

Toward a More Just and Sustainable Dorchester Bay City Proposal

On February 14, 2019, the University of Massachusetts Building Authority (UMBA) and Board of Trustees entered into a 99-year ground lease with Accordia Partners LLC, a private development firm, to transform the 19.94 acre Bayside Expo site, owned by UMass Boston, into a mixed-use urban innovation district inspired, in part, by Cambridge's Kendall Square at MIT.

On September 23, 2020, Accordia Partners LLC submitted a Project Notification Form (PNF) to the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) outlining their plans for this site, along with 13 acres on the south side of Mt. Vernon Street, as part of their Dorchester Bay City Proposal. This mixed-use development featuring 5,900,000 square feet of new building is currently under review by the BPDA as part of their Article 80 large project process and by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act.

As the owner of the proposed development's largest parcel and one of its most directly impacted parties, the University of Massachusetts Boston has an obligation to ensure that this development meets the current and future needs of our campus and surrounding neighborhoods, specifically the Harbor Point, Dorchester, and South Boston communities. [Note: Technically, the UMass Building Authority owns the property which has been part of the UMass Boston campus.]

The organizations signing this letter represent nearly 2,500 UMB faculty and staff and 16,000 students.

While we support the redevelopment of the former Bayside Expo site, we do not support the Dorchester Bay City Proposal in its current form. The limited affordable housing, absence of affordable space for long-time community businesses and service providers, and the omission of community facilities from the developer's plan makes it highly likely that this new urban district will emerge as one more income- and race-segregated community that will reinforce our region's longstanding pattern of uneven development.

We demand that Accordia Partners LLC modify their Dorchester Bay City Proposal to fully address the following ten planning issues identified by our members prior to the "scoping phase" of the BPDA's Article 80 Large Project Review Process.

1. Expand the existing Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to include the full range of stakeholders.

Thus far, Accordia and BPDA have leaned disproportionately on area homeowner associations to represent the project's directly affected parties, while tenant organizations, public housing groups, seniors, neighborhood businesses, non-profits, public school students and teachers, and UMB's faculty, staff, and students are under-represented. We are especially concerned about the absence of low-income people, persons with

disabilities, and unemployed individuals on the CAC, as these are the people who are often at the greatest risk of displacement.

2. Increase the overall commitment to affordable housing (onsite and offsite), by providing a higher number of affordable units and a higher percentage of more deeply affordable units.

We appreciate the proposals that Accordia has made to address affordability, by (1) raising on-site affordability to 15% (slightly above the 13% required by the City of Boston), (2) voluntarily paying higher linkage fees to increase the number of off-site affordable units, and (3) pledging to set up a fund to support anti-displacement through homeownership opportunities.

However, these efforts are insufficient, given Boston's severe housing crisis, the inflationary impact the Bay City project will have on area real estate values and rents, and the fact that the majority of the site is publicly owned. The current displacement crisis and inflationary impact of the project will likely most negatively impact low- and very-low income renters, who are disproportionately people of color.

Therefore, we specifically call on Accordia to:

- a. raise the percentage of on-site affordable housing units from 15% to 50%
- b. ensure that the on-site affordable units are more deeply affordable, ranging from 30-70% AMI, with an overall average of 40% AMI, which would reflect the incomes of the surrounding community
- c. work with the city to guarantee that 75% of the off-site affordable units will be located in the immediate community (i.e., within 2 miles of the project site), and made permanently affordable at 50% AMI or lower (thereby matching the neighborhood AMI)
- d. create more family housing and housing that serves vulnerable populations (e.g., the disabled, seniors, veterans, and the homeless)
- e. double the monetary commitment and increase the flexibility of the anti-displacement fund so that it can support rental as well as homeownership units. This fund must be sufficiently flexible to be able to support the preservation of existing affordable rental units and tenancies and not just homeownership opportunities. In addition, we ask that this fund be available to support land trusts or other approaches that take units off the speculative market, making them permanently affordable.

3. Provide a comprehensive multi-modal transportation strategy that addresses the needs of visitors to the site as well as area residents.

Residents of Harbor Point, Dorchester, and South Boston as well as users of the peninsula's numerous educational and cultural institutions* currently experience significant transportation challenges. All routinely face gridlock conditions at the exits/entrances to the area from Interstate 93, as well as on Morrissey Boulevard, Day Boulevard, Columbia Road, and Mt. Vernon Street. The congestion along these major arteries during extended rush hour time periods makes delays at the Kosciuszko Circle "legendary." All of these surface transportation challenges are further complicated by regular flooding along significant segments of Morrissey Boulevard during "King Tide" periods.

Moreover, although the area is densely served by MBTA buses, trains, and the commuter rail, older equipment, deferred maintenance, and budget shortfalls frequently cause significant commuter delays. Residents and commuters to this area currently face some of the region's worst transit problems, which the Dorchester Bay City Proposal will further exacerbate in the absence of a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation plan that fully integrates public, active, on-demand modes of transportation within a Smart City traffic management system.

4. Establish a meaningful connection between Harbor Point Homes and Dorchester Bay City.

Currently, the site plan does not include a single road or sidewalk connecting the Harbor Point Homes community to the new development. It also features a major increase in elevation on the proposed site to protect it from future sea level rise events, which will further complicate efforts to weave the new project into Harbor Point's existing physical form. Finally, the buildings proposed for the eastern portion of the development site are between 20 and 30 stories tall, which represent a significant encroachment on the open spaces and low-density structures of the Harbor Point Homes.

* These include Boston College High School, St. Christopher's Roman Catholic Church, Boys' and Girls' Club of Dorchester's Walter Denney Youth Center, Boston Teachers' Union, McCormack Middle School (scheduled to become a middle/high school), Dever Elementary School, UMass Boston, the E.M. Kennedy Institute for the U.S. Senate, the Massachusetts Archive and Commonwealth Museum, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

5. Incorporate needed community facilities into the proposal.

While the current proposal provides required spaces for facilities of public accommodation (FPA), it does not feature any traditional community facilities such as schools, daycares, senior centers, branch libraries, or public “maker spaces” such as the one Mel King operates in the South End. This might not be a problem if this project were being proposed for privately held land that did not require new zoning and significant public investments. However, the Dorchester Bay City Project is taking place on land owned by UMass Boston, a public-serving institution with a longstanding commitment to an urban mission promoting accessibility, inclusion, and equity. The developer is also seeking to redevelop the site as a Planned Unit Development in order to protect its future value, which represents a significant change in zoning. In addition, the project will require significant public subsidies to address to protect its buildings from future threats from climate change-related sea level rise and to resolve the significant and worsening accessibility and mobility challenges outlined in the previous section. Finally, since the project falls within a federally designated Opportunity Zone, it will also be the beneficiary of additional public funds, subsidies, and tax breaks.

Given its significant public funding, this project must be redesigned to more adequately benefit the public that is paying for it. This can happen through the incorporation of important community facilities such as those mentioned above, which are critical in promoting healthy, vibrant, and unified neighborhoods.

6. Establish a cross-subsidy program whereby Dorchester Bay City commercial tenants pay a modest premium to provide long-standing community businesses and non-profits access to space within the new development.

A quick survey of commercial and office space tenants in the Kendall Square and Innovation District reveals few examples of revered local businesses and valued, community-serving, non-profits occupying space within these redevelopment areas. Accordia claims this project will enhance what is best about the Harbor Point community, but doing so in practice will require them to establish minimum square footages, located in desirable places, offered at deeply subsidized rent levels for these important community purposes. Such a cross-subsidy might enable the re-establishment of the UMB-sponsored Early Childhood Center that was forced to close due to recent campus budget cuts.

7. Establish enforceable goals and appropriate resources to expand employment, entrepreneurial, and business opportunities for low and moderate-income residents of the development's impact area throughout its lifecycle (planning, design, development, and operations phases).

The addition of 15,000 predominantly well-paying jobs will only increase displacement if the people hired for those jobs do not live in the surrounding neighborhoods. As new employees are hired into “Kendall Square”-type jobs at the development, they will move into area neighborhoods close to their jobs, driving up rents and sale prices. This is called “jobs-led displacement” and it is a significant factor pushing local people out of their neighborhoods. These jobs—which appear to be such a good thing—will actively harm the neighborhood and current residents without a major intervention.

In particular, the virtual exclusion of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) people from the industries of the intended tenants - biotech, life sciences and other anchor industries - means there needs to be even more intentional steps to change the current labor market. Accordia needs to join with other anchor employers now working with community leaders and residents to create a new community pipeline into these industries to have any hope to make this hiring happen at the scale needed.

Specifically, we call on Accordia to:

- a. agree to a multi-stakeholder planning process now so that agreements can be in place for any upcoming discussions with banks, tenants, or contractors
- b. establish and fund a new, community-based, First Source program, in partnership with anchor employers. This First Source Program should build on the expertise of local, culturally competent, community-based organizations already doing this work. The program should include both skills development and labor exchange activities and work with employers to map internal labor markets and occupations.
- c. ensure job quality in construction and permanent jobs (including service and retail as well as life sciences and other anchor industries) at a family-sustaining level, including income, benefits, time off, stability, and rights
- d. require employers to set and measure goals for access and retention of underrepresented groups at all levels of employment, including for upward mobility; institute internships and other mechanisms if targeted hiring cannot reach goals for senior positions
- e. participate as an anchor employer site (along with teaching hospitals, life science, and tech/fintech leaders) with the community in developing the community pipeline to these good jobs

- f. for construction jobs, establish a trade-by-trade agreement to bring in a set number of new members (either apprentice or journey person) from the designated location, as well as preference for union labor
- g. require all employers—developer, contractors, tenants—to keep data and present it to the multi-stakeholder group overseeing implementation in order to work together to improve outcomes
- h. increase its commitment to supporting Women and Minority Business Enterprises (WMBE) from 30% to 50%

8. Re-evaluate the project’s preliminary sea level rise mitigation strategies, which may adversely impact neighboring sites.

The current proposal to mitigate the impacts of sea level rise on this site appears to depend on the preservation of a considerable amount of open space on the site, a significant increase of the site's elevation, and filling and hardscape improvements on the adjacent public parkland. We are concerned that when future storm surge and flooding occurs, these improvements may, if they function correctly, displace water onto neighboring sites. They may also increase the velocity of the water moving through these areas, which may, over time, compromise the structural integrity of the buildings on these properties. We are particularly concerned about the impact of the proposed sea level rise mitigation proposals on the Harbor Point Homes property located to the east of the site.

9. Stop the proposal’s encroachment on Dorchester Shores Reservation and Carson Beach

To protect private development, the Accordia plan proposes re-grading portions of Dorchester Shore Reservation and public parkland adjacent to Day Boulevard and Carson Beach, which will disrupt the use of these public facilities. The proposal also sites one of its tallest structures at the property line at Carson Beach, which represents a significant physical and psychological encroachment on this well-used recreational area. Accordia must supply more detailed plans and renderings of their landscape proposals so this encroachment can be more carefully studied and mitigated.

10. Create research and internship opportunities for UMass Boston students during the planning, design, construction, and operating phases of the project.

This will ensure that UMB undergraduate and graduate students who lost access to affordable parking the site once provided and whose daily commute to and from campus

will be complicated by the project's long-term construction will directly benefit from the development.

We believe the best way for the developer to respond to these demands is to enter into good faith bargaining with a representative group of local community and campus stakeholders to negotiate a legally enforceable Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), such as the one recently undertaken by the developers for Somerville's Union Square.

In the event that Accordia declines to enter into a CBA, we expect BPDA planners assigned to the Article 80 Large Project Review of their proposal to **include the ten demands presented in this document within their "scoping document" for this project.** In addition, we ask them to secure a rigorous analysis of the project's impact on residential and commercial property values and rent levels in the neighborhoods surrounding the site from a reputable, third-party housing research firm so local citizens, institutional leaders, and city officials will be able to determine the project's likely displacement effect and an adequate housing mitigation program can be designed.

Failure to address the planning, design, and civic concerns outlined in this letter will result in the Dorchester Bay City development becoming one more living/working district for an important but narrow class of Bostonians; namely, young professionals from the region's burgeoning technology, bio-engineering, and life-sciences sectors. We are eager to work with Accordia, the BPDA, and other interested parties to avoid Dorchester Bay City becoming another upper-income enclave for the "creative class," similar to Kendall Square and the Innovation District. Such upper-income enclaves further reinforce residential segregation by race and class, which remains, according to recent reports published by the Boston Foundation and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, such a troubling and persistent feature of our city and region.

Respectfully submitted by the following representative bodies and members of the University of Massachusetts Boston campus community:

Classified Staff Union
Department Chairs Union
Faculty Council
Faculty Staff Union
Graduate Employee Organization
Professional Staff Union
College Republicans
College Democrats

Janrey M. Javier, President of the Undergraduate Student Government
Jaely C. Pereira, Vice-President of the Undergraduate Student Government

Izabel Depina, Vice-President, Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM)