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September 5, 2008

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

PROJECT NAME : Lower Riverside Park
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY : South Hadley
PROJECT WATERSHED : Connecticut
EOEA NUMBER : 14298
PROJECT PROPONENTS : Holyoke Gas and Electric Department
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR : August 6, 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 detailed in the Environmental Notification Form (ENF), the proposed project consists of construction of a recreational park on an 8.4-acre site along the Connecticut River just below the Holyoke Dam in South Hadley. The project is being designed to enhance public access to the riverfront area, highlight important historical features, and provide views of the Connecticut River, Holyoke Dam, and native flora of the area's woodlands and meadows. The proposed project includes improvements to the existing gravel access drive from the municipal parking area to the park entrance and two additional parking spaces as well as construction of a canal viewing platform and interpretive signage. Three stone-dust paths will be constructed and generally aligned along existing gravel paths leading to the canal viewing platform, picnic areas and riverfront area. A turnaround area will be provided at the end of the easterly path for public safety vehicle access. The project includes extensive landscaping improvements and a comprehensive vegetation management plan to eradicate invasive species and promote growth of native plants.

According to the Environmental Notification Form (ENF), the proposed project will impact 8,000 square feet of Bordering Area Subject to Flooding and 65,700 square feet of

Riverfront Area. The proposed park and nearby Connecticut River are mapped for seven state-listed species. The project is undergoing environmental review pursuant to Section 11.03(3)(b)(1)(f) of the MEPA regulations because it involves alteration of one-half or more acres of wetlands and requires a state agency permit. Based on comments from the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), the project may be conditioned to avoid impacts to rare species.

The project requires a Superseding Order of Conditions from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and Approval of a Vegetation Management Plan and Yearly Operations Plan from the Department of Agricultural Resources. The proponent is not seeking financial assistance from an agency of the Commonwealth. Therefore, MEPA jurisdiction is limited to the subject matter of state agency permits required with the potential to cause Damage to the Environment as defined in the MEPA regulations. In this case, MEPA jurisdiction extends to land, rare species, wetlands, archaeological and historical resources, and stormwater.

As further detailed in the comment letter from the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), the project site is within the South Hadley Canal Historic District listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Undisturbed portions of the project area are archaeologically sensitive and likely to contain significant archaeological resources. The ENF indicates that an intensive (locational) archaeological survey will be conducted for the project. The proponent should consult with the MHC regarding survey results and to identify any measures necessary to avoid and minimize or mitigate any adverse effects to archaeological resources. As noted in its comment letter, MassDEP will require a Determination of No Adverse Effect from the MHC prior to issuance of a permit for the project.

The Order of Conditions issued by the South Hadley Conservation Commission on January 8, 2008 was appealed to MassDEP by the proponent. As noted in its comment letter, MassDEP requires additional information from the proponent to evaluate compliance with the Wetlands Protection Act prior to issuance of a Superseding Order of Conditions (SOC). This includes information pertaining to project review by NHESP and the MHC. The proponent should consult with MassDEP and provide additional information as requested for MassDEP to complete its review. I refer the proponent to the MassDEP comment letter for additional guidance on regulatory requirements pertaining to air pollution, solid waste management and potential contamination on the project site. As recommended by MassDEP in its comment letter, the proponent should retain a Licensed Site Professional (LSP) and manage any oil and /or hazardous material that may be encountered during project implementation. The proponent should also implement a spills contingency plan as recommended by MassDEP. The proponent should provide MassDEP with any environmental site assessments that were performed at the location of the former Texon facility.

The NHESP has reviewed several versions of the plans for the proposed project. As noted in its comment letter, since the initial plans were reviewed, the vegetation management and invasive plant plans have been expanded and the project plan has been enhanced to include native plantings and maintenance of native meadow areas, and to minimize vista pruning. As noted by NHESP, Sapling Black Willow (*Salix nigra*) has many of the same botanical features as

Sandbar Willow (*Salix exigua spp. interior*), a threatened species, and will co-occur with Sandbar Willow. The proponent must ensure that Sandbar Willow are properly identified and protected prior to removal of any Salix species or application of herbicide. The proponent must also adhere to the conditions detailed in the NHESP letter dated December 10, 2007. I remind the proponent that the yearly operation plans and vegetation management plans are subject to review by NHESP.

The ENF and some comment letters received indicate that the proposed park is part of a Master Plan that includes redevelopment of the former Texon building and the Upper Gatehouse Park located adjacent to the proposed project site. However, the Town of South Hadley and the proponent indicate that the Lower Riverside Park project is separate from, and not contingent upon, the development of the Texon building. The Town also notes that plans for the Texon Mill and Upper Gatehouse Park are uncertain at this time. The creation of the Lower Riverside Park was mandated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in an Order Issuing the New License for the Holyoke Dam on August 20, 1999. Pursuant to this Order, the proponent is required to construct and maintain a trail and appropriate recreation amenities along the South Hadley canal. The Order also required the proponent to propose disposition or use of the Texon building. The proponent should consult with the MEPA Office to discuss future filing requirements, which may include a Notice of Project Change or a new ENF, for the overall Master Plan.

I have determined that the ENF has sufficiently defined the nature and general elements of the project, and proposed measures to avoid and minimize or mitigate environmental impacts. I am satisfied that any outstanding issues can be adequately addressed during permitting. Based on review of the ENF and comments received, and consultation with state agencies, I have determined that that no further MEPA review is required for the proposed Lower Riverside Park. The project may proceed to state agency permitting.

September 5, 2008

DATE



Ian A. Bowles, Secretary

Comments Received:

- 8/13/08 Massachusetts Historical Commission
- 8/26/08 Department of Environmental Protection, Western Regional Office
- 8/26/08 Town of South Hadley
- 8/27/08 Town of South Hadley, Conservation Commission
- 8/28/08 Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program

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