

(Emailed to FOC 11/6/11)

Dear Friends of the Canalwalk:

I was asked to comment about the disappointing delays for Phase II of the Canalwalk. This project is extremely important to the city for the revitalization of our downtown. It will offer pedestrian improvements to an area that very much needs them. It also adds an increase in property values for the business and property owners that surround the Canalwalk. This is a federally funded project that must go through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for approvals all along the way. Also, since State and Federal funds are being used, both of them also have to review. According to Federal Highway (FHWA) rules, the City could not contract with anyone for Phase II until Phase I actually began construction. I have a timeline below that shows that the City didn't waste any time in getting the project started and actually sent out the RFP prior to the Groundbreaking for Phase I.

If you look at the documented timeline below, you will see that it took Mass DOT and FHWA eight months to review the City's scope of work for the project before they would give us the notice to proceed. We had a kick-off meeting with Mass DOT within one month after signing the contract with VHB.

Since it was the desire of the community and the city to include the old railroad bridge in Phase II it needed to be inspected, which can only happen when the canal is drained. Rather than wait to use Mass DOT funds or for the notice to proceed, the city used our own funds to get the bridge inspected in the Spring so we didn't have to wait until Fall when the Gas and Electric drained the canal again, however, we had flooding in the river that week and the canals needed to be refilled that day so the consultants were not able to complete their work.

The preliminary plan concepts were brought to the public meeting in November of 2010 for residents to comment. You can see by the documentation below, that the city's consultants turned the plans around right away that included the public meeting comments into the plan.

Another setback to the city was having the bridge review from Mass DOT Boston take 9 months to complete their review. We called both Mass DOT's District II office and Senator Knapik's office for assistance to get them reviewed sooner. Finally, in August of 2010, they said they had no comments and that we could proceed. While this project is extremely important to the city, in all fairness to Mass DOT, their bridge department must work on bridges within the Commonwealth that have extreme safety issues as a priority.

We had regular coordination meeting with the abutting property owners to make sure none of the changes in the plan would interfere with the current businesses along the walkway. There were also meetings with the Holyoke Gas and Electric to talk about burying the power lines and coordination of work.

Last week, the Planning Department reviewed the 25% design plans that will be submitted to Mass DOT to make sure that public comments were included. Their comments were given to the VHB by the end of the week and the consultants made the necessary changes this week and submitted the 25% design plans to Mass DOT on Friday according to the timeline.

As you can see, this is a very complicated process when having to use State and Federal funds. The Planning and Development Office has stayed on top of this project and has purposely documented details and phone calls to show where things have been slowed down.

While the delays in this project are disappointing to both the city and the “friends” of the Canalwalk, it needs continued positive support moving forward. It is critical for people to come out in support of the project and to ask to expedite the review process to get it into the 2012 schedule of construction. With this support, it may be possible to put it back on the 2012 schedule. I will be there to vote to exactly that.

Please feel free to invite the Planning and Development Office to a meeting where these details can be explained further. The Planning and Development Office has called Nancy Sachs on several occasions to give her updates when we finally had movement from Mass DOT during these frustrating times.

We are already planning Phase III of the Canalwalk and have 25% design drawings. This was done through a different grant funding source that did not require the preliminary approvals of Mass DOT and their lengthy timelines. This is an example of how the staff of the Office of Planning and Development continually works to leverage funds in order to move projects forward.

Canalwalk Phase II Timeline

Drafted RFP for engineer	02/01/09
Comments back from DOT	03/27/09
Draft RFP to Dave Martins for review	04/01/09
Comment back from Dave Martins	04/16/09
Released RFP	04/21/09
Groundbreaking Phase I	05/01/09
Bids opened	06/09/09
Review Committee review completed	06/24/09 <i>(Top 3 selected for interviews)</i>
Selected VHB as Contractor	07/09/09
Scope of Work submitted to DOT for VHB	08/19/09
Emailed several times for update	08/26/09
Left message for Paula Simmons	09/14/09
Response from DOT	09/15/09
Response to questions of DOT by VHB	09/17/09
Additional bridge comments from DOT	09/21/09
Responses sent back by VHB	10/23/09
Called for update	11/15/09
Canalwalk Phase I completed	11/01/09
Received email from DOT Rich Masse <i>week)</i>	11/06/09 <i>(DOT to forward recommendation next</i>
Mayor rcv'd request for info from DOT	12/04/09 <i>(information in proof of procurement)</i>
Planning rcv'd request from DPW	12/23/09
Planning responded to request	12/28/09
Emailed DOT for progress	02/17/10

Recv'd acknowledgement of request	02/18/10
Call & response from DOT/FHWA approval	03/09/10 <i>(is checking on date for DOT Boston approval)</i>
Spring Canal Drawdown (bridge work)	03/23/10 <i>(contracted separately with VHB to do investigation during drawdown)</i>
	<i>(Not all work completed. Flooding, canals refilled in 1 day)</i>
Notice Contract signed in Boston	04/28/10 <i>(email from Dave Blei)</i>
Received Agreement from FHWA	04/30/10
Submitted to Council to accept grant	04/30/10
General Contract from VHB	05/03/10
Council accepted Grant	06/01/10
Notice of account from Auditor	06/08/10
Contract back with signature to City	06/22/10
Canalwalk Phase I Ribbon cutting	06/25/10
Kick-off meeting with DOT	07/21/10
DOT Canal Bridge details received	07/22/10
Bridge Investigations by VHB	09/20/10
DOT phone meeting	09/27/10
Property owner meetings	10/20/10
Project Meeting with DOT	10/29/10
Preliminary plans to staff for review	11/04/10
Estimates recv'd for electric underground	11/10/10 <i>(from HG&E)</i>
Public Meeting on Phase II plans	11/17/10 <i>(2 concepts presented)</i>
Final comments forwarded from meeting	11/30/10
Initial survey research completed	12/16/10
Preliminary Structures Report Submitted	12/17/10
Survey Field work	12/20/10
Preferred Concept Plan to staff for review	12/21/10
Comments back to VHB from staff	12/30/10
Electrical Coordination Meeting	01/24/11
Submitted RDA to ConCom	02/10/11
Canalwalk Determination of Applicability	02/25/11 <i>(Negative determination from ConCom)</i>
District Comments received	03/04/11
Revised Preliminary Structures Submitted	03/15/11 <i>(Bridge loading correspondence as well)</i>
Received accident reports from Engineering	03/17/11 <i>(faxed to VHB)</i>
District Comments received	03/31/11
Confirmed w/ Fred Nohelty project assigned	04/24/11 <i>(told comments would be 1 week from Boston Bridge)</i>
Correspondence from Fred Nohelty	05/23/11 <i>(Fred said reviewer is busy and could not commit to any date for their review of the bridge plans)</i>
Asked Law Dept to review deeds for bridge	06/07/11
Called Senator Knapik's office for help	06/13/11
Forwarded timeline to Helene	06/15/11
Boston Bridge Comments	08/08/11 <i>(no further comments from Mohammed Farooqui)</i>
MPO Meeting – moved to 2013	08/30/11 <i>(MPO voted to move to Canalwalk)</i>
Revised Preliminary Structures to Boston	08/26/11
Asked VHB to look at adding bikepath raised	09/10/11

Checked with Law Dept on progress	09/14/11
Submitted revised schedule to DOT	09/21/11
Emailed Dave Blei at District for update <i>re: verbal approval</i>	10/03/11 <i>(he was going to check & get back to us</i>
Preliminary deed information from Law	10/11/11
Preliminary 25% plans recv'd by staff	10/17/11
Comments to VHB on 25% plans	10/28/11
Emailed Dave Blei again	11/01/11
Comments back from VHB on staff review	11/02/11
25% Design Plans Submitted	11/04/11