



# *The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

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## **STATEMENT FROM REP. ADRIAN C. MADARO ON BPDA APPROVAL OF THE SUFFOLK DOWNS PDA**

Last night, following nearly six hours of public testimony, HYM's Suffolk Downs development was approved by the Boston Planning and Development Agency. This decision comes after nearly three years of community participation and negotiations. However, this process is far from over.

With the Suffolk Downs PDA approved, the work begins to ensure that the commitments made to our community are fulfilled and expanded upon. As the project is constructed over the next twenty years, we must continue to push for a Suffolk Downs that is truly reflective of our community, and responsive to its circumstances. East Boston achieved some important wins in this agreement. Yet at the same time, we know that gaps remain in fully addressing the community's needs and concerns. This is why we must continue to advocate and negotiate. As your elected Representative, I am committed to standing behind the community throughout this process.

I want to take a moment to recognize and speak to the fears that many in our community have expressed regarding what Suffolk Downs will mean for housing affordability and displacement in our communities. These concerns are well-founded. We are living through a housing crisis. Many of our neighbors are struggling to remain in the community they call home. Too many young people who were born and raised in East Boston do not see a future for themselves in our neighborhood because they can no longer afford to live here. My office has seen seniors evicted who have spent their entire lives in our community. We know too many neighbors and loved ones who were displaced when their buildings were sold or rents raised, who had to move in with friends or family, or leave East Boston entirely for a lack of available, affordable options.

Concerns that Suffolk Downs will exacerbate these issues are not without merit. It is likely that Suffolk Downs will increase pressures on our housing market. When a large number of new, luxury units are built, they tend to have the effect of raising the prices (and rents) of nearby properties. This is a trend we have seen throughout East Boston these past several years. The housing market is failing working class

families across the country, including here in our neighborhood. We have witnessed the production of an abundance of expensive luxury units at the cost of affordable options for working families. These trends have compromised the ability of longtime residents of our neighborhood to continue making their home here.

HYM did not create East Boston's housing crisis, and we cannot expect HYM to solve it alone. However, they do have a responsibility to ensure that Suffolk Downs does not contribute to the pressure of displacement. This responsibility must be achieved through their affordable housing and community stabilization commitments, both on and offsite. We must continue to advocate to raise those floors, to look for ways to increase the numbers of affordable units and deepen the level of real affordability at rates that East Boston residents can truly afford, in order to ensure that these anti-displacement measures are truly effective. We must continue to push for more housing for families with children across all income levels to ensure that Suffolk Downs is more reflective of our neighborhood at large. And beyond Suffolk Downs, we need more affordable housing, and better policies at the city and state levels to protect renters and prevent displacement. I remain fully committed to fighting for those policies and working to retain the fabric and character that has made our diverse, immigrant community so special.

But the victories that our community has already won in negotiations with HYM are significant, and deserve to be celebrated. We have made great strides from what was originally proposed. We secured more benefits and protections than any other project in recent Boston history. In doing so, we have guaranteed important wins for our community and set a solid foundation off of which to grow future negotiations.

What started off as a proposal to have the minimum requirement of 13% affordability now has a floor of 20%. These will include more family-sized units available to a wider range of incomes. We successfully negotiated for the creation of a \$5 million housing stabilization fund that will be controlled by our community and funded throughout the 20-year project. We secured an investment of \$800,000 to the City's Rental Relief Fund and ensured that Suffolk Downs will be held to the standards of the pending fair housing (non-discrimination) amendment to the Boston Zoning Code.

Beyond housing, the project offers 40 acres of green, open space to be managed by the City for all in our community to enjoy. That open space will link to the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway and have connections to Belle Isle Marsh, offering more opportunities for recreation and enjoyment for East Boston residents. HYM also agreed to fund an additional DCR ranger at Belle Isle, in addition to committing to a visitor impact study of that critical environmental habitat.

We also worked hard to make sure that this development could serve as an economic boon for our community and that East Boston residents would have priority in accessing any jobs created. To that end, we advocated for expanded vocational education and a direct pipeline to jobs for East Boston residents, with a \$1 million investment in trade apprenticeship programs. An additional \$1 million has been set

aside for ESOL and workforce development for East Bostonians to ensure community access to jobs long after construction has ceased, and we've secured commitments from the developer to work with local businesses, restaurants, and entrepreneurs in the neighborhood to fill retail space at Suffolk Downs.

We secured a \$20 million investment for public transit. \$12 million of this will go towards updating the signal system on the Blue Line, allowing for increased train speeds and capacity. In addition, \$7 million will go towards the redesign and rehabilitation of Beachmont and Suffolk Downs train stations, and \$1 million will go towards improving our MBTA bus network.

All of the above mitigation measures are floors, minimum requirements with the opportunity to increase investments as the process unfolds. What I highlighted above are just some of the results of the years of negotiations between HYM and our community. But, it is important to note that these negotiations are not yet done. Since this will be a long-term development, so too will the conversations be around impacts. An Implementation IAG of East Boston residents will help ensure compliance and hold stakeholders accountable. This will mean continuous review at each phase of the process with East Boston residents having a strong seat at the table.

These mitigation benefits are a direct result of our community activism. I am deeply grateful to the many neighbors who have participated in this process, attending meetings, writing their elected officials, and sharing their thoughts and concerns about this project. I also want to thank the community advocates who led these efforts. What we have accomplished would not have been possible without their tireless advocacy and grassroots efforts throughout our neighborhood. I am also thankful to my colleagues, Councilor Edwards and Senator Boncore, for their steadfast partnership in these negotiations.

Last night's agreement meant a deal for East Boston that was significantly better than what was originally proposed and, more importantly, represents a strong foundation to continue future negotiations. As a community, we must continue to stay engaged for the next 20 years and beyond. We intend to continue to fight to ensure that all these commitments are met and enhanced, and that we receive the best outcomes possible for our community at each step of this process.

As we continue in this process, I am committed to stand by the residents of our community, hear your concerns, and advocate for your priorities. We are building a new neighborhood, and together we must ensure that the future of Suffolk Downs is the future that we want for East Boston.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'A. Williams' or similar, written in a cursive style.