



*building a better neighborhood together in Fort Point & the Seaport*

The Honorable Kathleen Theoharides  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900  
Boston, MA 02114

(submitted via email to [alexander.stryisky@mass.gov](mailto:alexander.stryisky@mass.gov))

October 1, 2021

Re: 244-284 A Street Draft Environmental Impact Report, EEA #16250

Dear Secretary Theoharides,

FPNA is writing to provide input to the DEIR for the proposed development located at 244 - 284 A Street in South Boston.

**Project Site**

244 – 284 A Street is subject to MEPA 2009 South Boston Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan Amendment (MHP), which also incorporates the Fort Point Channel Watersheet Activation Plan. The project site is also under jurisdiction of the City of Boston’s 100 Acres Master Plan and Planned Development Area (PDA) 69 zoning, codified in 2007. The entire site is situated on filled Commonwealth tidelands and under MassDEP Chapter 91 open space and ground floor Facilities of Public Accommodation (FPA) jurisdiction. The property is also located in FEMA 100 year flood zone and is identified by the City of Boston Climate Ready Boston and Resilient Boston Harbor as one of the most vulnerable areas to sea level rise and critical to providing flood protection from Fort Point to Dorchester. The site is also part of the City of Boston Groundwater Trust Overlay District and adjacent to the Fort Point Channel Historic District.

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## **Process**

### MEPA

We commend the Proponent for following the Secretary's certificate on the ENF and not filing the DEIR until after the parks conceptual design process. We respectfully maintain that the proposed building height increases over approved levels, one by more than 80% the other by 50%, combined with the site now creating additional shading on the watersheet and parks, and a reconfigured Waterheet Dependent Use Zonel are significant enough to require a South Boston Waterfront Municipal Plan (SBWMHP) amendment with full public engagement as opposed to a clarification without public involvement.

We remain seriously concerned about the timing and sequencing of the clarification that the Secretary requested be "sought and obtained prior to filing the DEIR in order to reflect changes and mitigation to conform" (source: 09.18.20 Secretary Certificate on 244-284 A St ENF) and the City and Proponent's noncompliant proposed year end submission. A year end clarification filing means that it will most likely occur after the project receives City approvals and to the exclusion of community input and discussion. We continue to advocate for a SBWMHP amendment process to address changes to the project that do not conform. We understand that there are mechanisms such as requesting a supplemental filing and subsequent opportunities to comment however, our experience is that supplemental filings are often brief and do not provide adequate additional information or the opportunity to get real-time answers to subsequent questions. We also recognize that offsets and substitutions agreed to between the Proponent and City without community input are more difficult to change via comment letters. Therefore, we request that further planning and approval await the clarification decision and that the proponent submits a revised DEIR after the City's clarification is submitted and the State's decision is obtained. Overall, we are also concerned about the precedence this (disregard for the Secretary's decision or procedure) sets for future MHP alterations by a proponent without public process and input.

### Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA)

The community remains very concerned about the project's resiliency measures and the lack of a comprehensive flood protection approach for sea level rise and storm water retention / detention with sufficient infrastructure capacity for the site,

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adjacent properties, and the inner neighborhood. During the City's Article 80 Draft Impact Project Report (DEIR) public meetings, less than 10 minutes was allocated to resiliency, not allowing for the presentation of "a comprehensive analysis of mitigation measures" requested by the Secretary. Climate resiliency and adaptation is a complex issue for the community to understand and is deserving of at least one individual meeting in order to review and comment appropriately. In addition, a scheduled meeting to cover ground floor activation and urban design, occurred without covering urban design, important in understanding density, wind and shadow impacts and compliance to the SBWMP. This topic did not get discussed before the City closed the DPIR public comment deadline. In a rather unprecedented move, the proponent recognizing the importance of these topics and started holding private unadvertised meetings to address these two topics. We request that you recommend these important topics (resiliency and urban design) come before the community through a BPDA public meeting process that is inclusive, transparent and involves the appropriate City departments.

### **Parks & Open Space**

Park sizes continue to shift and result in a deficit to original planning to even the most recent 100 Acres Open Space concept plan. The waterfront park (FT1) is oddly shaped giving preference to buildings over park space. This destination park directly along the Channel is yet to meet its potential as quality park attracting neighbors and visitors throughout the Commonwealth. There is much work yet to be done to fully define park design through individual park design meetings to meet the needs of recreation and resilience. The amount of hardscape still needs to be reduced. On the more inland park, FT2, cycle lanes should be removed from the park and be put on Garage Access Rd.

The neighborhood advocates for a public ownership privately maintained park model for the two proposed parks, similar to the existing City of Boston A Street Park in Fort Point. This model provides permanent protection of the park making it a truly public park welcoming to all and provides the necessary private funding to maintain it.

Binford Street is a City of Boston Street that the proponent is proposing to terminate at Necco Street extension and create restricted open space with required vehicular access accommodations to the Gillette Pumphouse and the MassDOT emergency tunnel head house.

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The ownership and management of that space is undefined as well as its integration into the adjoining Chapter 91 Binford Park, recently sold by Gillette to Tishman Speyer

For the realization of a cohesive, welcoming and truly public series of parks to be created in the 10 Acres being developed along this stretch of Fort Point Channel four property owners need to come together with the community to bring about this network. We ask that the State require the City of Boston to engage the respective property owners, along with the community, and undertake a robust, integrated public planning process for these critical resilient and recreational parks and open spaces. This process should also result in an operational and ownership agreement that ensures perpetual public access. In specific reference to the Parks and Harborwalk, this means Related Beal, National Development with partner Alexandria Real Estate, Gillette, Tishman Speyer and the City of Boston.

### **Chapter 91**

FPA civic and cultural space should match or exceed other projects along the Fort Point Channel and in the South Boston waterfront. A project of this magnitude should include cultural and civic spaces of at least 30% of the required FPA total space. In a neighborhood with a deficit of civic spaces and opportunities to create community, these spaces are critical for the growth and success of the neighborhood. Providing a mix of FPA uses at different ranges of affordability (McDonald pricing on up) that are also reflective of the City's diverse population could be achieved by having a percentage of BIPOC businesses so visitors see people who look like them and feel welcome. This goal could be accomplished through a public RFP process and requirement to include a percentage of minority owned businesses. Civic and cultural spaces should be conducted through a RFP process to ensure the best applicants get these prized spaces. With this goal, there needs to be affordable rent, no pass through of property taxes, and applicant selection before construction starts to tailor spaces with a white box build out specific to the organization. It would be helpful if the City's small business unit could work with the applicant to make sure the construction costs and associated budget is realistic and a City liaison position for the successful applicant to assist over the life of the licensed FPA space.

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There is also a need for spaces to support park and watershed activation such as visitor storage, restrooms, changing area, showers, game equipment, bottle refill stations, water fountains, etc..

Funding is necessary for watershed activation and park programming. This funding should be funneled through the existing City of Boston Fort Point Operations Board in a public grant process and not parceled out independently to private parties.

The project area's direct frontage along the Fort Point Channel is the only section along the entire channel with sloped banking. This area is accessed via Binford Street and currently used for the launching of floating public art and dragon boats. There have been no plans shared by the proponent for any watershed activation. At minimum direct public access to the sloped bank on the Fort Point Channel must be maintained.

4 parking spaces are available under the properties existing Chapter 91 license and these should be expanded to support increased watershed activation and programming that will be generated from the project. The parking spaces should be in a location where it is easy to move kayaks, paddle boards or other small boats from the garage to the public dock or boat launch. The parking hours should be adjusted to reflect viable water time hours to encourage greater water activation and not optimized as is currently done to private use.

### **Building Density**

The 2009 South Boston Municipal Harbor Plan defined maximum building heights and substitutions considering density, shadow impacts and other elements identified in the City of Boston's 100 Acres Master Plan. There have not been any exceptional public benefits identified that would support the proposed project composition of three buildings with two exceeding approved building heights ( G5 zoned at 100' proposed at 180' and G6 zoned at 100' and proposed at 150'). The SBWMHP approved building heights should be retained. Other concerns center around noise and public safety of the Life Sciences lab building directly across from an existing 80' historic residential and future residential on the site. We would like to see a more detailed analysis of the noise generated by the rooftop mechanicals and a reduction of the 50' foot mechanicals by incorporating mechanicals within the buildings themselves. There are examples in the Seaport and South Boston where this has been done.

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We are also concerned that the current economic engine of the Life Sciences industry and request that the office building along the Channel be restricted from converting into Life Sciences, especially given the impact of increased shading of the watershed from heightened mechanicals.

### **Resilience**

The proponent is incorporating climate resilient solutions as defined in the City's 2018 Coastal Resilience Solutions for South Boston Report. They are also planning to integrate a proposed City of Boston berm and sea wall solution along Fort Point Channel based upon an application for a FEMA pre-disaster grant. The City has yet to receive approval of the \$10M FEMA Grant that would fund their solution. We continue to request a detailed explanation of standards used and solutions selected as well as the operational details of the proposed flood gates. The proponent has not indicated what their solution is if the full City of Boston's proposal is not approved. Given the uncertainty and lack of implementation details, we request that the FEIR not be filed until the City receives approval of the FEMA grant before moving forward with the project.

As stated in the Secretary's Certificate, "I encourage the Proponent to consult the most updated climate data in design solutions..", we too would like to see more updated climate science integrated in resilient and adaptive design solutions as well as planning for combined storm water and sea level rise flooding events on the site including adjacent properties.

Building G6 at the corner of Binford & A is at existing street elevation putting FPA space in that building at risk. All FPA space should be at or above BPDA Sea Level Rise Design Flood Elevation (SLR-DFE).

The Harborwalk needs to be appropriately raised so it remains accessible to the public and be adaptable to sea level rise, storms and nuisance flooding. The adjacent private space is not designed to accommodate this foot and bicycle traffic. Circulating the public through private property for passage is not acceptable or a long term solution given the challenge of private interests and the ability to create a welcome experience for all.

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The proponent is proposing close to 150 new trees for the site. What has not been answered is how quickly these trees will provide shade. There are over 50 maturing trees which have been on the site for 20 years. It would be prudent to save as many of these trees as possible. If that is not possible, we request that they are replaced with by large trees that could contribute immediately to the environment.

### **Transportation**

We are pleased that the proponent has fully embraced the idea of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and Complete Streets designs, and has provided travel projections for the project that predict a net total of 4,633 trips generated by the site of which 4,089 are walking, biking and transit trips - an impressive 88% of all trips! We also applaud the plan to redevelop what currently is non-permeable parking lot pavement into a park and pathway system which will help control the impacts of tidal flooding along the channel.

However, we are disappointed and concerned that the DEIR/DPIR devotes so little analysis of future conditions and, more specifically, how these thousands of trips will be served. Section 4.4 Transportation Build (2028) Condition of the document devotes (excluding maps and tables) 1/2 page to bike accommodation, 2 pages to transit, and 0 pages to walking (this notwithstanding that both walking and transit mode shares will depend on pedestrian facilities - including especially walking access from South Station and Broadway Station). And we are disappointed the project team is seeking to “not overburden” a transit system which currently does not serve this area sufficiently, instead of actively increasing capacity and service in advance of the rapid growth expected at Channelside. This development cannot be “Transit Oriented” without providing for increased transit usage.

This parcel at 244-284 A Street is a crucial connection to a network of safe bicycling and walking routes that flow throughout the city, and needs to be incorporated into a vision of a connected, sustainable, and safe waterfront trail and harborwalk that includes all of the City’s waterfront neighborhoods.

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We ask that MEPA require the City of Boston (along with MassDOT, the MBTA and Massport) to complete, fund and begin the implementation of the South Boston Transit Study prior to advancing the permitting of the project. We believe that without such action the proponent's project (along with existing and other new development projects) will choke the neighborhood with traffic, provide insufficient transit service, not include an accessible sidewalk system (both within the development zone and connecting to South and Broadway Stations), and lack safe bicycle facilities connected to a larger network for those most vulnerable on our roads.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Ready  
FPNA

cc.  
Nick Collins, State Senator 1st Suffolk  
David Biele, State Representative 4th Suffolk  
Daniel Padien, MassDEP

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