

Re: 2024 Harvard University Institutional Master Plan Notification Form

Harvard Undergraduates for Environmental Justice (HUEJ) is a student advocacy organization that aims to educate and mobilize those in and around Harvard to protect the environmental wellbeing of our human and ecological communities. With a strong and dedicated membership of undergraduates at Harvard College, HUEJ members work to emphasize justice, with a particular focus on communities and areas disproportionately affected by environmental issues due to compounding social and historical factors. Our membership constantly seeks opportunities to confront pressing issues regarding our local environments. Due to our mission and our position as Harvard students, HUEJ has an interest in the University's development plans and activities in Allston, an area with historical and ongoing justice concerns. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the IMPNF, and hope to offer a valuable, justice-oriented student perspective on the institution's effects on our neighbors.

Transportation and Mobility

HUEJ commends Harvard's previous and planned efforts to prioritize alternative, sustainable transit modes in Allston. To maximize the benefit of these alternative transit improvements, Harvard should support the needs of Allston community members who are not Harvard affiliates. Many of the transportation facilities which Harvard cites in the IMPNF, such as parts of the SEC and Allston Mobility Hub, are only open to HUID holders and therefore do not benefit the existing Allston community. Additionally, Harvard's shuttle routes are not publicized to the greater Allston or Cambridge communities, which serves as a barrier to access. Increasing awareness of Harvard shuttle routes, such as through integration with high-adoption services such as Google Maps, or by improved signage clearly indicating routes and stop locations and times, would improve the accessibility of this service for all users.

Increasing transit opportunities in Allston is particularly important in light of the negative impacts of the proposed construction on neighborhood mobility. Harvard estimates 10,400 new daily person-trips as a result of this project, and alternative transportation modes such as campus shuttles and bike lanes are designed for connectivity with the Cambridge campus and short commutes. As a result, these solutions are unlikely to serve the staff members commuting to these buildings. What mitigating measures will be taken to avoid excessive congestion and preserve existing roadway level-of-service for all users?

Sustainability

HUEJ commends the development of a strategic zero-waste plan by the end of 2024. Recognizing the finite nature of Earth's resources and the disproportionate amount allocated to

wealthy institutions, it is imperative that Harvard make efforts to reduce consumption of material resources.

By developing strategies to purchase, ship, and consume less, the procurer—in this case the University—benefits in three ways: first, the cost of procurement is lowered when fewer materials are purchased. Second, marginal materials—those that would have been purchased but are not under a strategic plan—do not enter the waste stream, meaning that the University doesn't have to account for their impact on waste reporting nor their proper disposal. Third, nonprocurement abates upstream energy, material, and monetary costs of production and shipping. Reducing consumption cuts off waste and sustainability problems at the source.

As the Allston campus is developed from its current, barren state to a ecologically vibrant area, the University should re-examine its landscaping practices. Taking cues from the landscape design of the SEC, and working in conjunction with the BPDA's Greenway project, Harvard should commit to planting native species and sustainable, ecologically-sound landscaping practices and maximizing permeable ground area as possible. The consequences of failing to account for the urban ecosystem in landscape design could be significant: for example, well-planted, healthy soil is excellent at absorbing excess water; parking lots are notably not-so-adept. Harvard would do well to integrate bioswale planning and ecological collaboration in its flood and drainage planning. The potential for disease or uncontrolled pest proliferation in the Allston-Brighton area is also greater if the IMP area's landscape design does not work in concert with the existing, native ecosystems.

Community Benefits

HUEJ recognizes that affordable housing and culturally-vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods are key to environmental justice. We commend Harvard's existing commitments to community benefits and generous monetary and programmatic engagement with the Allston-Brighton community. But a crucial element of community well-being must be considered in the case of the IMP: the built environment. Though we are happy to see Harvard's work with the Coalition for a Just Allston + Brighton (CJAB) and the commitments to affordable housing on non-IMP properties, we are also concerned about the highly dangerous potential for cultural and economic gentrification due to IMP uses. If Harvard's only focus is on building lab, housing, and tech spaces for university use and third-party rental, the existing Allston community continues to be left behind in the built environment. Especially given the University's history of covert expansion and the long-extant distrust in the communities affected, Harvard should continue to engage with the Allston-Brighton community to create spaces that benefit the broader public on institutional land in addition to Harvard-specific uses. This could include but is certainly not limited to land set aside for publicly-accessible playgrounds, community gardens, or outdoor sport or exercise areas.

We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Harvard Undergraduates for Environmental Justice

Sustainability

Climate resiliency

Why do building flooding/stormwater plans seem to all be about building buildings higher off the ground or making pipes bigger and not planting more plants? → green roofs, native plantings, etc.

Built adaptation great, but there are also more natural-focused responses to climate changes

Okay they mention green roofs as part of heat island mitigation

“A tree inventory will be included as part of the upcoming Institutional Master Planning ("IMP") process.”

- Will that be accessible?
- Will there be reassurance that trees will stay on campus / will there be any prioritization of keeping trees where they are long-term?
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Mobility

Largely focused on alternative/sustainable transportation (shared use paths, BlueBikes) – yay!

Harvard cites bicycle mobility/infrastructure as a large part of the Allston transportation network -- but most of the bicycle infrastructure improvements they're talking about (SEC + Allston Mobility Hub) are only open to HUID holders

Harvard and TMA shuttles are primarily based on the needs of Harvard affiliates – schedules/routes not necessarily aligned with non-Harvard residents, shuttles could increase neighborhood congestion.

^Harvard does not adequately publicize these transit options to non-Harvard affiliates

Rerouting 66+86 bus lines is likely to negatively impact community residents who depend on those routes for mobility needs. Need to ensure that the neighborhoods which would lose access to those routes will continue to be served by public transit.

Specifically, there are some EJ communities in Somerville that would lose access to the 86 bus

line. Harvard did not offer specifics on changes to the 66 bus route, but it appears likely that they will suggest changes to eliminate service to parts of Allston and Brookline where the 66 bus route is currently the primary public transit option.

The proposed Allston-Brighton transit link could address these concerns? It seems like a good idea, just need to make sure it's efficient and publicized enough so people actually use it

Harvard estimates 10,400 new daily person-trips as a result of this project – that's a LOT. What mitigating measures will be taken to preserve existing roadway level-of-service? Most of the alternative transportation plans (shuttles, bike lanes, etc) are designed for short commutes and connectivity with the Cambridge campus, which likely will not serve the staff members commuting to these buildings.