

Offered by City Councilor Gabriela Coletta, Arroyo, Bok, Breadon, Fernandes Anderson, Flaherty, Lara, Louijeune, Mejia, Murphy, Worrell and Flynn



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING A COMPREHENSIVE, DISTRICT-WIDE PLANNING PROCESS FOR BOSTON'S WATERFRONT

WHEREAS: District One faces unique challenges as East Boston, Charlestown, and the North End are coastal communities bearing a significant burden of intentional and generational environmental injustices; and

WHEREAS: Boston's waterfront is a historic and treasured resource that is protected for all residents by the Public Waterfront Act (Chapter 91). As we prepare for sea-level rise due to climate change, we must prioritize waterfront planning and development that incorporates resilience, equity, accessibility; and

WHEREAS: According to a report from the First Street Foundation, Suffolk County faces the greatest risk of flooding with more than 45% of our critical infrastructure at risk, including hospitals, police, and fire stations. This is expected to increase by 20% by 2051; and

WHEREAS: Coastal flooding due to storm surge has increased on a more frequent basis and affects property owners and tenants alike. Severe flooding will result in the displacement of thousands, predominately those who are low-income and people of color, renters in basement or first-floor level units within the flood zone; and

WHEREAS: Boston has a significant role to play to protect our waterfront without depending on investments from private entities or developers. Taking a parcel-by-parcel approach to fortifying our coastline will not adequately address the urgent threat of coastal flooding. We must be able to meet the sea, on a district-wide scale, use both passive and active permeable landscapes; and

WHEREAS: In 2013, Boston began a Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan (DWMHP) process that took four years to complete. By the time the plan was finalized in 2017, it did not adequately consider contemporary climate data and centered on individual development projects as a means to achieve resilience; and

WHEREAS: In addition, the community engagement process to solicit feedback on the Downtown Waterfront MHP was limited to a small group of residents with waterfront property. It did not take into consideration a majority of Bostonian's priorities for amenities, programming, or public realm improvements that foster a truly welcoming and inclusive waterfront; and

WHEREAS: Mayor Michelle Wu recently launched a municipal harbor planning process specifically for East Boston to create a predictable framework that prioritizes waterfront equity and resiliency; and

WHEREAS: While we consider the next steps for East Boston's new process, there are significant lessons to be learned from the Downtown Waterfront MHP in both the planning itself and community engagement; and

WHEREAS: The new planning process needs a holistic approach that is community-led with an emphasis on centering on the needs of residents and their vision for the waterfront. It should lean on progress made by both PLAN: East Boston and PLAN: Charlestown initiatives to ultimately shape a waterfront that offers affordable amenities including housing and commercial space, climate preparedness, transit infrastructure connectivity; and

WHEREAS: It should utilize contemporary resilience strategies seen around the world and meet goals set out by Climate Ready Boston. Collaboration with academic partners like the UMass Boston Stone Living Lab is key to analyzing the merits of large engineering solutions to sea-level rise, as applied in European cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Venice; and

WHEREAS: Every resident has ownership of access to our waterfront but one only has to traverse the water's edge to feel the uninviting nature of the harbor walk. There is a lack of wayfinding signage in multiple languages and disjointed walkways with private security. Therefore, the new planning process should implement an equity lens to plan for the inclusion of all Bostonians to enjoy the waterfront, regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status; and

WHEREAS: Recently, there have been increased discussions around lifting certain waterfront properties from the Designated Port Area (DPA). Additionally, there are existing proposals for mixed-use developments on the waterfront that perpetuate a piecemeal approach to resiliency. The City of Boston needs to develop and implement a comprehensive, districtwide waterfront plan that takes into consideration modern resilience strategies and through an equity lens to guide any new proposed developments; THEREFORE

BE IT ORDERED,

That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing to discuss a holistic, district-wide planning process for Boston's district one waterfront, and that relevant members of the Cabinet of Environment, Energy, and Open Space, the Boston Planning and Development Agency, with other advocacy organizations and stakeholders invited to testify.

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