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15 State Street Suite 1100
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bostonharbornow.org

December 8, 2025

Via email: alexander.strysky@mass.gov

MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114
Attn: Alexander Strysky

RE: EEA 17019 Moran Annex Harborwalk Extension, Boston (Charlestown)

Dear Mr. Strysky,

Boston Harbor Now respectfully submits the following comments on the Moran Annex Harborwalk Extension Expanded Environmental Notification Form submitted by GEI Consultants, Inc. on behalf of the proponent, the Boston Planning Department.

Boston Harbor Now's mission is to ensure that Boston Harbor, its Waterfront, and Islands are accessible and inclusive, and that these special places are properly adapted to the risks of climate change. We advocate for climate resiliency measures that contribute to district-scale flood protection and improve ecosystem services, as well as waterfront activation that welcomes everyone, especially those who have been historically excluded. We do this to realize our Harborwalk 2.0 vision of a vibrant, welcoming, and resilient coastline along Boston's 47-mile waterfront.

Harborwalk Design

We appreciate the community engagement process around this project, which led to the inclusion of "a pedestrian handrail between the path and the channel with active and passive amenities spaced along and behind the Harborwalk to include benches, picnic tables, shade structures, exercise equipment, and an over-widened pathway near the Chelsea Street bridge for fishing".

In conformance with Chapter 313 of the Acts of 2022, the proponent proposes a "10-foot-wide shared use path extension to the existing Moran Annex Harborwalk that begins approximately 500 feet east of the Little Mystic boat ramp. The Harborwalk will extend east approximately 1,000 feet along the existing Little Mystic Channel seawall to the intersection of Terminal and Chelsea Streets in Charlestown".

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Site plans show public pedestrian access from east of the Little Mystic boat ramp to the intersection of Chelsea and Terminal Streets underneath the Tobin Bridge, completing the Little Mystic Harborwalk loop. This proposed extension links to an existing segment of the Harborwalk along the Little Mystic Boat Ramp which currently dead ends to the west. After the proposed 1,000 feet, the pathway continues east with an at-grade connection to the Chelsea Street/Terminal Street intersection, which is currently being redesigned by the Boston Transportation Department (BTD). Boston Harbor Now is appreciative of the creation of new segments of the Boston Harborwalk, especially in areas where none exist. Given that the proposed Harborwalk extension abuts a working port area, we encourage the proponent to work with BTD to ensure that pedestrian pathways, traffic lights, and roadway configurations maintain safe public access while avoiding adverse effects to nearby maritime and freight operations.

As outlined in the 2018 Climate Resilient Design Standards & Guidelines for Protection Of Public Rights-Of-Way, published by the Boston Public Works Department, Boston's Harborwalk is expected to be at a minimum of 12-foot wide. Although there are a few segments of the Harborwalk that are only 10-foot wide, it is not a best practice. We are aware that Chapter 313 of the Acts of 2022 specifies a 10-foot wide Harborwalk, and this site is constrained by the Designated Port Area behind it and the need for space for the proposed amenities. However, we urge the proponent to consider creative design solutions that would allow for the typical 12-foot width.

Creating Connections

As advocates for Boston's entire 43-mile Harborwalk, Boston Harbor Now and our partners advocate for a connected, welcoming, and resilient Harborwalk along Boston's entire 47-mile coastline. For this vision to become a reality, adjacent property owners need to collaborate to ensure their portions of the Harborwalk connect and create continuous, safe access.

We support the work of the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) around the Little Mystic Channel, which has been working since 2018 to provide better opportunities for recreation, access to the waterfront, social gatherings, and climate resiliency along the channel. With 29 Environmental Justice (EJ) Populations living within a mile of the site, and 612 additional EJ Populations within 5 miles of the project, this Harborwalk extension has the potential to benefit thousands of residents who face barriers to accessing Boston's waterfront. Access to open space is especially important for this part of our City, as residents



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within a 10-minute walk of the Little Mystic Channel fall in the 98th percentile nationally for exposure to diesel emissions, traffic, and hazardous waste (US EPA 2024).

This project should tie into MyRWA and community-led plans for the Little Mystic Urban Meadow and Little Mystic Park/Boat Ramp. We recognize that only a portion of this section of the channel is owned by the proponents, but we are hopeful that improvements will be possible by coordinating with abutting property owners, such as Boston Public Schools.

Wayfinding and signage are necessary and vital to help people navigate to and from the existing segments of the Harborwalk running along the Little Mystic Channel and to maintain public safety. We urge the proponent to work with the Friends of the Boston Harborwalk to include multilingual signage to welcome residents and visitors to this new Harborwalk extension.

Harborwalk Resilience

The proposed Harborwalk has been designed to elevate a minimum path elevation above the 2050 Spring Tide, elevation 14.79 feet BCB Datum. We appreciate that the proponent intends to address coastal flooding at their site, and also want to ensure that the Harborwalk can be further elevated in the future. Elevating the Harborwalk to prevent nuisance flooding for the structure's design life, or until 2070, is a best practice that allows the Harborwalk to remain connected to the water while also keeping it largely protected from the impacts of flooding. On days where the Harborwalk is expected to flood because of storm surge, we ask that the proponent have a warning system in place to close the Harborwalk. Any maintenance repairs to the existing infrastructure to allow for further elevation in the future should be addressed and Harborwalk should be constructed with materials capable of withstanding occasional coastal flooding.

Given that the original seawall in this parcel was constructed between 1858 and 1878, there is a clear need for the rehabilitation of the existing seawall to improve structural stability and enhance coastal resilience. The process of bolstering this seawall should examine feasibility of living seawalls and other nature-based solutions to provide ecosystem co-benefits.

We appreciate that ADA connections to and from this Harborwalk extension are being considered, as well as other grade changes that occur along the Harborwalk.



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Gentle grading slopes allow people of all abilities to utilize this important public amenity.

Site Resilience

We commend the proponent for building flood infrastructure that can be further adapted for future flood impacts and elevations above the projected 2070 1% flood (19.5 BCB), according to the Boston Planning Department's Base Flood Elevation estimate.

According to the filing's Climate Resilience Design Standards Tool Project Report, the site faces high risk exposure to sea level rise and storm surge, stormwater flooding, and extreme heat. In a 2070 1% storm planning horizon, the projected water surface elevation area weighted average is 13.7 NAVD88 (20.2 BCB).

We understand that the design of the Harborwalk to overhang the coastal bank will buffer the area located behind the Harborwalk from high energy waves and surges, protecting the Designated Port Area and Land Subject to Coastal Storm Flowage behind this Harborwalk segment. Bolstering the seawall will also promote resistance to increased wave energy.

In conclusion, the creation of the Moran Annex Harborwalk Extension is an exciting prospect, helping improve waterfront access in areas where none currently exists. However, the Harborwalk proposed in the filing is narrower than the ideal 12-foot width. We support the proponent's desire to build a flood-resilient asset that can help protect their site in the future and hope the elevations proposed match the design life of the new Harborwalk being created. Even though flooding will still occur at this site without additional infrastructure to create a continuous barrier, we appreciate that the proponent is taking steps to help make the Little Mystic Channel more resilient to inevitable flooding.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on this project and look forward to participating in the upcoming Chapter 91 licensing process to discuss ways to furnish, activate, and create a more welcoming public realm. We would be happy to speak with you or the proponent if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathy [unclear]".



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Kathy Abbott
President and CEO
Boston Harbor Now