



City of Cambridge Conservation Commission

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Public Meeting – Monday, June 16, 2025, at 7:00 PM Zoom MEETING MINUTES

The following meeting minutes were taken by Lena Frappier and are respectfully submitted.

Present Commission Members: Jennifer Letourneau, Director; David Lyons, Chair; Elysse Magnotto-Cleary, Vice Chair; Kathryn Hess; Erum Sattar; Khyati Saraf; Lorie Graham; Jim Gerstle, Associate

Absent Commission Members: Sean Bedingfield, Associate

Attendees: Kara Falise, DPW; Lena Frappier, DPW; Jerry Friedman, DPW; Roch Larochelle, HDR Engineering; Amy Ball, Horsely Witten; Chris Newhall, Eversource Energy; Simon Hildt, Epsilon Associates; Rick Branca, Eversource Energy; Matt Donovan, Benesch; Alicia Thoms, MBTA; Janice Kearney, MBTA; Tom Keough, AECOM

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary, Vice Chair opened the meeting.

7:00 – Request for Certificate of Compliance Willard Street Outfall DEP File #123-284

Jerry Friedman of DPW introduced Roch Larochelle of HDR Engineering and Amy Ball of Horsely Witten as the consultant team. He summarized that the project was successfully completed providing a new drainage outfall at the end of Willard Street to the Charles River thus relieving chronic flooding over many years of the street and adjacent residences. By upsizing the drain and providing this stormwater outfall it also relieved the burden on the MWRA combined sewer, which was taking a lot of runoff, so they consider it a very successful project.

Amy Ball presented an overview of the drainage area showing a number of jurisdictional areas including; the river itself which is land under water bodies, the bank to the river, riverfront area which in Cambridge is 25 feet, filled tide lands which are under the jurisdiction of Chapter 91 Waterways Program, and flood zone bordering land subject to flooding which was about elevation four. She also presented as-built plans that were prepared by the contractor and certified by the engineer to show minor changes in the brim elevations and the inverts, but all

substantially within compliance. There were a couple of minor changes to the planting plans, the most significant one was that originally an older tree, *Alnus glutinosa*, had been put on the MIPAG (Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group) list between the project being permitted and time of planting so they replaced it with *Nyssa sylvatica* which is Tupelo. Amy stated the restoration plantings were largely along the embankment, which encompassed the border lands subject to flooding, riverfront area, and a portion of the formally filled tide lands, all planted in completion in the fall of 2024. She referenced that there was an on-site meeting with conservation in November, and then more recently, an on-site meeting with the conservation director at the beginning of this month. Amy requested that number 34 of the order of conditions regarding the 3-year maintenance requirement prior to receiving a certificate of compliance be waived considering the pending Memorial Drive project.

Jennifer Letourneau presented a memo previously supplied to the commission and stated the site visit was conducted on Wednesday, June 4th. The project team reviewed the site conditions, the area planted is stable, and it's recommended for a favorable COC to be issued in advance of the Memorial Drive Phase 3 project. She added that the bid opening for Memorial Drive Phase 3, separate project entirely, was on June 5th, the day after our site visit. Jennifer did receive communication exchange with the DCR that the bid opening went well, and they are moving ahead with the low bidder, with the expectation of a notice to proceed with that contractor within the next couple of weeks. They're expecting mobilization to be within the next few months, which is why we are trying to close this one out before we go into a new work zone. She stated that work will include excavating in this area to change the curb line and so there is an expectation that the area that was planted will be disturbed.

Elysse asked to view exactly where the work completed will be disturbed just so the commission can conceptualize it since last reviewed.

Jennifer showed the area that was just replanted, the outfall area, and the curb line that is going to be moved to increase in vegetated area. There will also be an increase in the multi-use path several feet wide, a soft shoulder, and vegetated swale as well. Jennifer reiterated that there will be significant excavation in the exact area where this was just replanted.

Elysse added that she walks that a lot, and it looks fantastic, so thanks to the team for all the work that they've done there. She sees it every day, so it looks great.

Erum Sattar stated the commission didn't know that the Memorial Drive Project was coming along just as this was finishing up so the whole thing will be ripped up again. It's a lot of duplicative effort.

Jennifer responded that there was a huge pause with the understanding of when they were going to go into construction and the city was faster putting the Willard Street project together and moving forward.

David Lyons asked with the waiver request for maintenance of this area, will the Memorial Drive team or project be assuming maintenance?

Jennifer answered that they have incorporated these proposed conditions into their existing conditions and are now going to be using those as existing conditions. The open order of conditions associated with Memorial Drive Phase 3 includes tracking of construction, construction mitigation, and completion and planting maintaining post-construction for 3 years.

Daivd stated there are two public attendees and they can raise their hand if they would like to comment.

Lorie Graham moved to close public comment.

Kathryn Hess seconded the motion.

7:14 – The commission unanimously approved to close public comment.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

Kathryn moved to accept the certificate of compliance.

Elysse seconded the motion.

7:15 – The commission unanimously approved to issue the certificate of compliance.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

7:00 – Request for Determination of Applicability

Greater Cambridge Energy Project (GCEP) – New Transmission Line

Memorial Drive from Ames Street West to Boston University Bridge Rotary

Chris Newhall of Eversource Energy introduced himself and Simon Hildt of Epsilon Associates representing the Greater Cambridge Energy Program (GCEP) project. The project is a new substation facility in the heart of Kendall Square with transmission lines interconnecting that substation to other substations in Somerville, Boston and elsewhere in Cambridge. Chris stated they are seeking a request for a determination of applicability to confirm that the transmission line installation work proposed in Memorial Drive within portions of the 100-foot buffer zone is

exempt from obtaining a permit or submitting a notice of intent under the Wetlands Protection Act as the work will occur entirely within paved roadways. Chris added that the presentation materials will include a portion of the transmission line work that would be going underneath the Charles River with a horizontal directional drill and that portion of work would be subject to the Wetlands Protection Act and included in a notice of intent they are looking to submit to the Commission in August of this year.

Simon introduced that two circuits that will be installed along Memorial Drive entering onto the River Street Bridge, where one of the circuits will cross over into Boston as B2A and B29F. A portion of both of those circuits occurs within the 100-foot buffer zone and part of the B29F as it crosses over the River Street Bridge, does enter within the 25-foot riverfront area of the Charles River. Simon stated they believe the project does meet the definition of the exemption which is, "installation of underground utilities within existing paved areas essentially provided that all work is conducted within the roadway and that trenches are closed at the end of each day." He reiterated that work will be within the paved roadways of Memorial Drive and River Street, trench excavations will be covered at the end of the day. While they believe they are exempt from filing with the Wetlands Protection Act, they will still make sure that they're in compliance with minimizing the potential for impacts and issues to wetland resource areas there, including live loading excavated soils from trenching and hauling those off-site to be appropriately disposed. They have EPA construction general permit coverage for the project that includes all locations so currently, they have ongoing weekly stormwater inspections. Simon said they will also have catch basin inlet protection with silt sacks making sure that those are inspected and cleaned out regularly along with street sweeping occurring daily and multiple times a day in some instances. There are spill prevention and containment measures at each site with multiple spill kits for any machinery, as well as the contractors' vehicles, and all the contractors that are working on site have undergone a project training that is specific to the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. There is a high groundwater table in much of the project so as far as dewatering of the trenches, that's covered separately through the EPA's dewatering and remediation general permit. Essentially, any water that is being removed from the ground passes through complex treatment system before it can be safely discharged so that's something that's on-site now for current work and will be maintained. With the weekly inspections under their stormwater pollution prevention plan if there is a greater than 25.25-inch precipitation event, that also triggers a visit. Simon stated they wanted to bring this filing to the commission to make them aware of the project and scope. He presented images of the entire project and zones along with each work site.

Jennifer presented a memo from Kara Falise of DPW previously supplied to the commission and stated that the project does meet the exemption. There were two exemptions included in the memo, one is buffer zone, and other is riverfront area and they speak to exempt activities in the roadway, in paved areas that have already been disturbed. She stated from a site visit she can confirm that at no location is there any vegetated buffer zone areas that are being disturbed. They are 100% in hardscaped areas.

Kara reiterated that the project team has a stormwater control permit active with the city which is an atypical filing for stormwater control permit, but it was sort of an arrangement and commitment by Eversource with the city to maintain standard operating procedures for erosion and sedimentation control for the linear type of construction that a majority of this project is.

They have a separate stormwater control permit for construction of their substation in Kendall Square, but they are operating under a stormwater control permit which has our city stormwater compliance staff checking in on their work zones, as well as full-time staff and consultants working with the GCEP team on scheduling and oversight. She suggested if they receive a negative RDA, they should notify Jennifer when they're doing this work in the areas under the commission's jurisdiction to have an extra pair of eyes monitoring the work.

Jennifer added that there is a complete expectation that a notice of intent for the Magazine Beach will happen this summer. She stated that although this does meet an exemption, Chris and team were amenable to her request to come before with an RDA and to explain what is happening and to really make sure that they are following all the procedures, protocols, and permits they have in place.

David asked when construction is planned for this phase and if all the staging and laydown are within the roadway.

Chris responded that they plan on starting the work in Memorial Drive in August and the staging will be immediately adjacent to the trenching work. They will start construction by installing concrete vaults and then backfill and pave those over followed by the transmission line to link this underground duct bank, which is multiple PVC conduits that are encased in concrete approximately 3 feet wide by 2 feet deep, so that's buried underground and constructed underground. They will be working with DCR for traffic pattern requirements. Chris stated where the line would extend into Magazine Beach is where they would stop construction as they are targeting August for and NOI with the Conservation Commission for that work to start November of 2026. To not impact the community the work at Magazine Beach would be done over the winter.

Jim Gerstle confirmed the dates including submission in August and construction start November of 2026. He also asked for the completion date of the entire project.

Chris answered they have an in-service date of 2029.

Erum asked given the duration, how frequently does something like this come along.

Chris responded that in terms of a large project like this, 40 to 50 years is about the timeframe that a new substation would service the load demand for a given area. That depends on a lot of different factors like economic development, fossil fuel divestiture and electrification.

Khyati Saraf asked to confirm that the stormwater permit is the entire duration of construction as well.

Chris answered that if that permit expires before the finish of construction, they will look to get an extension of that permit to cover the full duration.

Kara added related to stormwater and this linear project, it's a little bit different than the framework of stormwater control permit guidelines and requirements. The project is working under a long-negotiated memorandum of agreement where discussions related to surface

mitigation, improvements to localized stormwater, repaving, redoing ramps, and other details ironed out in support of Eversource providing this service of electrification to the city.

Kathryn confirmed that the work on Ames is part of this project and asked from a resident standpoint how long construction would be.

Chris responded that it varies by a lot of factors, specifically what other utilities are underground that they must negotiate around, installation of a vault may just be a single day or a couple days' worth of work, and then trenching through and installing is typically multiple days so they could be in front of a building for about a week or so. Chris introduced Rick Branca with Eversource Energy who deals with person-to-person interactions with property owners and large stakeholders like MIT.

Rick stated long before the Ames Street and Memorial Drive closure for construction they did extensive focus area reviews throughout the entire transmission line system to find where sensitive abutters are. So, a good example of that would be laboratory space near MIT and the president of MIT lives right there. He stated he has standing meetings with Doug Tuttle and Lori Werner from MIT walking through their three-week look-ahead with them, letting them know not only where and when they'll be, or where they expect to be, but what kind of work they are going to be doing. The installation of a vault might only take four hours, but the trenching if they must go 100 feet, they might only get 10 to 20 feet in a day. He reiterated regular meetings with abutters are occurring along with a public website and constant contact information. Rick said another example is construction on Linskey Way and 3rd, there's about eight or nine loading bays just on that street alone. He has standing meetings with Biomed, Alan Nylam, and Alexandria Real Estate as well, to coordinate with them what kind of deliveries they have and how best they can mitigate the amount of impact they have to the residents, whether it's the Water Edge Apartments right on 3rd Street, or if Biomed's having a public picnic, or company outing, and they're going to that park nearby. Rick stated they want to be able to avoid any detrimental impact on them in their day-to-day life, because it is a long project. He said one of his first goals working at Eversource was negotiating and working to navigate that MOU with Ted Bulger, Jim Wilcox and Jerry Friedman and that took a lot of meetings and a lot of good faith back and forth on what kind of community benefits we are going to give back to the community, aside from just building a reliable infrastructure. There's an extensive outreach plan that they had to submit to the Energy Facility Siting Board.

Kathryn said she appreciates the answer, and her question was kind of outside of the scope of the Conservation Commission, but as a Cambridge resident living on Memorial Drive she was concerned about it. She also questioned communication with DCR as they were in process of redoing the circle at the BU Bridge.

Chris answered they have been in constant discussions with DCR for the past 4 years and trying to understand what they had in the pipeline in terms of projects that were coming up and talking with them about our planned use of Magazine Beach for the horizontal directional drill under the river. They have been developing routing workspaces and things like that with DCR, with other stakeholders, like Friends of Magazine Beach, and the city. The process has taken years to get to this point through those discussions and trying to minimize the impacts to the community and keeping construction to a manageable time frame so that it doesn't take eight years to complete.

Chris said while they might not like the process everyone has been onboard and understanding that this is a necessary project that does need to be built for the city and the wider area.

Lorie questioned that it would be in the hardscape area.

Chris responded that everything is either in a paved asphalt roadway or sidewalk area where they're planning on installing not only the duct bank, but the vaults as well.

Lorie also asked for further thoughts in terms of the NOI for Magazine Beach in August, they are different phases, but they're obviously linked.

Chris stated they anticipate filing that in August and they are still waiting for final drawings from engineering partners, but assuming that they have all of those drawings in place they're ready to file a comprehensive notice of intent. They will also be filing with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection for a 401 Water Quality Certificate and submitting to the Chapter 91 Waterways folks for a new Chapter 91 license not only under Magazine Beach, but under the Charles River and opposite side in the multimodal yard. They will be submitting to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under the Massachusetts General Permit a pre-construction notification to them. Chris said the Chapter 91 license is probably the longest lead time anticipating about a year and there are extensive public comment periods that are associated with the 401 Water Quality Certificate as well. He stated if they receive the Chapter 91 license in August-September timeframe of 2026, that will set them up to start the work in November of 2026.

Jennifer asked if either member of the public had any questions for the Greater Cambridge Energy Project Request for Determination of applicability.

Elysse moved to close public comment.

Kathryn seconded the motion.

7:51 – The commission unanimously approved to close public comment.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

Kathryn moved to issue a negative determination of applicability with the construction mitigation conditions discussed.

Lorie seconded the motion.

7:52 – The commission unanimously approved to issue a negative determination with special conditions specific to construction mitigation.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

7:52 – Request for Determination of Applicability

MBTA - Keolis

Vegetation Management on the Railroad Right-of-Way

Jennifer introduced that Matt Donovan has been representing the vegetation management plans for the railroads in Cambridge for around 15 years. She stated to the commission that they can issue a determination that positively affirms the wetland resource area that is depicted and issue a negative determination of applicability on the same form as it meets the exemption.

Matt stated they are required to submit this RDA to the commission every 5 years, required by CMR11 prior to submitting the 5-year vegetation management plan to MDAR for approval. The VMP is designed to manage and control vegetation necessary to keep the railroad in operation safe using chemical and mechanical methods. Regulations are in place to keep sensitive areas protected throughout the duration of the plan, and these restrictions are listed in CMR 11, as well as their vegetation management plan. Matt said the maps submitted mainly depict the chemical portion of the plan but often dictate where mechanical methods will be used due to chemical restrictions. Each year there are two main chemical applications; one that takes place in the May to June timeframe that targets the roadbed, and one in the August-September timeframe that targets the brush and the areas adjacent to the roadbed. Matt pointed out these areas in the presentation provided and said the roadbed application is performed by a spray truck driving directly on the track equipped with nozzles on the back side of it about 18 inches above the ground spraying the solution directly down onto the track with arms that target the shoulders of the roadbed, up to 12 feet from the centerline of track. He stated the certified applicator is always accompanied by an environmental monitor familiar with the site conditions and equipped with these maps. The yellow zones will never receive any treatment to the shoulders however they may still receive treatment directly down onto the ties. As Matt pointed out the areas on the map he stated no chemicals can be sprayed in the brush program in the areas adjacent to the right-of-way because of the restrictions, so the only way to control the vegetation in the areas adjacent to the roadbed in these blue and yellow zones are with mechanical and manual measures and that is done on an as-needed basis. The chemicals that are used each year always come from the approved sensitive area material list provided by MDAR. They are seeking positive 2A determination to confirm the maps, as well as a negative determination for the work included in the vegetation management plan.

Jennifer also highlighted areas of interest to the commission on the maps provided.

Khyati asked to clarify the two parts of the request.

Jennifer responded by explaining the commission is being asked to affirm the outlines of each map and approve the exception of the work each year.

Erum asked if the tracks remain safe through these actions regularly.

Matt answered that work is completed every year, and it has proven to be an effective program especially in areas of PTC cables and signal and maintenance houses.

David questioned if the commission is making a determination as to the resource area.

Jennifer responded that the determination is that the polygons depicted from GIS are accurate. She explained certain sites on the maps in more detail to the commission. Jennifer stated that she has double-checked the maps, and they have not missed any resource area.

Matt added that underneath the positive 2A determination it allows for a narrative and some towns have said this determination is only for the resource areas in the vicinity, or in the proximity of the right-of-way.

Alicia Thoms introduced Janice Kearney and herself representing the MBTA and extended their appreciation in the efforts to consider the necessity of the VMP.

Elysse moved to close public comment.

Lorie seconded the motion.

7:23 – The commission unanimously approved to close public comment.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

Elysse moved for the positive determination of the resource areas as limited to the vicinity of the railroad right-of-way, and negative determination for the exemption of the VMP.

Kathryn seconded the motion

7:24 – The commission unanimously approved to issue a positive determination of the resource areas as limited to the vicinity of the railroad right-of-way, and negative determination for the exemption of the VMP.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes
Kathryn Hess- Yes
Erum Sattar- Yes
Khyati Saraf- Yes
Lorie Graham- Yes
Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

**7:30 – Request for Determination of Applicability
DCR**

Memorial Drive between River Street and Western Avenue Sink Hole Repair

Tom Keough introduced himself from AECOM representing DCR concerning a sinkhole forming on the bike path of Memorial Drive near Western Avenue. Currently the pavement has not collapsed, but there are voids under the pavement that DCR has been able to look at that are a couple of feet deep and a couple of feet wide. The area is within the riverfront and within the buffer zone to the bank. Tom explained in the presentation the limits of the excavation to repair the sinkhole is a 6 foot by 6-foot box and the marking of the erosion controls that would be used and trees to be protected, as you see trees to be protected, is called out here. DCR's intent is to get this all done in one day and the work will be performed by a mini excavator. They will install some erosion matting material in the hole itself and pour in some flowable fill and backfill the hole. Tom explained there will not be a chance for erosion or material stockpiling as they will vacuum out the hole right to the vac truck and backfill with the material right out of the vac truck and then compact and pave over it.

Jennifer stated that she has had a site meeting with Tom Valton, and her only concern is that since this area has been a concern for the last 20 years with the fence failing, during excavation they could be chasing the sinkhole. She said that yes, this minor activity does meet the exemption, but if at the time they excavate, the commission should consider a condition where the area turns into an emergency response if it extends beyond just a 6x6 and then they must come before the commission with a larger notice of intent.

Elysse questioned when they would notify the commission.

Jennifer responded that she requested to be on-site on the day of construction.

Lorie asked for further explanation on the condition of the area.

Jennifer answered that the fence is broken with sections missing that are just jersey barriers right now and it's very unsafe from River Street to Western Avenue. She added the capstone is incomplete, there's been several sinkholes in the last 20 years that have just been repaired and continued issues in this area. Jennifer stated she would have preferred it if it was an entire project from River to Western with the entire thing getting addressed, but was told that is not possible so continuing to do emergency repairs on an as-needed basis is the direction they're heading in. The fence cannot be replaced in this area because the capstone is not strong enough and doesn't have a foundation to support a new fence.

Khyati inquired if exploration for an understanding of why the sinkholes are happening has been completed.

Jennifer replied that the entire section between River and Western is a granite block seawall that dates back, and it's just wash out from decades, if not 100 plus years.

David questioned if there is a master plan for this area that's tentative on funding.

Jennifer answered that many years ago the Commission was asked to issue an order of conditions for River and Western Bridges and did, and then the transportation money never came in and that plan was tabled indefinitely. The goal from the DCR's perspective is that it should be a River and Western plus seawall project.

Erum asked if there is an inspection schedule to find these issues.

Jennifer responded that Tom Valton as part of their stormwater division has recently been looking at sidewalks, curb lines, and drainage structures, making sure that water is getting to the catch basins and to the outfalls.

Erum followed by asking if there is a sense of how quickly something is found that it's addressed.

Jennifer answered that she can't say for sure, but she wrote a memo specific to this area over 15 years ago and some of the pictures are the exact same as she took then.

Lorie questioned the process if further work is needed.

Jennifer replied if they must chase an area larger than the 6x6, that they're expecting then they must go ahead and continue it as if it was an emergency repair for safety, they must continue, and they would have to come back and explain what they're going to be doing next.

Elysse moved to close public comment.

Kathryn seconded the motion.

8:29 – The commission unanimously approved to close public comment.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

David said the condition should be if it's larger than the 6x6 area allowed, they must notify the commission right away and determine whether an emergency filing is necessary.

Elysee moved to issue a negative determination with the condition of the director's review on-site during excavation.

Lorie seconded the motion.

7:14 – The commission unanimously approved to issue a negative determination.

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes

7:15 – Administrative Topics

Meeting Minutes Tabled- March 10, 2025, and May 12, 2025

David stated the Community Preservation Act funding process has begun for the year and he is the commission designee for that process. CPA funding is a property tax surcharge on everyone's property tax bills for residential taxpayers. There is about \$25 million including state match and can go towards three specified purposes by the statute, affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space enhancement. He said they have started the process for the year to solicit project ideas and proposals that meet the criteria. Typically, Cambridge has always allocated 80% to affordable housing, 10% each to historic preservation and open space, which are the minimum amounts that each category must receive per statute. David stated there has been a lot of great work in recent years funding parks and playground rehabilitation projects largely because of these funds. Green Cambridge and Charles River Conservancy have proposed projects previously. The review is through July 11th.

Jennifer added that there are now pre-reviews for all the projects so you must submit a letter of interest to make sure that it meets all the criteria.

Elysse moved to adjourn the meeting.

Khyati seconded the motion.

8:36 – Meeting Adjourned

7 – In Favor

David Lyons - Yes

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary- Yes

Kathryn Hess- Yes

Erum Sattar- Yes

Khyati Saraf- Yes

Lorie Graham- Yes

Jim Gerstle, Associate- Yes