



WalkBoston

September 7, 2007

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

RE: Expanded Environmental Notification Form
Harvard Allston Campus 20-Year Master Plan
MEPA # 14069

Dear Mr. Bowles:

We have reviewed the EENF for the Harvard University 20-Year Master Plan, comprising an overview of the university's proposed developments in the Allston neighborhood of Boston. The EENF requests a MEPA Phase One Waiver for the Science Complex Project in Allston, which would allow the MEPA review for the complex to move ahead of the MEPA review of the Master Plan.

Process Concerns

As expressed by many of the people who spoke at the MEPA meeting held on August 23rd in Allston, WalkBoston feels that the speed and timing of the EENF, including the proponent's request for a Phase I waiver is an unfortunate element of the review. While there has been extensive interaction between Harvard and the community about the Master Plan, the timing and speed of this filing seemed to catch almost everyone off guard. In particular, granting of a Phase I waiver request depends on compliance with several criteria including the availability of "ample and unconstrained infrastructure," a criterion that is difficult to assess without more detailed information.

Initial Reactions

Our review of the Harvard Allston Campus 20-Year Master Plan and the MEPA Phase One Waiver for the Science Complex raised a number of questions concerning the pedestrian environment, open spaces, parking and proposed changes in traffic patterns that will affect pedestrians. We began with an examination of The Plan for Harvard in Allston (Draft) Executive Summary, January, 2007- a precursor to the EENF that is the subject of the current analysis. We used this document extensively as a guide to the proposed evolution of the Allston campus and proposals that affect the Science Complex. We also used the Science Complex DPIR for details of that project. We wanted to see if we understood the details of the Science Complex and their effects on pedestrian facility planning for the initial project. We also wanted to see to what extent the Science Complex, if built according to the current plans, will guide the Master Plan's subsequent developments, and whether the Master Plan might be changed if the proposal for the Science Complex did not come about.

We agree with the overall goals of the January 2007 Executive Summary of the Plan for Harvard in Allston with respect to place making. We agree with the goal of a shared urban campus/community environment that offers more open green space and improvements to streetscapes. We think it wise to make Western Avenue an active urban boulevard. We agree with the notion that a network of campus green space can help integrate academic development with civic, neighborhood and public functions.

Furthermore, we agree with the transportation framework that seeks a diverse, inter-connected system of memorable and accessible places, each having a specific function and a distinct identity. We think positively about the proposed open space hierarchy of core open spaces as focal points for recreation and relaxation, courtyards within building groupings (such as the Science Complex), and generously landscaped paths that connect all of these open spaces, “so that one can walk internally from any place on campus to any other and to Barry’s Corner by crossing only one or two streets.”

General Conclusions

1. The Harvard Allston Science Complex and the Harvard Allston Campus 20-year Master Plan are intertwined and highly interrelated. The Science Complex appears to set policy for many aspects of the Master Plan as it affects pedestrians. Yet the Master Plan does not include the pedestrian policies that appear to be emerging from the plan for the Science Complex.
2. There is little documentation that existing transportation infrastructure facilities and services are ample and unconstrained in support of the Science Complex Project, as is required for a waiver. There is also little documentation that the proposed improvements that are part of the Science Complex will mitigate the impacts on several of the streets that serve the area.

Questions

- The proposed Harvard Allston Science Complex marks the beginning of development of 200 acres in the City of Boston. Is this project intended to serve as the mechanism to detail pedestrian paths and walkways for the whole district covered by the Master Plan?
- Designs for the Science Complex suggest a hierarchy of pedestrian facilities – along two major streets, a collector street, a greenway, a local street, a park and an interior courtyard. Does the Master Plan envision a hierarchy of pedestrian facilities (similar to its hierarchy of streets) to reflect the differing functions and designs of walkways along major and minor streets and off-street facilities such as greenways and courtyards?
- Does the Master Plan envision a hierarchy of bicycle routes that is different from the hierarchy of pedestrian facilities? How will bicycle facilities be separated from pedestrian facilities?
- Will the Master Plan include design standards for pedestrian facilities along streets – widths of sidewalks, space for landscaping and street furniture, etc.? Will there be different design standards for off-road paths in the pedestrian facility hierarchy? Will there be design standards for bicycle ways?
- The Science Complex sets a precedent for pedestrian and bicycle routes at the edges of a Master Plan development area where buildings surround an interior courtyard. Will the courtyard be reserved for pedestrians, as in Harvard Yard? Will this guiding principle be

- extended throughout the areas covered by the Master Plan?
- Will separate walking and bicycle paths be provided throughout the area covered by the Master Plan?
 - Will the Master Plan provide for off-road (as opposed to streetside) pedestrian paths with connections to the Charles River, into the residential community, and to the proposed Barry's Corner retail area?
 - Will the Master Plan include details for instituting pedestrian access from the Science Complex and other locations within the 200 acres to the existing river crossings at the Anderson Bridge, the Weeks Footbridge and the Western Avenue Bridge? How can pedestrian access to each of these bridges be improved?
 - Will the Master Plan include guidelines and examples for connections between sidewalks and the riverside walkways at each bridge? This is especially important at the difficult pedestrian crossings of Soldiers Field Road/Storrow Drive on Western Avenue and at North Harvard Street.
 - Will the Master Plan include details for a connection between the campus and Allston neighborhoods to the Charles River parklands west of the stadium area? Can the proposed extension of Stadium Way pass over Soldiers Field Road as a footpath to the spacious riverfront parkland that is currently difficult to reach from either the Allston residential neighborhoods or the Master Plan additions to the Allston campus?
 - What is the relation of the city-owned Smith Park to the Master Plan? Are there methods of integrating this park more completely with the Master Plan, perhaps with walking paths and integration of the ball fields with the large riverfront park on the opposite side of Soldiers Field Road?
 - Are the proposed coverings of Soldiers Field Road on the north side of the Master Plan area intended to provide additional riverfront parkland and access to users of structures in the development areas centered on Western Avenue? Can't users of the Master Plan areas get to the Charles River parklands more efficiently via Western Avenue or the proposed footpath extension of Stadium Way? How would the Master Plan insure that the riverfront adjacent to the north side of the Allston campus feels like public open space and not like the front yard for new undergraduate housing developments?
 - Will traffic calming features be part of the Master Plan? Will there be guidance for design of street rights of way and intersections, including curb extensions at major intersections, street trees, curbside parking or mid-block crossings?
 - Will the Master Plan include guidelines and examples for the analysis of pedestrian activity, such as the level of service at intersections for pedestrians, and prospective signal timing to maximize pedestrian crossing times?
 - Will the Master Plan provide guidelines and examples for paving materials in sidewalks to include flat surfaces for mobility-impaired pedestrians and for wheelchairs?
 - How will the Master Plan include incremental changes in transit service, routings, stops and nodes that will need to be modified to meet demand as the Master Plan is carried forward?
 - Will the Allston Campus meet the level of non-auto access that is achieved by the Cambridge campus? As reported in Harvard's 2006 Parking and Transportation Demand Management report, "Approximately 85% of employees commute to campus using alternative modes of transportation (public transit, bicycling, walking) — an increase of 2% over 2005." (Source: <http://www.upo.harvard.edu/Reports/ptdm.html>).

- Can public access to shuttle services be provided by Harvard and MASCO?
- How will commercial activities located along Western Avenue, North Harvard Street and Stadium Way be related to the proposals for retail areas in Barry's Corner? How will these activities relate to the hierarchy of Harvard Allston major and minor street sidewalks, bicycle ways, greenways and courtyard pedestrian walkways?
- What are the ample and unconstrained transportation facilities and services that support the Project in the event a Phase I waiver is granted? Will most of the burden of providing vehicular access to the site fall on Western Avenue? What traffic will use North Harvard Street, and will improvements be needed to handle this? To what extent will these two streets be reconstructed to handle the demand for vehicular travel as well as pedestrian movement in the initial phase of development?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this EENF. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner