



WalkBoston

May 22, 2009

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

RE: Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)
Queset Commons Chapter 40R Smart Growth Development
MEPA # 14266

Dear Secretary Bowles:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Draft EIR for the Queset Commons Chapter 40R Smart Growth Development in Easton, a proposed mixed-use retail, office and residential development within a Smart Growth Overlay District.

WalkBoston is the Commonwealth's leading advocate for pedestrians and safe walking. We work throughout the state encouraging walking, advocating for pedestrian improvements and working for design improvements. We have extensive experience helping residents and local government improve walking conditions, implement safe routes to school programs, and develop programs that promote walking.

Our conviction is that developments of the size and character of Queset Commons should follow a number of general guidelines in building a mix and relationship of uses that will encourage residents and visitors to walk more and drive less:

- Create a pedestrianized core
- Mix a variety of land uses in close proximity to each other
- Locate dense development close to transit or bus stops
- Group buildings close together
- Create a network of sidewalks
- Encourage transit use by locating a bus stop at the center of the pedestrian network
- Focus building entries on walking routes, not parking
- Phase development to encourage dial-a-bus use
- Create clear visual and pedestrian paths to transit and proposed town squares or meeting places
- Provide areas for public events in open spaces or along river or other natural areas

Based on these guidelines, we offer the following comments on the DEIR:

- The "Town Common" A slender east-west "Town Common" is suggested in this plan – a good start toward an identifiable and major pedestrian core. It helps unify the development into a walkable village and to encourage walking to shops, a bus stop or the childcare center. This significant linear walkway indirectly connects the grocery store and the community center on the pond. Residential buildings are arrayed on either side of it and truck and

parking service locations are on other street frontages. The “Common” might create a stronger pedestrian core with the following adjustments:

- Lining up the grocery store and the community center to relate them visually to the “Common”
 - Reducing parking and street space within the “Common”
 - Designing a clear pedestrian path between the Pond and the grocery store
- North-south paths A north-south path should be created at the east edge of the site to connect the grocery store, the bank and the CVS pharmacy to the “Common.” A connection should also be provided between the east side of the site and the existing north-south sidewalk along Washington Street. Connecting the site to a path planned for town land north of the site might eventually create a pedestrian connection that extends to Stonehill College.
 - Morse’s Pond The pond is a major edge of the site. Residential buildings would benefit from direct access to this major water feature with fewer parking spaces located between the structures and pond. A walking path should closely follow the edge of Morse’s Pond, connecting directly with the “Common.”
 - Street crossings The grocery store appears to be a major shopping element of the project, and residents should be able to walk to it. However, a very major new street separates the residential buildings from the grocery and other stores. Safety for pedestrians is paramount for any major location where foot traffic meets motor vehicles. A traffic signal may not be warranted, but “stop” or “slow for pedestrians” signs should be considered. Additionally, neckdowns (or “curb extensions), as shown in the proponent’s maps, are helpful to narrow the distance where pedestrians are exposed to motor vehicle travel on the roadway.
 - Parking supply Parking should be reduced where possible or consolidated into fewer locations to leave more open space. The Town requires 766 parking spaces for the project because it is located in a Smart Growth Overlay District, yet the proponent has proposed 881 parking spaces, of which 260 are commendably located underground. The 115 unrequired spaces could be eliminated from the proposed 621 spaces on the surface of the site – particularly where additional open space would result in a major amenity for the residences, as in the “Common” area or at pondside.
 - Walking in parking lots In Figure 2-10, “Schematic of commercial stormwater low impact development practices,” the proponent suggests ways of enhancing parking with landscape features that break down wide swaths of pavement and serve as water collection/storage facilities. Walking is not always included in these features, but it could be. For example, within parking areas walking paths could be incorporated in the landscaped strips or swales provided for drainage.

Following the DEIR, the Final EIR should include consideration of the details that make a village walkable including:

Good sidewalk design

- Walking zone—a clear walking path clear of mail boxes, trash cans, trees, benches, bus shelters, cafes, sign boards, signal/sign poles, etc. Width is based on the number of

people anticipated.

- Furnishing zone—attractive/useful amenities and infrastructure; trees, benches and cafes, mail boxes, trash cans, bike racks should be confined to this area
- Shy zone—a two foot buffer since people can't walk right up against storefronts or benches
- Walking surfaces should be flat and smooth – principally concrete or asphalt.

Connectivity to existing or future pedestrian network

- Build sidewalks along interior and exterior streets
- Fill in gaps in the network
- Connect to nearby paths, trails, sidewalks
- Connect to schools, shopping, elder housing, etc.
- Provide access to transit

Good street design – minimize vehicle/pedestrian conflicts

- Include safe intersections where pedestrians can cross
- Crosswalks should be painted on the street in all locations where it is safe for pedestrians to cross – a minimum of two parallel lines; (a ladder is better and worth the extra cost)
- Raised crosswalks are even better and provide visual, acoustical and physical reminders for traffic to slow down
- Curb extensions can be used to shorten crossing distances for pedestrians and to make walkers more visible

Keeping pedestrians safe

- Slowing traffic speeds
- Narrow lane widths - lanes should be no wider than 11 feet on main streets; narrowing a travel lane from 12 feet to 10 feet reduces speed by approximately 7 mph
- On-street parking can form a buffer between fast-moving cars and sidewalks
- Raised crosswalks at major pedestrian crossings
- Provide safe access to transit via sidewalks or paths
- Locate bus stops/shelters to maximize usage

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. Please feel free to call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

Cc Alice Savage, Acting Director of Planning and Community Development
Town of Easton