

March 9, 2021

Kathleen A. Theoharides, Secretary
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge St, Suite 900
Attn: MEPA Office – Tori Kim, Director
Boston, MA 02114

Subject: Proposed MEPA Interim Protocols
Climate Change, Adaptation and Resiliency and Environmental Justice Outreach

Dear Secretary Theoharides;

The Stone Living Laboratory (SLL) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Unit's two draft interim protocols addressing Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency and Environmental Justice Outreach. Our comments focus on the following areas:

- Draft MEPA Interim Protocol on Climate Change and Resiliency
- Draft Addendum Climate Change Resiliency
- Draft MEPA interim Protocol on Environmental Justice Outreach

Background on the Stone Living Lab (SLL)

Officially launched in the Fall of 2020, the SLL represents a collaboration between The Stone Foundation, The City of Boston, The National Park Service, UMass Boston, and Boston Harbor Now. The Lab is a major new research and educational initiative within the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park focused on developing and testing innovative, adaptive, nature-based solutions to climate adaptation, coastal resiliency, ecological restoration, and associated policy research with an overriding commitment to equity and environmental justice.

Based on four founding principles—Research, Climate Preparedness, Education and Policy—our vision is to create a culture where people work with nature to make coastal regions resilient and adaptive to climate change while enhancing the natural and built environment. The SLL will serve as an interdisciplinary innovation hub that will combine elements of scientific research and experimentation with public engagement, education, and policy development. The methods developed and lessons learned in our lab will be used to protect coastal resources and communities across the Commonwealth from the impacts of climate change and will provide transferable and critical knowledge for national and international benefit.

As part of our initial work, the scientific team is in the process of installing a collection of monitoring instruments on and around Rainsford Island in Boston Harbor to collect real-time and ongoing baseline data that will assist project participants in designing and creating more resilient projects in and around Boston Harbor. The SLL is positioned to become a unique resource to assist the Commonwealth in a host of climate change initiatives.

Draft MEPA Interim Protocol on Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency

The Interim Protocol encourages those projects subject to MEPA to utilize the best available climate science data and projections for Massachusetts in evaluating risks and impacts associated with sea level rise, the amount, frequency, and timing of precipitation, and increases in average temperature including frequency of extreme temperature events. The effects of climate change will continue to directly impact communities in Massachusetts, particularly coastal communities. Project proponents must be strategic and thoughtful in using best available climate data in designing and engineering their projects. The SLL will soon become a resource for climate science data and expects to support the Commonwealth's efforts in this area.

The Protocol specifically requires that all new proponents filing with the MEPA Office must complete an addendum entitled "Addendum: Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency" designed to assist in the evaluation of a project's climate risks and adaptation strategies. The SLL supports requiring all project proponents to file an "Addendum" to assure that proponents fully assess the climate risks and identify climate and resiliency strategies earlier rather than later in the project development design process. In addition, the SLL recommends that project proponents provide information on appropriate mitigation measures, if appropriate, in the addendum.

Addendum: Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency

The SLL supports MEPA's Interim Protocol requiring that all new proponents filing an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) with the MEPA Office complete the Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency Addendum. The Addendum mirrors information that will be available from the Resilient Massachusetts Action Team (RMAT) Climate Resiliency Design Standards Tool regarding climate risks and criticality of proposed projects. We offer the following comments on this Addendum:

- Section I.D. – Since FEMA does not publish Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) for 0.2%-annual-chance flood areas on their maps, consider asking applicants to provide the 0.2% stillwater elevation from the FEMA Flood Insurance Study reports.
- Section II.A. – Maintain the option to submit Section II of the Addendum even after the RMAT Climate Resiliency Design Standards Tool becomes available. This will provide



applicants the opportunity to justify a criticality level for unique projects using additional factors that may not be considered in the RMAT tool.

- Section III.C. – Responses to this question will be useful in assessing potential impacts to Land Subject to Coastal Storm Flowage (LSCSF) or Bordering Land Subject to Flooding (BLSF); however, without site specific engineering calculations and/or model results, the responses should be considered qualitative.

Draft MEPA Interim Protocol for Environmental Justice Outreach and Resiliency

The SLL supports MEPA’s Interim Protocol requiring that all new proponents filing with the MEPA Office not only be required to identify the location of the project relative to Environmental Justice (EJ) areas but also the location of any anticipated impacts. The filing should also include a printout of the project location relative to these areas as an attachment to a MEPA filing (ENF or EENF).

If a project is located in or impacts an EJ community, early identification of impacted communities will only strengthen the environmental documents that need to be filed and reviewed by MEPA staff. SLL supports a 10-day pre-filing consultation with MEPA to assure that all issues related to impacts to an EJ community are identified prior to “officially” filing with MEPA.

General Comments

Recognizing that the Resilient Massachusetts Action Team (RMAT) is an inter-agency steering committee (rather than a group of NGOs, etc.) responsible for implementation, monitoring, and maintenance of the State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan (SHMCAP), the SLL is prepared as information develops to provide expertise and guidance to RMAT based on the work of the Lab.

Given the unique nature of the SLL and the potential experiments that might occur in and around Boston Harbor, the SLL looks forward to submitting more detailed comments to MEPA as part of procedural changes also under public review with a March 31, 2021 deadline.

In closing, the SLL supports the Interim Protocols as they further the Commonwealth’s efforts to support state agencies and municipalities in implementing SHMCAP.

We also expect that as the work of the SLL advances, the Lab will help to enhance and contribute to the success of the state’s initiatives on climate change and help add an innovative layer of research, educational and policy data to those efforts.



On behalf of the Lab, thank you for the opportunity to comment. We are glad to provide further information and respond to any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Paul H. Kirshen, PhD
Director
Stone Living Laboratory

cc: Sonja Plessett, The Stone Foundation
Marc Albert, National Park Service
Alison Brizius, The City of Boston
Kathy Abbott, Boston Harbor Now
Kirk Bosma, Woods Hole Group