

**WRITTEN COMMENTS SUBMITTED FOR CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PLANNING,
DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION HEARING ON DOCKET #0722**

**A COMPREHENSIVE, DISTRICT-WIDE PLANNING PROCESS FOR BOSTON'S
WATERFRONT**

**SPONSORED BY COUNCILOR GABRIELA COLETTA
SEPTEMBER 22, 2022**

Submitted by:
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Resident of Charlestown Navy Yard

My comments are in support of this proposal with the exception of Item 1, below:

**I. USING “PLAN: CHARLESTOWN” AS A BASIS FOR COMPREHENSIVE WATERFRONT
PLANNING**

To start off with a point of clarification, the language in Docket #0722 states the following:

*“WHEREAS: The new planning process needs a holistic approach that is community-led with an emphasis on centering on the needs of residents and their vision for the waterfront. It should lean on progress made by both PLAN: East Boston and **PLAN: Charlestown** initiatives to ultimately shape a waterfront that offers affordable amenities including housing and commercial space, climate preparedness, transit infrastructure connectivity”*

Please note that the Charlestown Navy Yard, which is highly impacted by its proximity to Boston Harbor and which should be part of the focus of this proposal, is **NOT** included in PLAN: Charlestown and reliance on PLAN: Charlestown as a basis for this proposal is therefore problematic.

Further, PLAN: Charlestown has received limited community feedback. The most recent edition of the Charlestown Patriot Bridge issued a clarification regarding the number of participants in PLAN: Charlestown that was reported in the newspaper:

The story also said that almost 900 survey responses have been submitted. It should have read 493 survey responses have been submitted, split between nine surveys of different topics. The Patriot Bridge regrets any inconveniences.

If interested in more detail on PLAN: Charlestown, please refer to this recent article on planning in Charlestown:

<https://commonwealthmagazine.org/government/planning-by-pieces-isnt-working-in-charlestown/>

II. BOSTON'S INCREDIBLE ASSET

Without a doubt, Boston's waterfront is a unique asset that makes our city one of the most beautiful in the country, if not the world. In addition, it provides alternative transportation methods away from crowded highways and ill-functioning public transit; it lends economic vibrancy to our city in terms of tourism which is a key driver of economic growth and employment; it contains major port areas for the transportation of goods and related skilled employment; it provides a host of recreational opportunities from Piers Park in East Boston to the Boston Harbor Islands; and importantly, as we have learned after the Covid pandemic, our waterfront provides physical and mental health benefits through enjoyment of waterfront-facing open space and fresh air and is a respite from ever-increasing heat islands throughout the city.

Unfortunately, this asset is at risk due to climate, rising sea levels and flood risk. This is one key reason why this incredible asset, our waterfront, should be overseen by a more thorough and comprehensive planning process with a singular point of accountability. Councilor Coletta's proposal to view District One as a cohesive entity is a step in the right direction.

I would like to see us take this first important step even further and consider, as some have talked about, a totally comprehensive plan, overseen by a "waterfront czar" as part of the Mayor's cabinet who sees the big picture and should include all areas that touch the Harbor. Planning for the waterfront should be undertaken in an holistic manner looking at all 42 acres of downtown waterfront as one entity and a move away from piece-by-piece ad hoc projects which, in most cases, are driven by developers' interests.

Our waterfront is an incredible asset and should be treated as such. It is an asset that should be open and welcoming to all residents.

III. MUNICIPAL HARBOR PLANS

Are many separate community-by-community Municipal Harbor Plans the best vehicle for planning along the waterfront? Different plans govern different pieces of the waterfront, even though the entire waterfront is one continuous and contiguous synergistic area, facing the same threats of rising sea levels. For example, is it prudent to have a Downtown Municipal Harbor Plan right next to a HarborPark Plan for the next-door neighborhood of Charlestown? It defies logic.

And what about the "current" HarborPark Plan for Charlestown, as an example. I recently emailed several State agencies trying to locate the most recent Waterfront Plan for Charlestown. After a Public Records request with the CZM, I received a copy of the *Approval of the Boston HarborPark Plan* which is dated May 22, 1991. And while I was finally happy to receive an answer to my request, no one could tell me if it is still in force or has expired. How can it be a governing document given all we have learned about climate and rising seas? How does this outdated document co-exist with the recent Climate Ready Boston study on Charlestown and East Boston?

Who and what specifically guides waterfront development in Charlestown? Is it when a developer comes up with a plan for a parcel that has been blighted by neglect that a "process" kicks into gear? Shouldn't there be more overarching planning and not a haphazard, developer-driven, piece-by-piece, parcel-by-parcel process?

While outdated, there was one paragraph in this report from 1991 that still seems relevant today:

“The Boston Harbor Park Plan is built on the same comprehensive goals as CZM’s urban waterfront policies. The plan stresses that the economic rebirth of stagnant waterfront areas through private investment cannot come at the expense of the public’s quality of life; as the City puts it, “the HarborPark Plan recognizes Boston Harbor as a unique resource that should be accessible to all residents of the city as a place to live, work and gather for recreation or the quiet enjoyment of nature.” This emphasis as the need for “enlightened” redevelopment is further reflected in one of the four basic goals stated in the Plan which is to “revitalize Boston’s underutilized and dilapidated piers and shoreline by promoting growth through private investment that is appropriately designed and is a balanced mix of uses that bring vitality the waterfront and benefits of development that are shared by all of Boston’s residents.”

A balanced mix of uses as a concept needs to be revisited and illustrates the need for a new comprehensive Municipal Harbor Plan for the entirety of Boston’s waterfront given all that has been learned about climate and rising sea levels and building on the water’s edge; all of which should redefine what is included in a “balanced mix”.

We have dated Municipal Harbor Plans and in the case of the Downtown Municipal Harbor Plan, the process is so convoluted that a political appointee without proper authority signed off on the Downtown Plan. Let’s clear up the confusion — We should move toward a comprehensive Municipal Harbor Plan with a clear line of authority and it should become a living, breathing document that is constantly being reviewed and updated with new data on climate and the needs of the community.

IV. POOR STEWARDSHIP OF EXISTING WATERFRONT ASSETS

I can only speak to Charlestown where I have seen two waterfront piers (the historic Pier 5 and Pier 4, the home to Courageous Sailing), and most of the Harborwalk not maintained and become blighted by lack of oversight, re-investment and maintenance.

After the Charlestown Navy Yard was decommissioned, ownership was transferred to the BPDA (it was then called the BRA) who continues to own most of the properties in the Navy Yard. The BPDA collects revenues from the Navy Yard in the form of lease payments on the properties it owns, transfer fees on each and every condo sale on select buildings and other revenues.

Since 2009, the BPDA has collected \$40.5 million dollars from the Navy Yard and yet, there are blighted and unsafe properties. The recent sudden closure of Pier 4 where Courageous Sailing operated is a case in point. Pier 4 was found to have corroded steel and risked a sideways collapse, forcing the closure of Courageous Sailing right before opening day and causing a scramble for new operating space. This issue did not likely crop up overnight.

In the case of Pier 5, over the years, starting in 1980, there have been several engineering studies commissioned by the BPDA and undertaken by Childs Engineering based in Bellingham, Massachusetts. Childs Engineering has observed ongoing deterioration of the steel piles, concrete jackets, column extensions and decking. They cite “a significant lack of maintenance”. Per the report:

As part of our analysis, we are developing some conceptual repairs which would be required to maintain the pier in a usable condition. One approach might be to repair every third pile and perform some concrete patching or shotcrete placement on the bottom of the beams and deck where the most severe deterioration has occurred. This would stabilize and maintain the facility that could potentially support 100 pounds per square foot of live load which is needed for public assembly. It should be noted that the pier even where repairs have been made would continue to need ongoing repair on a regular basis (3-4 years).

To my knowledge, none of this suggested repairs or maintenance have been performed.

Councilor Coletta who is sponsoring this Committee Hearing has spoken publicly about Pier 5 as an incredible opportunity for the creation of a public park from an equity and resiliency perspective.

Comprehensive oversight could prevent blighted areas and focus instead on prudent and less costly maintenance instead of emergency repairs which are certainly more costly. In terms of overall planning, taking a comprehensive view and valuing our waterfront as an asset could hopefully avoid some of the deterioration we have seen in prime waterfront locations because of a lack of overall vision, planning and oversight.



(The historic Pier 5 has sat behind an ugly chain link fence for over a decade.)

Please see recent article on Pier 5:

<https://commonwealthmagazine.org/opinion/why-abandoned-pier-in-charlestown-matters/>

V. A CHANCE TO RESET GOALS

A comprehensive plan for the entire Boston Waterfront would provide a chance to hit the reset button on what it means to be a city on the water. The tenets of Mayor Wu's vision of a Boston Green New Deal should be part of future waterfront plans. All that we have learned about climate science and the health benefits of outdoor space can be reflected in a new vision for what a modern city's waterfront should look like and become. Climate studies suggest a 'retreat' from waterfront development and to use the waterfront as one part of a tool box to

fight rising sea levels and combat heat island effects while providing the health benefits of open space and access.

As our city has become more diverse, one of the most important areas of focus should be inclusivity and accessibility for all. Everyone should be welcome in enjoying our magnificent waterfront.

Councilor Coletta's proposal to plan comprehensively within District 1 is a step in the right direction and should lead to better decision-making on waterfront development and access.

In closing, thank you for holding this hearing and for my chance to submit comments.

Kathleen M. Elliott

Resident of Charlestown Navy Yard

Date: