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December 24, 2008

CERTIFICATE OF THE SECRETARY OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS  
ON THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL NOTIFICATION FORM

PROJECT NAME : South Shore Community Church  
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY : Bridgewater & West Bridgewater  
PROJECT WATERSHED : Taunton River  
EEA NUMBER : 14342  
PROJECT PROPONENT : South Shore Community Church  
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR : November 24, 2008

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (G. L. c. 30, ss. 61-62I) and Section 11.06 of the MEPA regulations (301 CMR 11.00), I hereby determine that this project **does not require** the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

As described in the Environmental Notification Form (ENF), and as revised in the December 5, 2008 supplemental notice material, the project consists of the construction of a new church facility on Elm Street in Bridgewater, just south of the West Bridgewater town line. The proposed 980-seat church and associated buildings would have a footprint of 72,100 square feet with a total of 454 permanent parking spaces and the ability to park up to 266 vehicles in a gravel area adjacent to the parking lots. Approximately 5.93 additional acres of impervious surface will be created for parking and roadways. Revisions to the project proposed in ENF were made by the Proponent following two consultation meetings with Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) to avoid any work in the Priority and Estimated Habitat for Rare Species. The proposed site is located within the Hockomock Swamp Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

The proponent has voluntarily filed an ENF to provide additional opportunities for public review of the project. I appreciate the proponent's efforts to promote public awareness and understanding of the environmental impacts associated with this development. I encourage the proponent to continue its outreach efforts to abutters and others in the local community as project design and implementation progresses.

### Jurisdiction

This ENF was filed voluntarily by the proponent. The project does exceed several ENF review thresholds, but it does not require any State Agency Action for purposes of MEPA review. The project exceeds ENF review thresholds pursuant to Section 11.03(1)(b)(2), Section 11.03(6)(b)(13), Section 11.03(6)(b)(15), and Section 11.03(11)(b) of the MEPA regulations because the project will create five or more acres of impervious area, will generate 2,000 or more new additional trips on roadways providing access to a single location, will construct 300 or more new parking spaces at a single location, and will be located within a designated ACEC. The project will require an Order of Conditions (OOC) from the Bridgewater Conservation Commission, and hence a Superceding OOC from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) if the local Order is appealed.

This voluntary ENF and supplementary information included documentation of potential land, wetlands, rare species, ACEC and transportation impacts. MEPA review of this voluntary filing will focus on those aspects of the project that may have significant environmental impacts.

### Rare Species

The project site, or a portion thereof, is located within *Priority Habitat 1392* and *Estimated Habitat 59* as indicated in the *Massachusetts Natural Heritage Atlas* (13<sup>th</sup> Edition). The project has recently been revised to eliminate all proposed activities with the Priority and Estimated Habitat. A comment letter from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) states that the NHESP has determined that this project, as currently proposed, will not adversely affect the actual Resource Area habitat of state-protected rare wildlife species. Furthermore, the correspondence from the NHESP concludes that, as currently proposed, the project will not result in a prohibited "take" of state-listed rare species. I remind the proponent that any changes to the proposed project or any additional work beyond that shown on the site plans may require an additional filing with the NHESP pursuant to the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) regulations (321 CMR 10.00).

### ACEC & Wetlands

The ENF indicates that no activity is planned within the wetland resources or Priority and Estimated Habitat for Rare Species. However, the project is located within the Hockomock Swamp ACEC. The Hockomock Swamp ACEC, designated in 1990, comprises approximately 16,950 acres within the towns of Bridgewater, Easton, Norton, Raynham, Taunton, and West Bridgewater. This ACEC primarily includes the Hockomock Swamp and associated wetlands and water bodies which form the largest vegetated freshwater wetland system in Massachusetts. These wetlands act as a huge water reservoir and serve as the headwaters for the Town River,

which flows into the Taunton River. Because of the land alteration proposed, 6.84 acres of impervious surface in this critical environmental area, the ACEC Program recommends that the proponent avoid disturbance in the 100-foot wetland Buffer Zone in conjunction with additional Low Impact Development (“LID”) design elements and Best Management Practices (“BMPs”).

### Stormwater

The Project will discharge stormwater within the Hockomock Swamp ACEC and to an area that is hydrologically connected to the wetlands of Hockomock Swamp and the extensive area of Priority and Estimated Rare Species Habitat. The ACEC Program has indicated in its comment letter that more significant use of BMPs could further reduce the impervious areas, alterations and impacts in the 100-foot wetland buffer, and ultimately impacts to the wetland and habitat resources.

In addition, the project site falls within a FEMA “Zone A” flood zone, as shown on FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Bridgewater. The property also lies within a FEMA “Zone A5” in West Bridgewater. Therefore, I encourage the proponent to develop and implement a comprehensive stormwater management plan to control construction related impacts including erosion, sedimentation and other pollutant sources during construction and land disturbance activities.

### Traffic

The ENF contained a traffic study prepared in conformance with the EOEA/EOTC Guidelines for EIR/EIS Traffic Impact Assessment. The study concluded that the proposed church will not have major impact on operations of the surrounding roadways because of its limited use to Sunday morning, when traffic volumes are considerably less than the weekday peaks. Independent of this project, the Town of Bridgewater has decided to upgrade Elm Street, and has asked the owners of abutting properties to contribute toward the cost of designing such improvements. The proponent has agreed to contribute its pro rata share toward the Town’s design study costs.

### Conclusion

Based on a review of the information provided by the proponent and after consultation with relevant public agencies, I find that the potential impacts of this project do not warrant the preparation of an EIR and that any remaining issues can be properly addressed in the permitting process. I am confident that the review of the ENF has garnered sufficient input from the state agencies so as to make the local agencies with permitting authority for this project fully aware of the environmental impacts of the project. No further MEPA review is required at this time.

December 24, 2008

Date



Ian A. Bowles

Comments received:

- 12/15/2008 Massachusetts Department of Protection-SERO
- 12/15/2008 Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program
- 12/16/2008 Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, ACEC Program

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