



walkBoston

October 1, 2007

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

RE: Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF)
Haverhill-Merrimack River Walkway

MEPA # 14097

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston is the Commonwealth's leading advocate for pedestrians and safe walking. We work throughout the state – encouraging walking, helping with advocacy for pedestrian improvements and sponsoring walks. We have extensive experience in helping residents and local government with pedestrian issues, safe routes to school and safer street crossings and sidewalks. We have reviewed the ENF for the Haverhill-Merrimack River Walkway proposed by the City of Haverhill, and offer the following comments.

The proposal calls for a 2.5 mile walkway circling the Merrimack River on both banks between the Upper County/Comeau Bridge and the Basiliere Bridge in the center of Haverhill. The proposal will provide access to the river in areas where the downtown area is visually and physically walled off from the river by the seawall built in 1935. The proposed walkway connects to the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority bus station, downtown bus stops and the Haverhill MBTA commuter rail station. It is consistent with Haverhill's ongoing efforts to improve the riverfront and with the discussions generated by the EOEEA's UrbanRiver Visions Charette, held in Haverhill in March 2007. The project is also consistent with the Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission 2006 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and the 2006 Priority Regional Economic Development Actions List.

The proposed walkway will take advantage of the improvements to the river water quality resulting from intensive pollution abatement efforts. It also builds on increased public awareness of and interest in the river. On the north side of the river, the walkway will begin at the existing Riverfront Park walkway and will extend it, with a limited portion at grade and behind a 3-high seawall, and an extension by means of a 12-foot wide boardwalk atop the seawall, cantilevered 10 feet over the water. On the

south side of the river, the walkway will be a 10-ft paved pathway with a 2-ft gravel border on each side to allow storm water infiltration. The south side walkway may be located on an abandoned rail line, which the city is negotiating to purchase.

WalkBoston heartily salutes the city for undertaking this project that will help make downtown Haverhill a destination for recreational walkers. The project is imaginative in its proposal to cantilever construction over the river. The project, to be built in stages, will ultimately provide a valuable resource to the city and the region. This is precisely the type of project that should be copied throughout the Commonwealth.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal.

Sincerely,

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner