

MAPC selects Public Health by Design as HIA Evaluator

October 25, 2019

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has hired Public Health by Design, a consulting group based in London, to provide an independent evaluation of its recently-completed Health Impact Assessment (HIA) examining the public health impacts of a proposed natural gas compressor station in the Fore River area of Weymouth.

The Massachusetts Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Public Health (DPH) contracted with MAPC, the regional planning agency for Metro Boston, to conduct a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of the proposed compressor station in Weymouth, MA. DEP and DPH released the HIA for public comment in February 2019. The HIA focused on the potential public health effects of the proposed station under typical day-to-day operations. The purpose of the assessment was to paint a picture of likely health impacts if the station were built, so key decision-makers would be aware of potential health implications.

While the HIA determined the compressor station would not pose a public health threat under typical conditions, additional air quality information has been released by the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) that may include new data points regarding air toxins above public health thresholds. Based on this information and requests by advocacy groups for MAPC to re-examine the HIA, MAPC pledged to hire an independent evaluator through the Commonwealth's procurement process under MGL Ch. 30B, and we have now hired Public Health by Design to review of the process, the findings, and the final report.

Marc Draisen, Executive Director of MAPC, said, "It is good practice, from time to time, to seek an independent evaluation of planning work we conduct at MAPC. This is especially true for a project as significant and controversial as the natural gas compressor proposed for Weymouth. I have great confidence in the analyst we have chosen, Public Health by Design. They will conduct a thorough and independent review, and we will share their results with the public, regardless of their conclusions."

While under contract by MAPC, Public Health by Design will evaluate the HIA by assessing the document elements against HIA practice standards, applying an internationally vetted evaluation framework. Through interviews and review of contextual documents and information, Public Health by Design will assess conditions and constraints that informed and guided the HIA process.

Public Health by Design was established in 2013 and has an extensive track record of conducting HIAs as well as performing independent evaluations in accordance with HIA practice standards. Their independent evaluation of the proposed Fore River Gas Compressor Station Health Impact Assessment is expected to be released in early 2020.

More information about Public Health by Design is available at <http://www.publichealthbydesign.com/>.

Read more about the Fore River HIA and MAPC's prior statement articulating its opposition to the proposed natural gas compressor station at <http://foreriverhia.com>.