

BOSTON

GROUNDWATER TRUST

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April 8, 2004

Keith Craig
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

Re: Museum of Fine Arts
Planned Development Area Proposal

Dear Mr. Craig:

This letter is in response to a request for comment on the proposed Planned Development Area for the Museum of Fine Arts Expansion Project.

In view of the groundwater sensitivities of this site, we believe a comprehensive subsurface analysis is critical to understand if there is a man-made source of groundwater depletion on-site or nearby and if additional measures are necessary to protect the water table from possible depletion caused by construction of the significant building volume proposed for basement-level development.

Our hope is that a reliable groundwater management program can be established for protection of timber pile supported structures nearby, built in landfill areas. The MFA site is believed to be located along alignment of the historic Boston shoreline and there have been indications of lowered groundwater and foundation damage nearby. For the past four years groundwater levels reported by the Boston Groundwater Trust from an observation well on Hemenway Street opposite Fencourt Street and next to the Forsythe Institute parking lot have fluctuated significantly, from a low elevation of 2.93 BCB and most are likely to pose an endangerment to wood pile foundations.

We have reviewed the Development Plan dated February 20, 2004 currently under consideration by the BRA and note a statement by the proponent in the "Approvals" section that, following MEPA & BRA determinations, no further site plan review is required. It also is our understanding that the proponent's commitment to consulting with the Boston Groundwater Trust is memorialized in MEPA's certification of the Final Environmental Impact Report.

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On April 1, 2004 we met with the MFA team, which explained the status of subsurface investigation and confirmed the scheduled completion of Phase One construction documents soon. Although no written subsurface report was available for review, there was agreement to investigate the following requests and report results to the BGWT as follows:

- o Review available groundwater data and the location of any existing observation wells.
- o Research available information concerning the location, size and elevation of the Stoneybrook Conduit.
- o Investigate reports of observation wells once thought to be in the area of the, now existing, Japanese Garden.
- o Consider adding up to 6 observation wells toward the low level reading area of Hemenway St. nearby.
- o Consider relocating the planned discharge field to facilitate recharge into low level reading areas.

Also, it was noted that the School of the MFA is itself supported on timber pile foundations, as is the Isabella Gardner Museum, nearby.

It appears that baseline groundwater data and the technical program for gathering it remain in a formative stage. We look forward to further developments and future response from the development team. However, we regret to report that, to date, no substantive commitment has been forthcoming to concerns about the project, which were summarized in the attached letter dated September 19, 2003. We continue to recommend that a comprehensive program for groundwater management be established by the MFA. The program should be designed to address both the construction phase as well as long-term maintenance of the extensive basement level volume constructed within the water table and adjacent to vulnerable timber pile built areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this development proposal. We look forward to any future request for coordination with the Boston Groundwater Trust and welcome questions that require further clarification.

Very truly yours,



Gary L. Saunders
Trustees & Co-Chairs, Boston Groundwater Trust



Tim Ian Mitchell

copy:
Michael P. Ross, City Councilor, District 8
Le Andrea Dames, MEPA Office