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November 5, 2021

Jeffrey Willis, Executive Director
Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council
Stedman Government Center - Suite 3
4808 Tower Hill Road
Wakefield, RI 02879



Terrence Gray, Acting Director
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
235 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908

Re: RI Waterfront Enterprises LLC, CRMC File No. 2021-08-011, RIDEM WQC 21-153 DP 21-188

Dear Directors Willis and Gray,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on planned development activities at the South Quay in East Providence, Rhode Island. Save The Bay is concerned about the scope of wetlands lost during recent activities on the property and those planned to be disturbed during operations described in this application. Based on analysis of past and current imagery, we also believe that the applicant has failed to accurately delineate all wetland areas that have been or will be disturbed. As detailed below, Save The Bay submits that the applicant should be required to mitigate wetland areas lost during recent activities on the property, and be required to create wetlands at a migration ratio of at least 3:1.

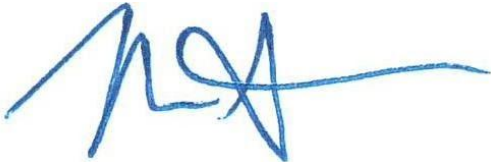
The South Quay, previously consisting of navigable waters of the Providence River, was filled between 1981 and 1997. Since at least 2002, the land remained undeveloped, and vegetation colonized the site. Freshwater also began to collect on the surface of the filled area, and review of historic aerial imagery reveals that wetland hydrology developed. By 2016 approximately 5.4 acres of freshwater shrub swamp and emergent marsh had been created onsite. By February 2018 the northern 1/3 of the property was graded for a parking lot, eliminating many of the wetlands present there. Between September of 2019 and March of 2020 fifteen large piles from the Waterplace Park River dredge project were placed on the southern corner of the project, filling in what appears to be additional wetland. These wetland losses onsite were not mitigated in any way, and the remaining freshwater wetland areas on South Quay are not delineated on the site plans included in this public notice. It would certainly be appropriate for the applicant to accurately depict all wetlands on site and submit an amended application for public notice. If this is not feasible, due to the altered nature of the northern half of the site, then Save The Bay asks that the 5.4 acres of freshwater wetlands be included in the total proposed permanent wetland losses, and an appropriate wetland mitigation site be selected to replicate the functions and values lost.

In addition to the freshwater wetland that was created on South Quay, saltmarsh was also created along the filled edge of the site. Approximately 1.3 acres of saltmarsh and brackish marsh will be impacted by the project. The application has proposed some saltmarsh creation near the existing marsh, as well as non-native invasive species removal of *Phragmites australis* and creating marsh in an area already vegetated with woody species. Save The Bay asks that a more suitable site be selected for wetland mitigation. While enhancing the saltmarsh onsite seems like a good idea on the surface, once this facility becomes fully operational, sensitive wildlife species currently using the habitat may be driven away by noise, light, and human activity. Even with the proposed changes, existing functions and value of the existing marsh will be lost. The majority of the site was created by filling over thirty acres of tide-flowed land. Given the past and proposed destruction of wetlands, Save The Bay submits that the State should impose a wetland creation mitigation ratio of at least 3:1; 20.1 acres of restored coastal wetlands. A suitable coastal wetland restoration site should be selected either in East Providence or nearby.

In reviewing the site plans and available aerial imagery of the proposed project site, Save The Bay also requests that every effort is made to minimize impacts to the freshwater wetlands present east of the gravel access road, sometimes referred to as Waterfront Drive (unimproved). These wetlands were not created due to past use of the site, and provide critical coastal habitat for a wide variety of species. Ensuring that the limit of disturbance is clearly marked, that appropriate erosion and sedimentation controls are used, inspected, and periodically replaced, as well as preventing excess artificial lighting of this wetland are all techniques that the applicant should be required to use to minimize impacts to this natural wetland.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



Michael Jarbeau
Narragansett Baykeeper, Save The Bay
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