walkBoston

July 10, 2009

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Comments on the Renaissance Village Environmental Notification Form (ENF) Brockton, MA
EOEA #14424

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for the Renaissance Village project in Brockton. The project is a 40-R mixed use project of 6 stories, including 308 residential units, commercial and retail space, and a 460-space parking garage.

The project is located in an urban setting that occupies one full city block of downtown Brockton. It is readily accessible on foot to the Brockton commuter rail station, one of three serving the city. It will be a good addition to the city by helping to establish downtown as a place to live as well as work or shop.

The location of the project is related to numerous Brockton efforts to revitalize the downtown area. Stimulus efforts include the planned use of CDBG funds to design parking facilities, a Commercial Area Revitalization District [CARD] for downtown under Chapter 40D of the Massachusetts General Law, "Economic Opportunity Areas" in downtown pursuant to Massachusetts Economic Development Investment Program [EDIP], and establishment of a loan pool for downtown business facade and signage upgrades recommended by the Mayor's Economic Advisors group.

The proposed Project offers various pedestrian benefits. It can become an asset to downtown by introducing handsome housing and retail units into an area with vacant lots and substandard buildings. The site is one block from the Brockton Police Station and two blocks from City Hall. It is situated very close to transit – with both the Commuter Rail Station and the new Brockton Area Transit (BAT) Station serving all local bus routes within a very short walk. The project site is part of a larger Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) planned for the heart of the city and implemented in part by a 40R Downtown Brockton Smart Growth Overlay District zoning classification. A small open space on the southwest corner of the site, the Veteran's Memorial Park, will be retained and enlarged. The large Enterprise Building at the northwest corner of the site will be retained in part, with portions of the back of the building to be razed.

The site is designed to be a mixed-use development with buildings that begin directly at the sidewalk. There are two inner "courtyards." One courtyard provides landscaped open space for the adjacent residential units and the second houses a two-level parking facility directly

adjacent to commercial space and the other courtyard. Commercial space is focused on a midblock portion of Centre Street and at the intersection of Montello and Centre Streets.

The plan calls for reconstruction of all the perimeter sidewalks at a minimum width of 5 feet. None of the surrounding roadways will be widened or otherwise reconstructed as a result of this project. Access to the parking garage first level is located on the Centre Street frontage at midblock. Access to the interior parking garage's second floor and building service court are located on Petronelli Way along the north side of the site, and away from the residential units.

Sidewalks around the project appear to be planned for somewhat distinct uses. For example, on the Main Street side of the site, the Enterprise Building and the Veteran's Park occupy much of the frontage. Veteran's Park is to be enlarged with new landscaped areas, which should be a good location for additional street trees and benches.

On the Centre Street frontage, landscaped areas are planned in front of both the retail and residential units. The spaces to be landscaped appear to be significantly wide; perhaps street trees and benches might be introduced here as well as in the Veteran's park. The first floor level parking garage entry at midblock on the Centre Street frontage should be carefully designed to ensure pedestrian safety. Warning signs and audible signals would help protect walkers at this location.

On the Montello Street side of the site, building locations along the sidewalk are varied, with some façades further away from the street edge than others. The variability in the width suggests potential locations for street trees along this façade, in the portions of the building that have the widest sidewalk.

Along Petronelli Way, the site will have large service areas and access to the second level parking garage at midblock. The group of Petronelli Way housing units closest to Montello Street appears to front directly on the sidewalk with all entrances near the service court. Landscaping on this frontage might also be beneficial.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the ENF for Renaissance Village in Brockton. The Project's final design should fully consider pedestrian concerns to create a walkable design that will help activate the project, downtown Brockton and links to the public institutions and transit that are nearby. We sincerely hope our comments on the ENF are incorporated into any requirements and conditions for the next phase of design and permitting documents.

Please contact us for any clarification or additional comments that you may need.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

Cc Mayor James E. Harrington
Wayne McAllister, Brockton Planning Board