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Letter in Response to Pier 5 Proposals, March 31, 2021

Introduction & Vision

The Navy Yard Garden Association ([NYGA](#)) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established to revitalize and enhance open spaces in the Charlestown Navy Yard through planning, design and programming for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. Since our inception in 2017, we have worked collaboratively with stakeholders and sponsors on numerous projects including two major public arts exhibits, with a third permanent art installation planned for 2021. Our perspective in reviewing the three Pier 5 proposals is informed by our mission statement to enhance open space and our suggestions are brainstorming ideas that certainly need robust testing in the larger Charlestown community.

Fundamentally, we seek to elevate the conversation about the Pier 5 development from an “either-or” argument into a collaborative effort involving the community, a developer, non-profit experts, and BPDA stakeholders to create a Charlestown Community Waterfront. Our nonprofit, over the past four years, has seen growing interest, participation and community support for the revitalization of open space and the addition of programming, plantings and public art. We believe the community at large has the motivation and interest to create a vision for an inclusive Charlestown Waterfront.

Paul Murphy, Chief Communication Officer for the MGH Institute of Health Professions states: "We support the Navy Yard Garden Association's comprehensive and collaborative approach to the issues surrounding the development of Pier 5". This support reinforces our belief in the community's readiness and motivation to engage on the issues.

Charlestown Community Waterfront

Although the current RFP is focused on Pier 5 and the Pump House, the time is right to involve the community in creating a comprehensive vision and plan for the current RFP, as well as Piers 3 and 4, which are permanently designated for public space and use, rather than private development, but have not been imagined or maintained to achieve full public benefit. As currently configured, this core and central section of the Charlestown waterfront is suspended in time. There has been substantial public-private development work on the eastern end of the Charlestown harbor front extending from Spaulding Hospital to Pier 6. We also anticipate a wonderful outcome in the National Park's planned updates, extending westward from Pier 2 to the end of the park. Anticipating this successful National Park project and plans to upgrade the [Visitor Experience](#), the glaring “hole in the middle” will be Piers 3 to 5, thus our vision for the Charlestown Community Waterfront.

We envision a future waterfront where Charlestown residents, workers, students and tourists arrive in the Navy Yard and opt to stay for a while to enjoy the view of the city skyline and to explore activities and public amenities designed to fit in the neighborhood. Success means two things:

*Residents from all over Boston, especially the core areas of Charlestown, will have a true reason to spend a Saturday or weekday evening in the Navy Yard, with a full enough range of amenities and open space to engage people of all ages and life stages.

*On a future list of the top ten destinations in Boston, or on a Monday Night Football highlights reel, this area of our beloved waterfront will be included, because of the innovative development of public spaces, architecture, and/or iconic art.

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Where We Stand in Response to Pier 5 Proposals

It is too soon for our Board to lend support to any of the Pier 5 proposals. Support is contingent on the BPDA establishing a transparent process to respond to public comment, the development of metrics for accountability, and the inclusion of checks and balances to uphold public trust.

The 6M and Navy Blue proposals are not compatible with our vision, as they are largely designed to benefit a small group of future residents and not serve the public at large or fulfill the letter or spirit of Chapter 91 public benefits. Although the Urbanica proposal has elements that intrigue our organization, it is too soon to endorse, as currently configured. The Urbanica proposal does provide a good starting point for a conversation, but it requires further community input on open space, climate resiliency, facilities for public accommodation, housing model, mass/density and the creation of a public-private partnership.

Below are our suggested areas of focus for such a conversation and community collaboration:

Open Space

The Urbanica proposal demonstrates that Pier 5 is large enough to include both new development and significant open space. By including a rooftop public park, it returns virtually all of the pier to public open space. This type of proposal can be further advanced to truly become “a park with a building underneath,” not a building with a park on top. We appreciate this expression of Pier 5 as offering vibrant mixed-use possibilities, allowing for significant open space within the existing pier footprint, and the continuation of the harbor walk around the pier perimeter.

We are intrigued by the possibility of a managed rooftop garden, roof top open space, and green space at the end of the pier for the community to watch the fireworks, the sunrise and sunset, the city lights, and sailboats skimming across the harbor. The BPDA involvement in the [100 Acres project at Fort Point](#) demonstrate their understanding of key features necessary for community support: greenspace, public art, water activities and a variety of outdoor seating/swing/hammock opportunities. Of course, with recent success of two public art installations, we recognize the value of having a significant, interactive, and iconic art installation to be commissioned near or on Pier 5.

Climate Resilience

We eagerly anticipate the development of [“Climate Ready Charlestown Phase II”](#) to give the community and any future developers of Pier 5 and other developments in the Charlestown Navy Yard clear guidance for assuring future climate resiliency. It stands to reason that this area of the waterfront has a critical role in protecting existing buildings and facilities, beyond safeguarding the new development itself. The RFP’s gaps in this area are understandable given the lack of an existing Charlestown harbor front climate readiness plan, and we will be vigilant to assure the upcoming Phase II plan has specific provisions to connect the Pier 5 project to a district-wide climate resiliency strategy.

Potential Facilities for Public Accommodation for Pier 5 and the Pump House

The facilities for public accommodation requirements (FPA) must prioritize Charlestown businesses and organizations with a design for universal access given Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital is a half mile down the street. Returning the Ferry to Pier 4 is also a priority and is key to the success of these public facilities.

We imagine first-floor building space on Pier 5 that includes space for Courageous Sailing classrooms and administrative needs; flexible space designed to adapt to Charlestown community needs over time; retail space that prioritizes businesses with a demonstrable “come see how it’s made” component of light manufacturing, artisanal or craft production; art gallery and art studio space; and food hall, restaurant and/or café space.

The FPA requirement for the Pump House is easily imagined as it sits adjacent to Pier 4 and the water ferry stop. This one-story historic structure, once restored, could serve as a water transportation ticketing area, cafe/ice cream shop and a visitor center to orient and welcome those arriving in the Navy Yard for the first time. A possible glass floor can dramatically showcase the giant underground pumps six floors below, that once pumped out Dry Docks 1 and 2. We have no doubt this will be an instant hit with residents and visitors alike.

We caution against the inclusion of FPA amenities that add to operational demands and increase building height to accommodate large scale truck deliveries, such as deliveries to a grocery store. We note there are two grocery stores within a mile’s walk. First Avenue is an alternative location for a grocery store given there is plenty of appropriate and vacant retail space.

Potential for Housing

We recommend a housing model be reworked to become a mixed income homeownership model, awarding priority to those with a BPDA Certified Artist preference, veterans, frontline workers including teachers, fire, police and health care employees who work in and around our community. With our experience in the arts, we discovered that Charlestown is the only Boston neighborhood that does not have live/work options for artists. We urge the BPDA to elevate artists to a priority standing alongside all the other essential workers illustrated above.

Private Public Partnership

To make this vision for a Charlestown Community Waterfront a reality --of which Pier 5 is just a start-- a public-private partnership with philanthropic funding is absolutely necessary. Our stakeholder investigations reveal that there is no "white knight" within the city or state waiting in the wings to bring \$30M (or more) to redevelop the pier as a public park, even with a new mayor and with, or without, the BPDA. As such, a true public-private partnership and the enhanced funding, expertise, vision and stewardship it brings, is the best option. Our expectation is that the BPDA will expressly require the contracting of a nonprofit organization to oversee the public spaces on Pier 5.

Our nonprofit is willing to co-facilitate a multi-million dollar fundraising process with other waterfront-committed organizations such as the [Trustees of Reservations](#), the [Barr Foundation](#) and the BPDA in order to create options that allow the developer to decrease building mass, increase building setback and provide legacy-worthy permanent public open space and amenities. We further ask the BPDA to consider taking on a concurrent planning effort with the designated Pier 5 nonprofit (per above) to restore the surrounding harbor walk areas and the permanently designated public spaces at Piers 3 and 4, as well as Drydock 2. This is an opportunity for the BPDA to strengthen its long-term commitment to enhance the Charlestown Community Waterfront.

Request for Extension

Now is an opportunity to slow down--yet elevate--the decision process. The National Park Service spent over two years creating a plan to reimagine their programming and physical space. Allow the Charlestown Community Waterfront effort the same consideration.

We request a six month extension to work with key stakeholders to solicit community input and to link the Pier 5 project more broadly with a district-wide climate resilience strategy and an inclusive Charlestown Community Waterfront program. We believe the combined efforts will be synergistic. The Parris Landing Condominium Trust Board of Trustees supports our proposal to engage in a six month extension to work with key stakeholders. There is community support for this extension. This extension will also allow all interested parties to establish a Public Private Partnership with non-governmental organizations, initiate a fundraising project, and jointly create the legacy of "The Jewel of the Harbor".

Sincerely,

Robin DiGiammarino

Robin DiGiammarino, President
On behalf of the Board of the Navy Yard Garden Association, Inc.