



SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

July 20, 2018

Matthew A. Beaton, Secretary
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs
Attention: MEPA Office – Page Czepiga, MEPA #15595
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: XMBLY, MEPA #15595, Draft Environmental Impact Report

Dear Secretary Beaton:

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) regularly reviews proposals deemed to have regional impacts. The Council reviews proposed Projects for consistency with *MetroFuture*, the regional policy plan for the Boston metropolitan area, the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles, consistency with Complete Streets policies and design approaches, consistency with the requirement of the Global Warming Solutions Act, as well as impacts on the environment.

XMBLY (the Project) is a new mixed-use development located at 5 Middlesex Avenue in Somerville. The Project is located on a 9.38-acre lot bounded by Foley Street, Middlesex Avenue, Revolution Drive, and Grand Union Boulevard in the outer edge of Assembly Row. The Project is located within a 5-minute walking distance from the MBTA Assembly Square Orange Line Station and multiple MBTA bus routes.

CDNV Assembly, LLC (the Proponent) proposes to develop the site with approximately 1.5 million square feet (sf) of mixed-use development with five buildings surrounding 48,000 sf of central open space. When completed, the development program will comprise:

- > 836,000 sf of office use
- > 520,000 sf residential use (489 units)
- > 140,000 sf of commercial use

The Project is anticipated to generate approximately 13,638 unadjusted daily vehicle trips. Once mode shares are applied, the Project is anticipated to generate approximately 6,765 adjusted daily vehicle trips. Of these trips, 452 are projected to be during the morning peak hour, 533 during the evening peak hour, and 344 during the Saturday peak hour. A total of 1,670 parking spaces are proposed.

MAPC has a long-term interest in reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per the Commonwealth's statutory obligation to meet the GHG reductions of the Global Warming Solution Act (GWSA) — 25% from 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80% from 1990 levels by 2050.

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As a high density mixed-use development in close proximity to an MBTA rapid transit station, the Project has the potential to advance these transportation and GHG goals. The following recommendations are intended to help this project to reach its full potential by encouraging a greater shift of single occupant vehicle (SOV) auto trips to transit, bicycling, or walking. In addition to aligning this project with the Lower Mystic Regional Working Group's (LMRWG) study, our key recommendations address reducing the overall amount of parking and developing a robust TDM program.

In order to minimize adverse impacts and to keep the Commonwealth on track in meeting its regulatory and statutory GHG goals, MAPC respectfully requests that you require the Proponent to address MAPC's recommendations and questions in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) and the forthcoming Section 61 Findings.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Project.

Sincerely,



Marc D. Draisen
Executive Director

cc: Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone, City of Somerville
George Proakis, City of Somerville
Brad Rawson, City of Somerville
David Mohler, MassDOT

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Parking

Since the submission of the Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF), the number of proposed parking spaces for this Project has increased from 1,670 to 1,693 while the total development program has been reduced from 2.0 million sf to 1.5 million sf. The overall parking ratio for this Project exceeds 1.0 for the office, residential, and commercial land uses, a high ratio for a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) site.

As previously stated in our EENF comment letter¹, the amount of parking proposed for the entire project should be reduced by at least 50%. This is a premiere TOD site located less than a 5-minute walk to public transportation, as well as a very short walk to retail and restaurants at Assembly Row, enabling people to live and work without owning a car. The biggest determinant of whether people will use an automobile is the amount of free parking provided at both the origin and destination at the site. Therefore, reducing the amount of parking is the most effective strategy to reduce auto trips. This is also consistent with the City of Somerville's EENF comment letter² which states:

Reducing automobile mode share is an overarching policy goal of the City of Somerville, and is essential to meeting our ambitious environmental goal of becoming a carbon-neutral city. Reducing automobile mode share also advances the City's social equity, public safety and economic development goals captured in the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan... We are striving to ensure that transit-oriented development projects have adequate but not excessive parking.

Furthermore, one of the key preliminary recommendations of the LMWRG Study is to:

- Substantially Reduce the Amount of Parking in New Residential Developments within Walking Distance to Transit

Even the Proponent recognizes reduced need for parking spaces in the DEIR:

[D]ue to the nearby availability of public bus service and the MBTA Assembly Square Orange Line Station. Amenities associated with the Project also will promote bicycle and pedestrian travel. With the Project being continuously developed over a several-year period there should continue to be less reliance by Project Site workers and residents on private automobile ownership. This ongoing trend is the result of increased transit usage, and recently improved accommodations for bicycle and pedestrian travel throughout the Assembly Square District. Alternate means of travel, such as taxi, private ride services (Uber, Lyft, and others) should continue to reduce the parking needs for this area. There also will be extensive internal trip-sharing between the various uses within the Project Site. As an example, some residents of the Project Site may choose to walk to the various on-site retail uses that will be available. Similarly, some office/research & development workers could actually choose to live in one of the Project Site's residential units. (pages 3-39-3-40)

¹ MAPC EENF comment letter dated November 23, 2016.

² City of Somerville's EENF comment letter dated November 23, 2016.

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Despite these assertions, the DEIR does not provide any supportive quantitative analysis, and the total number of spaces has actually increased.

The Proponent indicates that a shared-parking approach will be utilized to help minimize the amount of parking spaces required. Due to the varying peak times for the office and residential uses, there is significant opportunity for parking spaces to be shared between residents and workers. Although the Proponent states they will pursue a shared-parking program, one is not quantitatively outlined in the DEIR. It is important to note that the Proponent did not respond to the request in the Secretary's Certificate to include a shared parking analysis in the DEIR:

The DEIR should include a shared parking analysis to support the amount of parking proposed in light of potential opportunities for shared parking between retail/office and residential users onsite. Reductions in SOV trips can often be correlated to parking availability and price. The DEIR should discuss options to reduce parking demand on-site, including, but not limited to, charging market rates for parking for all users, decoupling parking spaces from rental fees, etc.

MAPC requests that the Proponent be directed to reduce the overall amount of free residential parking provided on site, which could be accomplished by working with the City of Somerville to reduce parking requirements, developing a shared parking program involving other owners and project proponents in the vicinity, and charging for the use of on-site parking. All three steps are essential to success.

Public Transit

The Project is located in an area rich with access to public transportation. Five MBTA bus routes (89, 90, 92, 95, and 101) are all within 0.5 miles of the Project. The MBTA Assembly Square Orange Line Station is approximately 800 feet east of the Project Site via Revolution Drive or Foley Street. Additional stops on the Orange Line are located at Sullivan Square Station (approximately 0.6 miles south of the Project site) and Wellington (approximately one mile north of the Project site). Both Sullivan Square Station and Wellington Station also serve as local transit hubs and provide connections to several additional MBTA bus routes.

The DEIR estimates that approximately 97% of the public transit trips will occur by subway (Orange Line) but only 3% will occur by MBTA bus routes. The mode share assumption for use of MBTA bus routes needs to be reevaluated and increased.

As part of a mitigation program, the Proponent needs to work with the MBTA to address how the MBTA bus routes could be improved to maximize ridership. This includes, but is not limited to, review of pick-up/drop-off locations, scheduling, and route adjustments. It is important to point out that a key preliminary recommendation of the LMWRG Study is to make improvements to public transit.

While the Proponent has committed to a mitigation program for roadway improvements, mitigation for public transportation is minimally addressed. The Proponent needs to indicate how they will coordinate with the MBTA, specifically identifying how connections to and from the Project can be enhanced for the MBTA buses servicing this area. The Proponent should partner

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with the MBTA by contributing to the service improvements on bus lines servicing the site, particularly MBTA Routes 90 and 95, in an amount that is reasonably related to the Project's additional demand.

There are two such precedents for developers committing to public transit improvements through the MEPA process. One is Encore Boston Harbor's commitment to improving Orange Line service. The second precedent is Kendall Square where Boston Properties, the City of Cambridge, the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, the MBTA, and MassDOT signed a Memorandum of Understanding, under which Boston Properties will contribute a transit improvement fee to support MBTA service improvements.

Lower Mystic Regional Working Group

MAPC is particularly interested in monitoring the development that takes place for this Project since it is contained in the study area of the Lower Mystic Regional Working Group (LMRWG) www.lowermysticstudy.org. The LMRWG has developed a comprehensive regional land use and transportation study that was required by your office as part of the Encore Boston Harbor MEPA process. Encore Boston Harbor, MassDOT, and the Barr Foundation are funding the Working Group, with MassDOT as the Working Group lead. MAPC is a member, along with the cities of Everett, Boston, and Somerville. In addition, MAPC is providing some of the staff support for the Working Group, particularly in regard to deriving policy and planning recommendations based on the modeling conducted by the Central Transportation Planning Staff.

The LMRWG Study specifically anticipated development at the Project site, along with tremendous growth occurring in this general area, including additional build-out in Assembly Square, growth in Sullivan Square and other areas of Charlestown, the Encore Boston Harbor casino and resort, and additional growth planned close by in other parts of Somerville and Everett. Only a truly regional approach can address the traffic impacts that will result from this Project and nearby sites, including consistent and well-thought-out policies by local and state government, working in partnership. While additional transportation improvements will be needed, infrastructure alone will not address the anticipated increase in vehicle trips. The mix of uses, the amount of parking, and the transportation demand management (TDM) actions that property owners will be required to take are all critical to minimizing and mitigating traffic impacts. As the first development project to occur within the framework of the LMRWG Study, it is critical that the Proponent's transportation mitigation program be aligned with the Study's recommendations.

In light of the tremendous growth occurring in this area, the LMRWG Study recommends that establishing a Regional Mitigation Fund would enable developers to deposit mitigation funds into a pool for transportation investments. The funds could support improvements to MBTA rapid transit or bus service; regional roads, highways, and bridges; bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure; regional bicycle share systems; or other improvements jointly agreed upon by the Proponent, municipalities, and MassDOT.

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One great value of establishing such a fund is that it ensures all future developers will contribute according to reasonable and equitable rules to mitigate the impacts of their projects, rather than burdening the first, the last, or the largest project with all or most of the responsibility. A Regional Mitigation Fund, and the rules guiding contributions to it, can provide predictability to developers, while ensuring full mitigation of negative impacts. It is anticipated that once the LMRWG is Study is adopted, a mechanism to enable the allocation of funds for a Regional Mitigation Fund will be established.

Since we expect the LMRWG to be finalized within a month, we ask that the Proponent take the study's recommendations into account when preparing the Final EIR, and ensure that the project and its mitigation is consistent with the recommendations of the study.

Mitigation and Draft Section 61 Findings

The MEPA Certificate stated that the DEIR *should contain clear commitments to implement mitigation measures, estimate the individual costs of each proposed measure, identify the parties responsible for implementation, and contain a schedule for implementation. The mitigation implementation schedule should clearly note how mitigation will be provided in relation to project phasing; for example, tying commitments to either completion of project square footages or generation of a specific number of traffic trips based upon project build out.* The Secretary's directive was not addressed in the DEIR and, as a result, needs to be included in the FEIR as part of the Section 61 Findings.

Transportation Demand Management Program

MAPC is pleased that the Proponent will participate in the Assembly Square Transportation Management Association (TMA) and that Somerville's Mobility Management Plan requires the Proponent to provide an on-site bike-share docking station, internal bicycle parking spaces, and outdoor bicycle racks.

MAPC is also pleased that Somerville's Mobility Management Plan includes requirements for un-bundled parking. This strategy discourages auto use for the residential development by uncoupling the parking from the housing unit lease or sale and charging the tenant a monthly or annual fee to park a vehicle at the site.

However, the TDM program needs to be more robust and included in the Section 61 Findings. The TDM components that should be included are:

Provide Infrastructure for Electric Vehicle Charging

MAPC's supports the recommendation in MassDEP's EENF comment letter³ that at least four percent (4%) of the parking spaces should be allocated to electric vehicles unless the municipality requires dedication of a greater number of spaces. As the Proponent may be aware, Massachusetts is party to a multistate Memorandum of Understanding for an action plan facilitating implementation of zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) programs. The goal is to ensure that there are 3.3 million ZEVs on the roads by 2025, which requires adequate infrastructure.

³ MassDepartment of Environmental Protection's EENF comment letter dated November 23, 2016.

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Kensington Underpass

The Secretary's Certificate requested that the Proponent evaluate existing conditions at the Kensington Underpass (under I-93) and include a discussion of potential improvements to improve pedestrian and bicycle access between East Somerville, the Project site, Community Path, and Assembly Station. As part of the mitigation program, the Proponent should be responsible for making both safety and aesthetic improvements as well as their ongoing maintenance. Funds associated with a proposed Regional Mitigation Fund could be used for these improvements.

Other TDM components that should be addressed include:

- Allocating reserved parking spaces for car sharing services such as ZipCar;
- Subsidizing transit passes for residents and employees;
- Offering ridesharing through NuRide, the Commonwealth's web-based trip planning and ridematching service that enables participants to earn rewards for taking "green trips"; and
- Designating appropriate pickup/drop-off locations for taxi and private ride services.

Tenancy Lease Agreements/Tenant Manual

The FEIR should discuss how tenancy lease agreements or a Tenant Manual will be used as a mechanism to ensure implementation, maintenance, and success of TDM measures.

Mode Share Goals and Monitoring Program

Mode Share Goals

While the Proponent has committed to a monitoring program that will include vehicular data collection, there is no discussion of mode share goals. Developing and monitoring mode share goals is a central component of TIA preparation as outlined in the *EOEEA/MassDOT Guidelines for Traffic Impact Assessments (TIAs)*. Specifically, the TIA Guidelines state: *The TIA should include an assessment of the mode split assumptions, as well as the Proponent's plan to maximize travel choice, promote non-SOV modes, and achieve the assumed mode shares.* (page 17)

The Proponent needs to define mode share goals clearly (vehicular, commuter rail, bus, bicycling and walking) for residents and employees as part of their commitment to conduct monitoring and reporting, and to adjust the project's TDM program as necessary.

Monitoring and Reporting

The Proponent's monitoring and reporting program must be well defined and be committed to in the Section 61 findings. Trip generation, parking usage, and Level of Service (LOS) must all be monitored on a continuous basis. It is imperative that the Proponent outline an extensive and thorough transportation monitoring and reporting program.

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The monitoring program needs to include details of how mode share goals will be attained, as well as steps that will be taken if goals are not met. The Proponent must also commit to conducting regular monitoring and reporting of transportation mode shares and adjust the Project's alternative transportation services and TDM programs as necessary. MAPC recommends that the monitoring program take place annually and for at least five years after full occupancy. The monitoring and reporting program should include annual data collection of traffic counts, parking, public transportation, shuttle, bicycling, and walking.

The intent of the transportation monitoring program is to confirm that actual changes are consistent with forecasted changes. With a monitoring program, the actual impacts of a project can be determined and additional mitigation measures identified, if necessary. MAPC's recommendation is consistent with the Secretary's Certificate which states that the: *DEIR should include aggressive and specific mode share goals, either by use or phase, to ensure the achievement of any trip reduction measures assumed in the transportation study.*

Affordable Housing

MAPC is pleased the Proponent, consistent with the City of Somerville's mandatory on-site affordable housing requirement⁴, will set aside 20% of the residential units to be constructed as part of the Project as affordable units. Affordable units are a critical mechanism to reduce the number of cars, vehicle trips, and GHG emissions. According to the study, *Maintaining Diversity in America's Transit Rich Neighborhoods*⁵, *people of color, low-income households and renters are all more likely to use transit than the average American* (page 2). It should be noted that the City also implements a Housing Linkage Ordinance which requires large development projects to pay a per-square foot mitigation fee of \$10.00 per foot into the City's Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Open Space

The Project will be organized around 48,000 sf central publicly accessible civic space, along with a framework of new roadways. It is critical that the streetscape be designed to be inviting and encourage public access from the rest of Assembly Row to the fullest extent possible. For example this can be done through enhancing wayfinding signage and lighting to encourage access.

⁴ Article 13 – Inclusionary Housing of Somerville's Zoning Ordinance

⁵ Prepared by the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy; Stephanie Pollack, Barry Bluestone, Chase Billingham; October 2010.
<http://www.northeastern.edu/dukakiscenter/transportation/transit-oriented-development/maintaining-diversity-in-americas-transit-rich-neighborhoods>