

Boston Groundwater Trust

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July 1, 2013

Katelyn Sullivan, Project Manager
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201-1007

Subject: Fisher College

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Institutional Master Plan Notification Form for Fisher College. The Boston Groundwater Trust was established by the Boston City Council to monitor groundwater levels in sections of Boston where the integrity of building foundations is threatened by low groundwater levels and to make recommendations for solving the problem. Therefore, my comments are limited to groundwater related issues.

As noted in the IMPNF, Fisher College is located in the Groundwater Conservation Overlay District established in Article 32 of the Boston Zoning Code. Many of the College's properties are located on the north side of Beacon Street between Arlington and Berkeley Streets. This is a particularly sensitive area in which there have been historic problems with low groundwater levels. In fact, a Boston Globe article from 1911 reported on the necessity to make piling repairs to the structure at 118 Beacon Street, now the headquarters of the College, because of unexpectedly low groundwater levels. In recent years, the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Boston Water and Sewer Commission have made major efforts to recharge water in the area, leading to substantial increases in groundwater levels. It is critical that nothing be done to jeopardize those gains.

The proponent has committed in the IMPNF to meeting the recharge requirements of the GCOD and to receiving a written determination from BWSC that the standard is met. That would satisfy one of the GCOD criteria. The other is to provide a certification, stamped by a professional engineer registered in Massachusetts, demonstrating that the project will have no negative impact on groundwater levels on site or on adjoining lots. One of the IMPNF projects, the carriage house addition to 118 Beacon Street, is described as including a basement; this could extend space to elevations where there could be an impact on groundwater levels. Because this is planned as an Institutional Master Plan and because the project is small enough that it will not trigger Article 80 review, there will be no further zoning review by the Board of Appeals prior to construction. Therefore, for both reasons, it is critical that the potential impact of this project be resolved before zoning review and approval is complete.

I look forward to working with the proponent and the Authority to assure that any projects constructed under the IMP can have only positive impacts on area groundwater levels.

Very truly yours,

Elliott Laffer
Executive Director

Cc: Kathleen Pedersen, BRA
Maura Zlody, BED