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June 7, 2024

Via email: alexander.strysky@mass.gov

MEPA Office
Attn: Alex Strysky
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Reserved Channel Project (Phase 1) Environmental Notification Form

Dear Mr. Strysky,

Boston Harbor Now respectfully submits the following comments on the Reserved Channel Environmental Notification Form submitted by the Oxford Properties Group. Our organization has been following this project since its inception, and most recently, staff attended the Reserved Channel Meetings on May 8th, 15th, and 21st. A member of our staff, Kelly Sherman, Manager of Waterfront Design, is also on the CAC, a group convened by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) and Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office (MEPA) to provide additional input on this project.

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 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 waterfront 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 waterfront includes a variety of climate adaptation strategies to protect and serve Boston at a district scale. To center equity in waterfront 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.

Phasing and Flood Resilience

With sea levels persistently rising and the threat of coastal flooding becoming more extensive, it is vital that we build new coastal flood infrastructure when the opportunity arises. New waterfront development like this provides an opportunity to reimagine sections of the waterfront as more resilient and welcoming. We hope this development can help expeditiously realize flood infrastructure that protects communities from the threat of coastal inundation while also allowing them to access the water, one of Boston's great natural resources. Coastal flood infrastructure should help contribute to flood protection on a district scale and help create the continuous line of defense needed to protect more inland communities and assets vulnerable to flooding. Flood infrastructure should also be adaptable,



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allowing for additional protection as needed in the future. Finally, flood infrastructure should still allow for connection to the water and enhance the waterfront's use.

Although the primary focus of this filing is Phase 1, it is important to understand how the flood infrastructure created in this Phase will tie into the generally outlined coastal flood plans for future phases of this project. While it is clear that the proponent plans to elevate the entire site above the City of Boston's SLR-DFE of 20.5 feet BCB, resulting in a continuous line of protection, it is unclear how the phasing affects the flood delivery. How will the elevated paths and roads in Phase 1 connect to future phases of the site, which, at the time of construction, will be at the existing grade? Boston Harbor Now suggests that the proponent accelerate the flood infrastructure timelines for the other phases of the development to minimize the need to redesign and reconstruct areas where Phase 1 ties into other phases' flood infrastructure and expedite the closing of flood pathways. We recognize that fully closing these flood pathways requires tie-ins off-site beyond the jurisdictional boundaries of this project. The proponent should work to ensure that abutting property owners are aware of the proponent's coastal flood resilience measures, and the City and MEPA should help facilitate these conversations.

Jurisdiction

As stated in the ENF, the project site is owned mostly by Massport and ground-leased to the proponent, with a lesser portion owned in fee by the proponent. It is our understanding that for purposes of Chapter 91, the Massport-owned portions are governed by a 2001 Memorandum of Understanding between Massport and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). It is also our understanding that the tidelands owned by Massport, even when ground leased to a non-governmental entity, are considered Commonwealth Tidelands, which have a higher standard and greater expectation for public benefits. In future public meetings and filings, we would like the proponent to clarify how the MOU standards differ from typical Commonwealth Tideland standards, if at all. We also would like to note that DEP is in the process of updating their Chapter 91 regulations to better address the threats of sea level rise. Though not yet completed, we hope the proponent will work with DEP to ensure compliance with the future regulations.

Future Uses

Although we appreciate that there was a baseline amount of information provided for future phases of this project, we recognize that more details on the massing, uses, and design of future buildings, open space, and infrastructure are still being developed. Even so, we believe FPAs can play a vital role in creating a more equitable waterfront by introducing uses and amenities that support and encourage waterfront visitation for all. As the proponent selects uses and, eventually, tenants for their FPAs, we ask that they consider ones that will create a more welcoming waterfront and further



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the idea of the waterfront as a destination. FPAs and other waterfront amenities should provide services at various price points, including low-cost and no-cost opportunities, to eliminate social barriers that may deter visitors from coming to the area and to make it accessible to all. Although we expect to see basic amenities that allow visitors to use the space comfortably, like water fountains and bathrooms, we also want to see amenities that actively encourage audiences to visit the waterfront. FPAs should reflect both the local community and the communities we hope to bring to the waterfront and further appeal to audiences who have not historically been welcomed. With a host of FPA spaces coming online through this project over its multiple phases, we recommend the proponent select a diverse range of uses that can attract a broad range of audiences.

Site plans for the whole development also show a potential future building, K1, on the watershed. According to the ENF, “the building is envisioned to be a new hotel with approximately 215,000 sf, of which approximately 10,000 sf on the ground floor will be used for retail and public amenities, and it will be planned with facilities of public accommodation to include a public marina.” This non-water-dependent use would be built on pilings, which are not present on-site, though the proponent has stated that a pier was formerly located there. Boston Harbor Now would like to learn more about the proposed building and hopes to see more information provided about the proposed public benefit this site will have, its impact on water-dependent uses already operating on the channel, and its coastal resilience strategy.

Traffic Impacts to the Working Port

With roughly 1.7 million square feet of mixed-use development anticipated in Phase 1 and an additional 3.5 million square feet planned for subsequent phases, we expect a significant increase in daily trips to and from the site even with the proponent’s goal of prioritizing non-auto travel for residents, employees, and visitors. We appreciate the multi-faceted approach to transportation planning and mitigation outlined in the ENF but hope to see the proponent specifically explain how they will minimize impacts to the nearby DPA and working port facilities. The working port is a vital part of Boston’s economy, and their operations should not be disrupted. Ensuring quick, safe and efficient truck access for cargo shipments as well as workforce access to the various Massport and Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park employment destinations will be vital to working ports continued success.

In conclusion, although the scope of work is centered on Phase 1, it’s important to understand how Phase 1 work ties into the rest of the site, especially as it pertains to coastal flood resilience. Coastal flood resilience, to be effective, needs to provide a continuous line of defense, which is made more challenging by a phased approach. This project should also work to create a more welcoming space along the waterfront. Phase 1 and future uses on-site should provide opportunities to activate the waterfront and bring



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new audiences to the water. Even with the increased visitation we still hope that the nearby working waterfront is still able to flourish.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on this project and will continue to follow its progress toward implementation. If you have additional questions, we would be happy to speak with you or the proponent.

Sincerely,
Kathy Abbott

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

President and CEO
Boston Harbor Now