

Town of Franklin

Town Administrator
Tel: (508) 520-4949



Fax: (508) 520-4903

355 East Central Street
Franklin, Massachusetts 02038-1352

MEMORANDUM

To: Town Council

From: Jamie Hellen

Re: Proposed MBTA Solar Canopy at Dean Station

We are requesting the Town Council approve a resolution to oppose the MBTA's plan to install a solar canopy at the Dean Station Commuter Parking Lot.

After the Town just finished a decade-long, \$7 million dollar project to redo its entire streetscape to help spur more economic development and create a quaint, vibrant and pedestrian-friendly downtown, we believe this project will:

1. Jeopardize any possible redevelopment projects or private investment on neighboring or adjacent parcels;
2. Be an eyesore to pedestrians walking along the new sidewalks, notably any solar glare that retreats up for people walking on the bridge;
3. Limit the Town's ability to develop that area of downtown in any creative manner;
4. Continually push off the infrastructure improvements to the parking lot, staircase, platform and Train Station that have been promised for years.

It is important to note:

- Town officials were never alerted to this project;
- The MBTA has already selected a vendor, signed a contract with a vendor for a twenty year lease and is developing plans for each station;
- At a recent meeting last week with the MBTA that was requested by the Town Administrator through our legislative delegation, it was noted the Dean Station was one of their dozen most prioritized projects. Yet the lot only serves 180 cars and will net the MBTA an estimated \$15,000 a year in new revenue for a twenty-year lease;
- The Town fully supports, encourages and prioritizes any development of a solar canopy at the Forge Park MBTA Lot. It has nearly 750 spaces, has maximum sun light potential and is a win-win for the commuter who will have less snow on their car when they return home from work.

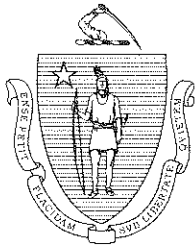
Town staff were recently alerted to a project the MBTA has been quietly developing to install solar canopies over many of their MBTA Commuter Parking lots. Attached is a sample picture of a solar

canopy below (not of the Dean Station lot, of course). The Town does not have any rendering of the Dean Station proposal.



The Town of Franklin is a proven leader in supporting solar projects. The Town manages a solar farm off Union Street that produces enough energy equivalent to 90-plus percent of all of the energy used by both the Town and the Schools. Solar is an as of right use in this community and has had many successful programs to encourage the use. The Town of Franklin is one of “greenest” communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

However, this proposed project at the Dean Station is a lost opportunity to the Town, the MBTA and other landowners who see the next phase of economic development in downtown coming. This project will significantly jeopardize the ability of private investment in that area of downtown.



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

June 19, 2017

Stephanie Pollock, Secretary
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Steve Poftak
MBTA Interim General Manager
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Solar canopy at Franklin/Dean T station

Dear Secretary Pollock & Interim GM Poftak:

We are writing with significant concerns over the MBTA's proposed solar array canopy at the Dean/Downtown Franklin T Station. As we communicated with Ms. Janelle Chan and MassDOT staff at a site meeting last week, this proposal will net very little financial gain for the MBTA, but will effectively shut off millions of private and public investment to revitalize the station and downtown Franklin. We request a meeting with you *immediately* to address this issue and to discuss alternatives to this proposal.

The Town of Franklin just finished a \$7 million streetscape project which included new sidewalks, roads, brick paving and a variety of other amenities to enhance the look and feel of downtown. In addition, the Town prepared a detailed Master Plan and implementation report in October 2013 and has been moving forward on a number of initiatives since that time to improve the downtown area. With the opening of the new streetscape a year ago and the implantation of several Master Plan initiatives, the Town has seen several new small businesses open up and has received a lot of positive feedback. Our local arts and cultural events have seen increased interest and participation in the downtown area, and we fully expect this trend to continue. But we are certain that these efforts will be stifled if the MBTA constructs its solar canopy at the Dean station lot, because it would be an eyesore and would restrict or discourage development on adjacent parcels.

This train station occupies critical real estate in our downtown and we are looking for a more thoughtful approach to the area than what has been proposed. In that regard, many

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Stephanie Pollack & Steve Poflak

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downtown landowners have been actively engaged with prospective buyers over new private investment in buildings and property in that location. This includes an adjacent parcel to the MBTA parking lot where there is an old building and underutilized land with frontage on Main Street. Several prospective developers have looked at purchasing the lot, re-developing it, and helping to spur more economic development. Additionally, the Town of Franklin owns a small commuter lot adjacent to the MBTA lot, and we would like to work with all stakeholders to invest in developing a more comprehensive solution to some problems and make a better investment for all parties involved, including the MBTA. In other words, if we all work collaboratively, we may be able to produce a more productive project.

The MassDOT staff informed us that the agency would only gain \$15,000 a year in new revenue over twenty years (a total of \$300,000). Thus, we are flummoxed by a decision to support a project that will hinder millions in private investment for such a small amount of revenue. This projected revenue pales in comparison to the millions in new investment this project would effectively kill. We assure you that if a more extensive conversation takes place relative to alternatives, we could assist the MBTA in constructing a better deal and a better project for everyone. As a small example, please consider that over 300 apartments are currently proposed to be developed in the area. If only four residents from these units buy a monthly pass and commute into Boston, they will generate \$15,264 in revenue annually (based on current \$318/month cost of a pass). That's a very conservative estimate, as we expect more than four commuters will result from the development proposals. But it is already more than what a solar canopy would produce.

Furthermore, by putting up this solar canopy, the MBTA would be killing the transit oriented development vision the Town has been working on for over twenty years. Right as the Town is on the cusp of reaching some of their transit oriented goals, the MBTA is proposing to kill any improvements for the next twenty years. The cost-benefit is wholly unfair to the Town, the MBTA and the citizens of this community. Overall, it's a bad deal for the Commonwealth!

On the other hand, the Town of Franklin fully supports a proposed solar canopy at the Forge Park MBTA Station. We cannot think of a better location. And we request you prioritize development of the solar canopy at the Forge Park site over the downtown site. If the Town can be of assistance in making the Forge Park site materialize faster, please let us know. Indeed, the Town of Franklin is a fan of solar installations in appropriate locations and has recently aided efforts to install them at the Mount Saint Mary's Abbey and Tri-County School in Franklin. In fact, Franklin uses power generated from the Abbey array solar panels to provide an estimated 80 percent of the electricity used in town buildings and schools. In addition, the Town receives payments in lieu of taxes for the land where the solar panels were installed, and uses credits for electricity produced by the farm to offset some of its other energy costs.

Another area of angst involves the fact that the MBTA never reached out to the legislative delegation and never contacted the Town to give a heads up on any of the solar canopy plans. The Town heard about this project through the grapevine and did its own research.

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Also, the Town has been in discussions with GATRA and the MBTA about taking over the station building and parking lot, and surprisingly, nothing about the solar canopies ever came up. While the MBTA still struggles to gain positive public relations within its communities, this project came as a complete shock given that nothing was disseminated to the community impacted by the decision.

The Town of Franklin has been requesting improvements to the entire Dean Station for years. We have called to the MBTA's attention crumbling staircases, lack of accessibility, parking lot potholes, building issues, and the poor platform at the station. We have had several meetings over the years and received many promises that the issues would be addressed. Unfortunately, every promise has gone completely unfilled with the exception of some minor improvements (a new roof) to the building on the property. Other than a new roof, the MBTA has put \$0 into the Dean/Downtown Franklin Station Parking lot in the last decade. We have attached the MBTA's Master Plan for the parcel given to us in 2014 that has gone completely unfilled. Your staff was not even aware of its existence when we gave it to them at the meeting last week.

In summary, the MBTA's desire to put up a solar canopy, without any notice or consultation, and to reap just \$15,000 in revenue, is a slap in the face to the delegation, the citizens of our community, and the local officials you are supposed to serve. Meanwhile, the MBTA's plan will no doubt kill millions in private economic development investment. It is for all of these reasons that we urge reconsideration and another approach.

And again, we request a meeting with you as soon at your earliest convenience.

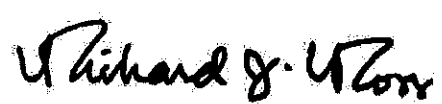
Sincerely,



Rep. Jeffrey N. Roy
10th Norfolk District



Sen. Karen E. Spilka
2nd Middlesex & Norfolk



Sen. Richard Ross
Norfolk, Bristol &
Middlesex

cc: Hon. Karyn Polito, Lt. Gov.
Jay Ash, Secretary of Economic Development
Matt Kelly, Chair, Franklin Town Council
Jeffrey Nutting, Town Administrator
Jamie Hellen, Deputy Town Administrator
Dr. Paul Rooney, Dean College President
Lisa Piana, Franklin Downtown Partnership



June 21, 2017

Matt Kelly, Chairman
Town Council
355 East Central Street
Franklin

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing on behalf of the Franklin Downtown Partnership Board of Directors to express our opposition to the proposed solar canopy at Franklin MBTA Station, located in the heart of downtown Franklin. We hope through our elected representatives, a meeting will occur before any final proposal moves forward.

Our main concern is how this proposal could impact the next phase of economic development in downtown Franklin. As you know, the Town just finished its new streetscape project which resulted a great deal of interest and investment from local business owners in downtown Franklin. We have new restaurants and several small new businesses and most importantly we have interest from developers looking to possibly purchase and redevelop property right next to the MBTA station.

Our arts and culture related events have seen record interest and attendance due to the new streetscape and pedestrian friendliness of the new sidewalks. We are very concerned that this solar canopy will effectively hurt any future investment in this area of downtown, in addition to compounding the parking problem we will encounter soon in downtown Franklin due to the increased business presence.

The Partnership would appreciate any effort our elected leaders could do to work with the MBTA to slow down this proposal and work to develop a more comprehensive plan in this section of downtown Franklin. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Lisa Piana-Executive Director

Franklin Downtown Partnership Board of Directors

cc: Town Council
Jeff Nutting, Town Administrator
Jeff Roy, State Representative



TOWN OF FRANKLIN

RESOLUTION 17-43

PROPOSED DEAN STATION SOLAR CANOPY

WHEREAS, the Franklin Town Council opposes the proposed solar canopy over the MBTA's commuter parking lot at Dean Station due to concerns of complicating prospective economic development in that area of Downtown Franklin and because the MBTA has not delivered on many previous promises to fix the many infrastructure deficiencies at the Dean Station.

WHEREAS, the Franklin Town Council supports and prioritizes the development of a solar canopy at the Forge Park MBTA lot.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT: The Franklin Town Council respectfully requests the MBTA postpone development of a solar canopy at the Dean Station Parking lot and prioritize development of a solar canopy at the Forge Park MBTA Station.

The Franklin Town Council respectfully requests the MBTA to meet with the Town's Administration and local legislative delegation to develop a long-range land and management plan for the area surrounding the MBTA Dean Station parking lot.

This resolution shall become effective according to the provisions of the Town of Franklin Home Rule Charter.

DATED: _____, 2017

VOTED:

UNANIMOUS: _____

YES: _____ **NO:** _____

ABSTAIN: _____

ABSENT: _____

A True Record Attest:

Teresa M. Burr
Town Clerk

Judith Pond Pfeffer, Clerk
Franklin Town Council