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[bostonharbornow.org](http://bostonharbornow.org)

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Sept 2, 2022

Via email: [stephen.j.harvey@boston.gov](mailto:stephen.j.harvey@boston.gov)

Boston Planning and Development Agency  
1 City Hall Plaza, Floor 9  
Boston MA. 02201

Attn: Stephen Harvey

Re: 776 Summer Street - Phase 1

Dear Mr. Harvey,

Boston Harbor Now respectfully submits the following comments on the *776 Summer Street - Phase 1 Project Notification Form* submitted by Hilco Redevelopment Partners and Redgate Capital Partners. Our organization has been following this project since its inception and most recently attended the August 3rd, 2022 Phase 1 Design Review Public Meeting #1.

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. We use the term “Harborwalk 2.0” to capture the aspirations of this work to ensure that the waterfront is accessible and welcoming, is prepared for the coastal impacts of climate change, and centers equity and inclusion in the development of its design, construction, 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, signage (preferably multi-lingual), full ADA accommodations, and the elimination of features that make users feel unwelcome or excluded.

We are pleased to see that this project’s waterfront design is in compliance with Chapter 91 guidelines and, by doing so, will create an expansive waterfront public space along the water’s edge and throughout the site. We appreciate how the site utilizes its past history and reimagines it to activate the Harborwalk, and we hope that the site is welcoming to everyone who wants to explore the waterfront and linger here. By contrast, the lack of a buffer from the dedicated freight corridor, as well as Conley Terminal more broadly, gives us pause. To further improve the open space on site we ask that future iterations of the project expand and connect the green spaces and reduce the amount of hardscape on site to offer better storm water capture and reduce the heat island effects as well as creating more comfortable recreation and relaxation spaces. We also want to learn more about the site’s activation plan beyond warm sunny days and in relation to the port.



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### *Designing with Waterfront Guidelines*

We appreciate that 776 Summer Street's development has consistently been designed to be in compliance with Chapter 91 regulations. In following the Chapter 91 guidelines, the proponents have planned for a generous and activated Harborwalk. We would also like to commend the proponent's decision to build the Harborwalk as a part of Phase 1 of the project so that these amenities and accommodations are available to residents and visitors at the outset of the project. In addition to addressing the threat of coastal storm flooding expeditiously, we admire the proponent's dedication to creating public open space for the community early on in the site's development.

Similarly, we appreciate the attention to detail on elevating the buildings and site in alignment with the Coastal Zone Flood Resilience Overlay District and considering the coastal impacts of climate change on the site as a whole. All of the public space at the water's edge is elevated above the projected high tides of 2070 to ensure continuous access. Meanwhile, the 21' BCB line of continuous protection provides ample outdoor public spaces above the projected future tides and 100 year storms combined over the same time period.

### *A Welcoming Waterfront*

We request that wayfinding signage will be well incorporated into the site and that view corridors are wide enough that visitors are drawn into this exciting new public space. There are multiple points of entry to access the new Harborwalk, and we ask that all are inviting and encouraging users of the site to visit the waterfront and its surrounding public spaces.

We applaud the dedication to preserving the historic landmarks and character of the site through both the preservation of buildings and industrial artifacts while also making a formerly industrial space into a welcoming pedestrian environment. By maintaining and repurposing the existing structures on the waterfront, visitors will be able to walk over and along the water while engaging with unique facets of the site's past. To further highlight these unique features, we recommend additional interpretive signage that will tie it into other local history signage found along the Harborwalk in South Boston, primarily developed by the Friends of the Boston Harborwalk, in addition to contemporary information about the adjacent working port.

### *Expanding Green Space*

Although we are excited about the amount of new open space this site will provide, especially along the waterfront, we believe that converting some of the hardscape areas into green space will make the proposal even stronger. Current designs show that there is a considerable amount of hardscape throughout the site. Larger,



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contiguous green spaces, along with more shade trees and other plantings, can help to address urban heat island effect, minimize runoff, create more usable areas for visitors, and tend to be more conducive to play.

While much of the paving in the eastern portion of the site is dedicated to the flex area, we believe that some of the areas used for seating along the waterfront could be converted to green space. By moving the benches and tables in the waterfront promenade away from the water's edge, there could be more continuous green space along the waterfront and a visual buffer from the truck route.

Additionally, we suggest that the number of pathways be consolidated. In the M Street Plaza and along Summer Street, there are a number of pathways that could potentially be removed. By streamlining the number of paths in these areas, smaller existing spaces can be combined to create larger green spaces. Overall we anticipate that these design adjustments and others like them can optimize more meaningful green space on site.

#### *Year Round and Port Adjacent Activation*

We hope that the public spaces are being designed and programmed to ensure that the site can be used year round. Current rendering shows how people might use the site during ideal weather conditions. In future iterations of this design we would like to see more information about the site's activation plan, especially its plan for addressing variable weather. Moving forward, it would be helpful to see how the proponent expects to keep the site activated during less idyllic months and how the site responds to rain, snow cold and extreme heat. Future designs might have additional structures or spaces that people can use for shade and shelter.

While the flex space does provide some programming versatility, we wonder whether the space will truly be able to accomplish all the different programming suggested. As designed, it is a blank slate meant to accommodate multiple uses, like a theater or ice skating. However, uses such as these can have more technical design specifications than what is being provided. If these flex spaces are not properly designed, they can become inoperable and remain underutilized. We suggest that the proponent reach out to local operators and other local community members for advice on how best to design the space so that they can be truly operational. Midway Artist Collective, for example, have created design guidelines for amphitheaters based on their advocacy along the Fort Point Channel. Other developers may have learned about the design needs of ice and roller skating rinks.

Finally, the design of the space shows views primarily from the water or across the site. The elevated Freight Corridor will be a steady, industrial presence along the northern side of the site. Designs should respond to the working port with additional consideration of sound and view buffers or find ways to acknowledge and lean into the working port character.



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We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this project, and to discuss the site and open space as a whole. Discussions about parks and open spaces, Harborwalk, and resilience are much more effective when thought of as a whole system rather than on a phase by phase or parcel by parcel basis. We would be happy to speak with you further if there are additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Abbott".

Kathy Abbott  
President and CEO  
Boston Harbor Now