



## **Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Planning Advisory Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, December 3, 2014  
Atlantic Wharf, 290 Congress Street

### **Attendees**

**Advisory Committee:** Sydney Asbury, Tom Wooters, Bob Venuti, Susanne Lavoie, Greg Vasil, Bud Ris, Joanne Hayes-Rines, Vivien Li, Meredith Rosenberg, Jim Klocke, Linda Jonash, Bruce Berman, Phil Griffiths, Nigella Hillgarth

**City of Boston:** Richard McGuinness, BRA; Chris Busch, BRA; Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

**Consultant Team:** Matthew Littell, Utile; Meera Deean, Utile; Tom Skinner, Durand & Anastas

**Government Representatives:** Valerie Gingrich, CZM; Ron Killian, MassDOT

**Members of the Public:** Daniel Jones, Mike Horit, Diane Rubin, Don Chiofaro, Niki Alleyne, Rick Moore, Dorothy Keville, Al Raine, Jay Spense, Barbara Yanke, Rita Advani, Karen Marcarelli, Elizabeth Smith, Charles Norris, Peggy Briggs, Will Adams, Rachel Borgatti, Soomin Lim, Gail Donovan, Andrew Magee, Tom Walsh, Lee Kozol, Victor Brogna, Sy Mintz, Valerie Burns, Chris Fincham, Tomas Nally, Gary Robinson, Eric Krauss, Jacqueline Lawless, Gabor Korodi, Pam McDermott, Jamy Madeja, Linda Gottlieb, Jessica Seney, Robert Stricker, Alex Tenenby, Jinqwei Zhang

### **Meeting Summary**

Chris Busch, BRA, opened the meeting and noted that the session would focus on the whole planning area and review the urban design context, proposed substitutions and a recommended strategy for prioritizing locations for area-wide offsets, and implementing the Public Realm Plan.

Matthew Littell, Utile, began the discussion by reviewing building massing, volume and heights in and around the planning area, starting with a diagram representing heights of existing buildings and those proposed within the planning area based on 100-foot increments. The analysis indicates most of the major height is in the Downtown core and Financial District with lower buildings closer to the waterfront and. He noted substantial height on the waterfront would be considered exceptional and not match any existing building height pattern. Matthew also mentioned that there is no standard height pattern for the Downtown Waterfront as there are varied heights and massing along the harbor.

Matthew then presented side profiles which represented the height plane of buildings from the Downtown and Back Bay area to the waterfront, which again represented varied patterns of height with different conditions. Views and view corridors were then presented, focusing on locations along Atlantic Avenue and Downtown and views to the water and how future development might affect those apertures. The Custom House Tower was then called out as an historic asset with views worthy of preservation. Several vantage points along the waterfront were reviewed where the Customs House Tower is part of the skyline, to develop a sense of how new development might impact views from the pedestrian level. Matthew noted the renderings and perspectives provided are intended to assist the Committee in determine the proper limits or costs of certain heights and densities for the development sites in the planning area. Density was then reviewed with a sampling of density as represented by floor

area ratio (FAR) for existing buildings in and around the planning area. Matthew noted it is an abstract measure but assists in gaining some perspective on the whole planning area. The FAR's of the proposed developments and what current zoning allows were also provided.

The ground plane of the planning area was then discussed with a diagram representing different qualifications of open space including Harborwalk, plazas, streets, sidewalks, landscaped zones, and public and private open space. Locations within the planning area serving the general public were then framed, including facilities of public accommodation, special public destination facilities and areas for waterfront and water transportation access. Matthew then presented a proposed prioritization scheme for the open space areas in the planning area, separating the district into five zones: the connective tissue comprised of street, sidewalks and alleys that link the Greenway into the planning area parcels; plazas and open space that connect to the waterfront; public realm along the water which is the prime real estate for waterfront access; the actual watersheet; and opportunity sites which are locations that have been called out through the planning process and Public Realm Plan that could be improved as open space. The zones were presented as another lens to view areas of potential impact and improvement. A prioritization scheme outlining the type and where offsets should occur with new development was also reviewed.

Joanne Hayes-Rines, MHPAC Member, inquired as to how the Northern Avenue area between Hook Lobster and the GSA building could be a priority area if the bridge will be open for traffic. Matthew Littell, noted that one lane of the bridge will be committed to pedestrian and bike traffic, and there are ways to design the area even with vehicular traffic so it acts more as a shared street and treating the whole intersection as one integrated area for public improvement. Joanne asked if vehicular traffic is a given for the rehabilitation of the bridge. Rich McGuinness, BRA, stated that it is planned to have the bridge open to vehicular traffic and it is important for the Committee to recommend different alternatives for improving the space through the harbor plan to provide future guidance.

Vivian Li, MHPAC Member, asked when the Committee would have time to discuss and provide feedback. Rich McGuinness, noted that it will be helpful to have a draft first for the Committee to discuss and review amongst themselves, and a draft will be developed over the winter break. Vivien asked Rich to clarify if the Committee would have time to determine what to recommend to the City. Rich stated that the draft plan would outline recommendations first based upon feedback received to date and material presented.

Bruce Berman, MHPAC Member, noted that it is important to preserve views and to consider how the waterfront is framed and viewed from within the district. He also recognized the BRA's position of incorporating a number of different perspectives and priorities in developing the plan and asked that the Committee have an opportunity to review and comment on the final draft before its submission to the state.

Bud Ris, MHPAC Member, asked if the priority open space areas are limited to only public land and how the offset prioritization type and locational schemes are integrated. Matthew Littell, noted that the goals are general in nature and would guide the types of offsets and how they would be embedded into the locational scheme. Rich McGuinness stated that the prioritization has focused on public land as it might be easier to facilitate improvements at those locations.

Bob Venuti, MHPAC Member, also raised concern with offsets related to the Northern Avenue Bridge area due to uncertainty of when the bridge may be rehabilitated. Matthew Littell noted that it was not the intent to have offsets on the bridge. Rich McGuinness mentioned that offsets would have to be permanent in nature as the state would likely not approve of mitigation that is only temporary. Bruce Berman asked if the bridge tenders house was open for consideration regarding offsets. Rich responded that the structure has been discussed.

Linda Jonash, MHPAC Member, commented that when discussing the public realm that connections be represented more broadly to include open space areas and connections adjacent to the planning area, and suggested that the area in front of the Aquarium be included and be thought of more broadly as part of the open space opportunity areas with the possible relocation of the IMAX theater into an adjacent development to further open the area, and urged that more creative options be explored for areas along the watershed to activate the waterfront.

Meredith Rosenberg, MHPAC Member, referenced two planning priorities of access to the waterfront and open space on the waterfront and noted that it is confusing that there is already discussion of open space offsets offsite when keeping open space on the development parcel should be the priority when there is development from scratch. Matthew Littell, noted that the proposed offset strategy does have as the first priority offsets on site.

Vivien Li, inquired about the heights represented and asked for a clarification of the Chapter 91 performance standards regarding height on the waterfront and the extent of tidelands jurisdiction. Tom Skinner, Durand & Anastas, answered that one of the principles of Chapter 91 is that heights step up from the waterfront to prevent the waterfront from being walled off. He noted the Downtown Waterfront was developed in advance of many of the current performance standards and therefore the existing building massing and open space do not meet the standards in the area. Regarding the extent of jurisdiction the area subject to the tideland regulations applies to filled tidelands and extends landward 250-feet or the first public way, whichever is further landward. He also noted regarding the offset prioritization the state is focused on the implementation of the Public Realm and Watersheet Activation Plan and improvements made in jurisdictional areas before entertaining mitigation options outside the planning area.

Tom Wooters, MHPAC Member, noted that the standard for new non-water dependent development is that it should be modest in size and condensed in footprint and that standard has been emphasized in prior MHP's, along with a proportionality regarding offsets and substitutions and that they achieve the tideland policy objectives with equal or greater effectiveness. He stated we are looking at projects that exceed Chapter 91 standards significantly and it is difficult to understand how offsets could be developed in proportion to the proposed substitutions and meet the statutory requirements. He also noted in the regulation and prior decisions, offsets need to be on site or in proximity to the development site and that offsite offsets should not be included in the prioritization scheme. Lastly he referenced CZM's appearance at the last meeting and there emphasis on precedent and the need for consistency and asked that Committee be provided prior MHP approvals and decision that CZM will be looking at when evaluating the current plan.

Maryanne Connolly, MHPAC Member, asked why the land around Harbor Towers is represented graphically as open space. Matthew Littell, stated that it is represented as open space, however, it is hatched as it is private and not open to the public.

Suzanne Lavoie, MHPAC Member, asked if the Committee would be discussing offsets based on the assumption for the proposed heights will be approved, or is the discussion about offsets to activate the waterfront and water dependent uses irrespective of whether a project moves forward. Rich McGuinness stated that there is no building proposal or height that is set at this time, rather the point of today's meeting was to review area-wide substitutions and an offsetting strategy to begin the discussion of how additional height and lot coverage will be mitigated.

Vivien Li, noted that the planning process is at a point where there needs to be more discussion and back and forth among the Committee members so there is more of a dialogue, which is needed for the development of the MHP.

Sydney Asbury, Committee Chair then opened the meeting for public comment.

Marcelle Willock, Harbor Towers Resident, specified that all of the Harbor Towers green space is private, however, the fence along Atlantic Avenue has been recently replaced and is lower than the previous fence and new plantings have been installed which allow more open sky and better views. She noted the area is an oasis of green. Additionally, the waterfront plaza with the public sculpture is frequented by the public, and there is now improved lighting and wayfinding signage will be installed.

A Harbor Towers Resident, raised concern with the public cutting through the property and not staying on the Harborwalk and there are congestion issues at India Street and where vehicular traffic is present.

Sy Mintz, Broad Street Resident, noted the reality of open space in the planning area differs from the percentages previously presented, as much of the area consists of roads and primarily for cars. He also referenced the Harborwalk and stated it should be specified in all open space plan representations, and called out State Street as a primary view corridor which needs to be maintained and protected.

Tom Palmer, stated that he hopes there will be a real discussion of all the material that has been presented to develop the MHP, and that there needs to be consideration given to all the parcels that may be developed in the future.

Jamy Madeja, referenced the opportunity zones represented in pink as important areas and mentioned the Northern Avenue Bridge and the developments on either side of the bridge that have had to design their projects in anticipation of vehicular traffic on the bridge and cautioned against planning and developing offsets for a bridge that will not carry vehicles. She also noted that private property should be respected and that private property owners often meet their Chapter 91 obligations and that offset efforts should be focused on those areas where there will be the greatest public benefit.

Steven Comen, Harbor Towers Resident, inquired why the Harbor Towers greenspace was included in the open space calculation and percentage. Matthew Littell, noted that it was a calculation based upon a general Chapter 91 standard for open space. Steven noted that the Harbor Towers open space does provide harbor view corridors for those in buildings in the Downtown area, and referenced the views that are now afforded from those in buildings that can see the harbor over the Harbor Garage. He stated there is value associated with those views and those views should be considered. Matthew Littell noted that technically the focus of Chapter 91 is on the ground plane and views from the pedestrian level within the public realm, not private buildings.

Rick Moore, Harbor Towers Resident, asked if the opportunity zones referenced earlier are where offsets are to be focused from adjacent development, or is it up to the developer to come back to the city and determine where the offsets go. Matthew Littell, noted that the areas are called out as locations for off-site mitigation adjacent to development parcels, and the city will be making the recommendations on where mitigation will be focused. Rich McGuinness added that one area will likely be the Harbor Islands due to the direct connection the area has with water transportation and the islands. Bruce Berman, asked if there is a similar connection to the Greenway. Rich stated that there is a stronger case for the islands, but there could be opportunities for offsets with the Greenway for creating or enhancing open space.

Jane Stricker, Harbor Towers Resident, noted that Tom Wooters and Suzanne Lavoie have provided the most direct comments at today's meeting.

Jamy Medeja, noted that preparation for sea level rise could be considered as an offset. Bud Ris noted that the update to the city's Climate Action Plan is currently under review and referenced a plan requirement requiring all city planning efforts to incorporate climate change into the planning document.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 PM.