



Town of Winchester

Michael Bettencourt, Chair
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December 3, 2020

VIA MAIL and EMAIL: publicengagement@mbta.com
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Re: Winchester Commuter Rail Station Renovations – Proposed Delay

Dear Members of the Fiscal and Management Control Board,

The MBTA Commuter Rail Station is at the center of the Winchester's commercial district, and the commuting convenience it offers is cited by many residents in our growing and diversifying community as one reason for moving to town. This long-envisioned station renovation is also a central, vital component in the town's long-term redevelopment plan focused on transit-oriented, smart growth and a commitment to mixed-income, multi-family rental housing in and near the town center. The station has been a catalyst for several rental housing and mixed-use projects now moving into the permitting stage of development. One of these is a mixed ground-floor commercial/60-unit mixed-income rental housing project on the town-owned lot adjacent to the station, planned to start construction when the station renovation is complete. The station's fully-designed, "shovel-ready" modernization project will facilitate affordable, transit-oriented housing to support expansion of the regional economy and also help recover or attract new ridership by signaling the MBTA's commitment to providing accessible, safe, and reliable service.

We appreciate the dramatic revenue decline confronting the MBTA due to the pandemic, but we are deeply discouraged by a "pause" to a project at 100% design, because we know delays will lead to both construction cost escalation as well as further deterioration to the station. Any foreseeable economic stimulus advanced at the federal level under the new administration likely will focus on infrastructure and public transportation projects such as this one. Anticipating the station renovation, a number of transit-oriented, mixed-use rental housing projects are in the pipeline for Winchester. We hope the MBTA will reconsider and collaborate with Winchester as we work to revitalize our center business district and address local and regional housing needs.

Please visit our website at www.winchester.us



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Over \$140 million in private investment and construction of over 350 housing units, including 140 desperately needed affordable units, is anticipated in proximity to the Winchester Commuter Rail Station. Winchester’s affordable housing inventory is one of the lowest in the state. Following the town’s 2018 Housing Production Plan and recently overhauled zoning for the center business district, a strong pipeline of transit-oriented projects is developing in Winchester which will create jobs and contribute to the region’s housing stock. Delays in the station renovation project will put numerous projects at risk.

Renderings of 3 TOD housing

developments to be built.



Now at 100% design, with MBTA’s investment in years of planning, the Winchester Commuter Rail Station project is a “shovel-ready” candidate for pandemic-related economic stimulus funding. We recognize the MBTA must face a severe financial shortfall due to the drop in ridership with the pandemic; we understand the reasoning behind pausing some capital outlays. However, we also can anticipate vaccines becoming available in coming months, allowing business activity to recover and the Boston economy to continue to grow. The incoming Biden administration and Congress will likely enact economic stimulus programs, which typically target transportation infrastructure. Near-term stimulus initiatives will likely focus on fully designed, “shovel-ready” projects. Advancing this commuter rail station project will allow MBTA to tap stimulus funding measures to immediately add jobs and support economic recovery. Investment in the timely completion of the station renovation will have a multiplier effect as Winchester’s several housing projects progress.



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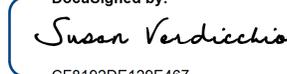
A full makeover of the circa 1956 Winchester Commuter Rail Station will help recover and attract new MBTA commuter rail ridership. Winchester is a growing, diversifying and evolving community, with many residents employed in medical, finance, and technology fields located within commuting distance from the town center. The town recently adopted its second climate action plan to address climate change. Before the pandemic, automobile traffic congestion in and around Boston was among the worst in the nation. The MBTA's 134 bus line and the Woburn/Stoneham/Winchester Tri-Community Greenway run through the town center, linking the station to other commuting modes. As the pandemic eases and the economy rebounds, MBTA can recover and attract new ridership by renovating a crumbling, outdated station and signaling its commitment to reliable, accessible, and safe public transportation.

The MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board has an opportunity, potentially with federal stimulus funding, to reconstruct a badly deteriorated commuter rail station, catalyze development of affordable transit-oriented housing, and recover commuter ridership in Winchester. All of these outcomes will benefit the Boston-area economy, the MBTA, and the town. We believe it is the right time to proceed with this project, and ask the Board to advance it without delay.

Sincerely,

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Michael Bettencourt
Select Board Chair

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Lisa Wong
Town Manager

cc. Secretary Stephanie Pollack

MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak

MBTA Director of Special Projects Angel Donahue-Rodriguez

State Senator Jason Lewis

State Senator Patricia Jehlen

State Representative Michael Day