential tenants, the proponent further plans to offer technical and financial assistance to those groups that may not have the in-house capacity or expertise to apply to an RFI/RFP such as this, which should broaden the pool of potential applicants.

We want to commend the proponent for working to establish a transparent process for selecting tenants of civic and cultural spaces, given the importance attracting diverse users for ground floor waterfront spaces and the ongoing advocacy to support process changes. The commitment to democratizing the planning process, by creating a public RFI/RFP process alone is worthy of praise, but in conjunction with their DEI efforts to reach and support non-traditional and underrepresented organizations, it is truly impressive. If the process unfolds as planned, we hope to see other waterfront developments emulate or improve on this model and consider it for other ground floor uses as well.

Finally, we are particularly supportive of the proponent's decision to transfer ownership of the Fort Point Channel and Necco Street Parks to the Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD). We applaud the creation of a trust for the two parks, allowing BPRD to program the sites as they see fit, while leaving the financial, operational, and maintenance responsibility to the 100 Acres Improvement Association. Transferring ownership of the surface of the park to BPRD will enable these open spaces to feel welcoming to all as part of the broader system of public parks in Boston. As this project moves forward in the permitting process, we look forward to seeing a more detailed operations plan.



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Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We look forward to remaining engaged with this project through Chapter 91 licensing, and we welcome further conversations about this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine F. Abbott".

Katherine F. Abbott
President and CEO
Boston Harbor Now