

City of Boston BERDO Review Board
Public Meeting Minutes
Zoom Virtual Meeting
May 27, 2025, at 4:30 pm
[View recording here](#)

Board Members in Attendance: Jessica Boatright, Stephen Ellis, Hessann Farooqi, Lori Ferriss, Gail Latimore, and Reginald “Reggie” Stovell Jr.

Board Members not in Attendance: Rashida Boyd and Councilor Gabriela Coletta Zapata,

Staff Present: Diana Vasquez, Zengel “Ziggy” Chin, Dr. Claudia Diezmartinez, and Oliver Sellers-Garcia.

Others: Approximately ten (10) members of the public attended this meeting.

Call Meeting to Order

4:38 pm: A meeting of the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance, hereafter referred to as (BERDO), within the Air Pollution Control Commission, was called to order on May 27 at 4:38 pm. This meeting was held virtually.

Roll Call

4:39 pm: The following BERDO Review Board members were in attendance: Chair Jessica Boatright, Stephen Ellis, Hessann Farooqi, Lori Ferriss, Gail Latimore, and Reginald “Reggie” Stovell Jr.

The following Environment Department staff were in attendance: Diana Vasquez, Zengel “Ziggy” Chin, Dr. Claudia Diezmartinez, and Oliver Sellers-Garcia.

Others: Approximately ten (10) members of the public attended this meeting.

First Agenda Item: Hardship Compliance Plan Hearing

4:41 pm: D. Vasquez presented an overview of Hardship Compliance Plans.

4:48 pm: New England Aquarium Corp (NEAq) presented information and details about their long-term Hardship Compliance Plan application.

5:11 pm: City staff presented staff comments.

5:15 pm: Board Q&A Session

- J. Boatright asked for an explanation of what green steam is and why the NEAq is considering green steam for compliance.
 - F. Batie explained that Vicinity offers a product called "green steam," which provides steam without greenhouse gas emissions, unlike their current method, which uses gas boilers. NEAq includes large areas, like the ocean tank, which relies on steam for heating. NEAq does not have space for electric boilers, so NEAq believes that switching to green steam is the best option to comply with emissions rules, despite potentially higher costs.
- J. Boatright asked if the NEAq has explored other options, such as heat pumps or geothermal energy, as alternatives to green steam.
 - F. Batie answered that NEAq has explored geothermal and heat pumps, but installing them would require deep drilling near the ocean, which could disrupt the local environment and marine life around Central Wharf. Since they already use steam and have the infrastructure in place, the NEAq believes switching to green steam is a simpler and less costly option than undertaking a major new construction project.
- J. Boatright asked if the NEAq has discussed with Vicinity the availability and infrastructure to support buildings switching to green steam.
 - F. Batie shared that NEAq has been working closely with Vicinity, and they've committed to gradually increasing the supply of green steam. Starting with 15% next year, 66% by 2030, and reaching 100% by 2035. Vicinity is confident in meeting this timeline, and NEAq is comfortable with the plan for now.
- S. Ellis asked what percentage of NEAq's energy use is electricity compared to steam.
 - F. Batie answered that the energy use breaks down to 31% steam and 69% electricity.
- S. Ellis asked how the process is going for NEAq to acquire a PPA or a VPPA.
 - F. Batie answered that NEAq is working with Vertis and a company called Coho, which invests in solar power projects, mainly in Texas. This partnership would help the NEAq offset emissions, similar to renewable energy credits.
- S. Ellis asked if the NEAq will be above the 2025 emissions limit.

- F. Batie answered that NEAq plans to be at or below the 2025 emissions limit. NEAq has implemented energy conservation measures to ensure all targets are hit in their proposed alternative emissions limits.
- S. Ellis asked if NEAq is currently partnering with Boston Power Corps or if that is a future plan.
 - F. Batie confirmed that the partnership is planned for the future.
- S. Ellis asked if NEAq can share any information about the flood risk plan and how NEAq is planning to protect existing and new technology in the building.
 - L. LaFeir shared that NEAq is exploring capital upgrades, such as relocating vulnerable equipment and securing underground systems. They are also working with Cambridge Seven on long-term plans to elevate parts of the wharf and possibly add features like a wave attenuation island by 2040. The approach includes phased improvements to both equipment and the campus landscape to reduce flood risks.
- S. Ellis asked for more information regarding the resilience work in Central Wharf.
 - O. Sellers-Garcia answered that through Climate Ready Boston, the City developed coastal protection plans across all 47 miles of coastline, including the Wharf District, where both property owners and the city are pursuing district-scale solutions. These plans strike a balance between building-level protections and broader interventions. Ensuring that institutions like the Aquarium can thrive in the long term is central to these efforts.
- H. Farooqi asked for more information about the workforce practices the NEAq team is using for the decarbonization work.
 - F. Batie answered that the NEAq is planning to hire Boston-based contractors for projects, not individual workers. The NEAq aims to collaborate with minority- and women-owned businesses (MWBEs) and is actively exploring options. They have spoken with City staff about helping us find more qualified MWBE contractors for both BERDO-related and general facility work.
- H. Farooqi asked if the NEAq uses apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs.
 - L. LaFeir answered that NEAq offers apprenticeship programs for onsite work to become an aquarist, for example.

- H. Farooqi asked for more information about the partnership between the Power Corp program and NEAq.
 - F. Batie answered that NEAq plans to partner with A Better City to participate in their workforce program. The partnership isn't just about BERDO compliance; it's also about being a strong community member. Through the program, they aim to host staff on-site, placing them in departments such as trades or mechanical systems as apprentices. Ideally, this could lead to long-term employment opportunities within the organization.
- L. Ferriss asked how much of an impact the energy conservation efforts had on energy use.
 - F. Batie answered that there are very few energy conservation measures NEAq can take, and the seven they have identified are the most impactful. Green steam will cost more than the current energy setup. Overall, switching to green steam and implementing these measures will result in increased costs.
- L. Ferriss asked if the NEAq is exploring switching from steam to electric systems.
 - F. Batie explained that the current steam system is facing issues due to rising sea levels, which have impacted a key steam pipe that's nearing the end of its life. NEAq is now exploring options to either reroute it across campus or keep it in place. They have taken short-term mitigation steps, but given the urgency, the focus is on resolving this first. Converting to electric boilers isn't feasible at this time, so continuing with steam remains the best option for now.
- G. Latimore asked if the NEAq has a WMBE utilization strategy.
 - F. Batie answered that NEAq doesn't have an official policy in place at the moment, but it is a practice they aim to follow. NEAq actively looks for opportunities to work with companies, including MBEs, when possible. As NEAq continues to identify qualified companies, they will continue to bring them on for future projects.
- G. Latimore asked for a status update regarding the energy improvement measures in the HCP application.
 - J. Deppenbrock shared that NEAq has been focused on installing VFDs (variable frequency drives), particularly on process equipment, air handlers,

and comfort systems, to reduce motor runtime and energy use. Initial surveys identified about 29 motors over 7.5 horsepower. So far, 13 of them have been addressed, and they are continuing to work through the list. Meaningful energy savings are expected as a result of these improvements.

- G. Latimore asked a follow-up question about how NEAq is funding the improvements.
- F. Batie explained that \$100,000, possibly a bit more, is for the VFDs alone. The rooftop trailer needs replacement, which will be a much larger project, estimated at \$2–3 million. The high cost is primarily due to the logistical challenges of working on the Central Wharf, especially with equipment located on the roof and in tight spaces near the waterfront. These are all essential capital projects that we can't delay. To fund them, NEAq seeks support through donations, grants, and other sources, while also allocating some funding from the operational budget.
- G. Latimore asked how the EJ communities are informed about the climate resilience and EJ benefits the NEAq provides.
 - F. Batie answered that NEAq's most impactful program is Boston Family Days. NEAq recently completed a community assessment and found that most community members prefer visiting the Aquarium rather than having representatives come to them. In response, the NEAq is developing events that offer meaningful experiences during visits. NEAq is continuing to plan additional programming to engage and serve the community positively.

6:04 pm: Chair J. Boatright opened a public comment period.

6:05 pm: Chair J. Boatright closed a public comment period.

6:05 pm: Board Member G. Latimore made a motion to approve the New England Aquarium's long-term Hardship Compliance Plan application with standard conditions, and City Staff recommended special conditions. Board Member H. Farooqi seconded the motion. All Board members in attendance (6) voted in favor. The motion carried at 6:07 pm.

Second Agenda Item: Report and Discussion on BERDO Regulations Update

6:08 pm: Chair J. Boatright called the public meeting to order.

6:09 pm: C. Diezmartinez presented details about the BERDO Regulations updates.

6:30 pm: Board Q&A Session

- S. Ellis asked for clarification about the language for a building owner to request a later hearing date for their building portfolio hearing.
 - C. Diezmartinez explained that the review deadlines and timelines still apply; however, if a building owner needs more time to prepare for their Building Portfolio hearing, they can request a later hearing date.
 - H. Farooqi asked if the City has engaged the Community Advisory Group to gather their feedback on the proposed Regulations updates.
 - C. Diezmartinez answered that not specifically, but the proposed updates have been shared with the City's contacts in different organizations.
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Third Item: Approval of Meeting Minutes.

6:39 pm: The Review Board voted to approve the [May 12 Meeting Minutes](#). Board Member G. Latimore made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Chair J. Boatright seconded the motion. Five (5) Board Members voted in favor. One (1) Board Member abstained. The motion carried at 6:40 pm.

Fifth Agenda Item: Administrative Updates

6:40 pm: Z. Chin shared the number of reporting extension requests received and approved by City staff. May 30, 2025, is the deadline for the second application round of the Equitable Emissions Investment Fund. The nomination form for Jack Nelson's vacant seat has been opened and will close on June 13.

The City proposed to forgo the June 9 Review Board meeting due to a lack of agenda items.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 30, 2025.

Meeting Adjournment

6:43 pm: Board Member S. Ellis made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Board Member H. Farooqi seconded. All board members in attendance (6) voted in favor. The motion carried at 6:43 pm.