

10 Dexter Street
Newburyport, MA 01950
September 22, 2021

Ad Hoc Committee on Expanding Market Landing Park
City Hall
Newburyport, MA 01950

RE: Market Landing Park Expansion – Revised Conceptual Plan

Dear Members of the Ad Hoc Committee:

Please accept the following comments regarding the “Revised Conceptual Plan” that was presented to the Ad Hoc Committee at its meeting last Thursday, September 16. I have also submitted these comments through the comment form on the project website.

Overall layout

- The revised plan is somewhat more relaxed than the earlier concepts, but it continues to break the available space into small pieces that do not seem appropriate or necessary. Although modest in its total area, the expanded Market Landing Park has the potential to provide gracious areas for unstructured enjoyment of the waterfront. However, the revised plan fragments these areas into smaller units (described as “rooms”). Along with the introduction of formal play/recreation structures, this approach would seem to make the park busier than it needs to be.

Shared use path alignment

- The revised plan calls for routing the shared use path through the boardwalk at the head of the embayment, thereby funneling bicyclists into the most attractive and busiest area for pedestrians. The boardwalk in this location is the place where those walking along the riverfront mix with those arriving from Market Square, so there is probably more pedestrian movement in multiple directions than anywhere else in the park. It is also an area for gathering and for informal performances. Whether or not bicyclists are required to dismount, they will add a different and unnecessary level of congestion and conflict and may degrade from the experience for those traversing the area by foot.
- The west end of the shared use path sweeps toward the river and the sculpture plaza and connects to the sidewalk in front of the Tuscan Sea Grill restaurant. There are two problems with this. First, the path goes through a complex area with a lot of activity, including children and families enjoying the sculptures and going to and from the adjacent picnic tables. Second, the sidewalk at Tuscan is neither wide enough (less than 8 feet) nor configured to be a cycle path, and I can envision many conflicts between cyclists and restaurant patrons crossing the sidewalk to and from the parking area, or simply waiting outside for a table.

In addition, the sidewalk is owned by New England Development and is subject to future redevelopment of the entire Waterfront West area. It would seem more prudent to have the path not make that sweep toward the river but instead follow the edge of the parking lot and terminate somewhere near the existing driveway to the dirt lot.

- If the plan retains the alignment of the shared use path across the boardwalk, it would be a good idea to provide clear bicycle links to Water and Merrimac Streets for cyclists who would prefer to ride continuously through Market Square rather than have to dismount and walk through the crowds at busy times.

Shared use path width

- Given the proposed alignment of the shared use path, I believe that a 10-foot paved width is too narrow for the likely volume of traffic at peak times during the warmer months. The downtown section of the rail trail between the Custom House and the Tannery has proven to be a tremendously successful amenity for walking, cycling and gathering, and there are already times when multiple groups of walkers make it difficult for cyclists to ride through. As the path crosses the central waterfront it will likely be even more popular, and so we should be planning for the likely capacity.

Vehicle parking and traffic

- For many years it was represented that the construction of a municipal parking garage would allow the City to eliminate most of the “temporary” parking spaces along the waterfront. Even the 2017 Master Plan refers to “relocate[ing] all of the parking that is currently on the waterfront parcels,” although other sections of the Master Plan suggest that only a portion of the waterfront spaces would be removed. Since then, it has been accepted that some of the parking will become permanent.

However, preserving a parking lot on the west side of the park will continue the traffic problems at the driveway that currently exist. If parking is to be maintained in the former NRA West Lot, the plan should include a strategy for upgrading the intersection of Merrimac St, Green St and the parking lot driveway.

Bicycle parking

- The conceptual plan does not depict enough bicycle parking to accommodate access to the park by cyclists both on the rail trails and the street system. At a minimum, the park should have one bicycle parking space for each 3 to 5 vehicle spaces. As the plan shows 157 vehicle spaces (including the Waterfront Trust lot), this would translate into between 32 and 52 bicycle spaces, or between 16 and 26 two-sided bike racks distributed throughout the park.
- The conceptual plan shows 9 bike racks in the proposed “West Embayment Plaza.” With proper spacing (3 feet between racks and on each end of the row) these racks would require 30 feet, but the plan shows a plaza width of only 25 feet, reducing the capacity to 7 racks.

- Bike parking should also be provided on the east side of the park, where the majority of the vehicle parking spaces are located. The conceptual plan does not show any bike parking in this area and even suggests that the existing 3 racks at the entrance to the Clipper City Rail Trail adjacent to Custom House Way would be eliminated.
- Based on the above considerations, I suggest revising the parking plan to include about 16 bike racks (i.e., capacity for 32 bicycles) on the east side of the park (which could include retaining the 3 racks next to Custom House Way), and about 10 racks on the west side distributed between the West Embayment Plaza and the Visitor Center.
- It would also be beneficial to include some larger parking spaces for cargo bikes and bikes with trailers in order to accommodate families with young children who would like to access activities in the park. As bicycle connectivity continues to improve in this and surrounding communities, I am certain that more people will choose to cycle to events and recreational facilities rather than drive, and the City can encourage this by designing its facilities accordingly.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,



Rick Taintor