

Charlestown Patriot-Bridge LaMattina Holds City Council Hearing on Ferries

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By Times Staff

By John Lynds

City Councilor and Chair of the Committee on Parks, Recreation and Transportation Sal LaMattina held a hearing last Thursday at City Hall to discuss the plans to bring a ferry to East Boston, Charlestown, the North End and South Boston.

The hearing, co-chaired by Council President Michelle Wu and Councilor Bill Linehan, showed that there is a need and desire to implement expanded water transportation access on the Boston Harbor but there has been a lack of funding and business planning to sustain longterm ferry service in Boston.

“My entire district is located along the waterfront and so is a sizable portion of Councilor Linehan’s,” said LaMattina. “As

I have said numerous times, I can see the Seaport from East Boston but I cannot get there, and it’s very difficult to get there using the MBTA and don’t even try using your car during rush hour because it could take you a half hour of more to get there. And if you live in Charlestown and the North End it’s just as difficult.”

LaMattina challenged city and state agencies to begin to ‘put our heads together’ and really work to make water transportation a reality in Boston.



City Councilor and Chair of the Committee on Parks, Recreation and Transportation Sal LaMattina held a hearing last Thursday at City Hall to discuss the plans to bring a ferry to Boston Harbor. The meeting was co-chaired by President Michelle Wu and Councilor Bill Linehan.

“Other Cities have set a nice precedent for the type of system we are looking to incorporate into our transportation infrastructure,” said LaMattina. “As we were doing research, we came upon the story of False Creek in Vancouver. They started with four little boats in 1981 which carried anywhere between 12 – 20 passengers. Today they are operating a fleet of four lines, 16 vessels, nine terminals and an annual ridership of 500,000 passengers. If they could do it, we could do it.”

In 2012, it was announced that Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) grant funds would assist in the implementation of ferry service between Eastie, the North End, South Boston, and Charlestown. The new service was to meet the growing demand for transportation across Boston Harbor and boost economic opportunity by creating new transit connections between Boston residents and jobs.

The Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) was to manage the FHWA grant funds and purchase two passenger ferries. The terms of the FHWA grant requires that the City match the \$1.28 million by 20 percent, or \$320,000 for a total anticipated purchase price of \$1.6 million.

An operator was to be chosen to manage the day-to-day operations of the ferry through a Request For Proposal process and was projected to set sail in 2013.

The last Capital Budget approved by the City under the late Mayor Thomas Menino in 2012 included \$155,000 to pay for the infrastructure improvements promised as part of this new Waterfront Development District. This money was to pay for water transportation infrastructure investment, including a study to determine demand, infrastructure requirements and programming of water transportation.

However, the plan has been adrift at sea for three years.

BPDA Deputy Director for Waterfront Planning Richard McGuinness pointed to several waterfront projects in East Boston and Boston that have the infrastructure to support water transportation like the Eddy on New Street, Clippership Wharf and Portside at Pier One in Eastie as well as Long Wharf in the North End and the Navy Yard in Charlestown.

However, McGuinness testified at the hearing that the cost has stalled the Ferry service plan. With costs estimated at around \$1 million per year to run, McGuinness said while a ferry would cost less when comparing the operating costs of other modes of transportation like the MBTA, the grant the city received only scratches the surface.

McGuinness said the FHWA grant fell short of city bids that were coming in to operate the ferry service with some bids several hundreds of thousands of dollars the city would get from the FHWA. With the grant money designated to build docks and purchase two, 49 passengers ferries to support service on the Boston Harbor, the city found the \$1.29 million was simply not enough. However, he added that the grant money is still in the BPDA’s general fund and can still be used to jump start ferry service but the city needs to come up with a solid business plan on how to make ferry service sustainable for the future.

Former Boston City Councilor Diane Modica testified on why the ferry service during her tenure on the Council failed. Modica's pilot ferry service sank because of the low ridership over 20 years ago. However, LaMattina said Boston Harbor is a much different place with Waterfront Development in Eastie, Charlestown, North End and the Seaport District.

“Other cities along the east coast, such as Baltimore and New York City have vibrant and active waterfronts, so why can't Boston?,” said LaMattina. “Water transportation will also connect our neighborhoods. Imagine living in Charlestown and being able to hop on a ferry and go to East Boston, get off the ferry, grab a Hubway and use the East Boston Greenway to go to the Beach. Wouldn't it be nice if you lived in East Boston and you could get on a Ferry to go to Charlestown to visit the Menino Park in Charlestown, or if you like going to a beach in East Boston to be able to take a ferry to use the Outdoor Pool in the North End. Water Transportation will allow us to have an awesome waterfront park system in Boston. Just think about it.”