

Connecting People and Parks and Conserving the Emerald Necklace

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Jamaica Hills Association  
Jamaica Pond Association  
MASCO  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

November 11, 2020

His Excellency Governor Charles D. Baker  
Massachusetts State House  
Office of the Governor, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Support for the Charlesgate Revitalization Projects, composed of:**

- #1 MassDOT project 606728- Storrow EB Bridge Replacement
  - #2 Charlesgate Park Revitalization Project, Central Zone
  - #3 MassDOT project 606496- Bowker Overpass Bridge #B-16-052 over I-90
- (Please see Figure A, below, for an outline of these three project areas)*

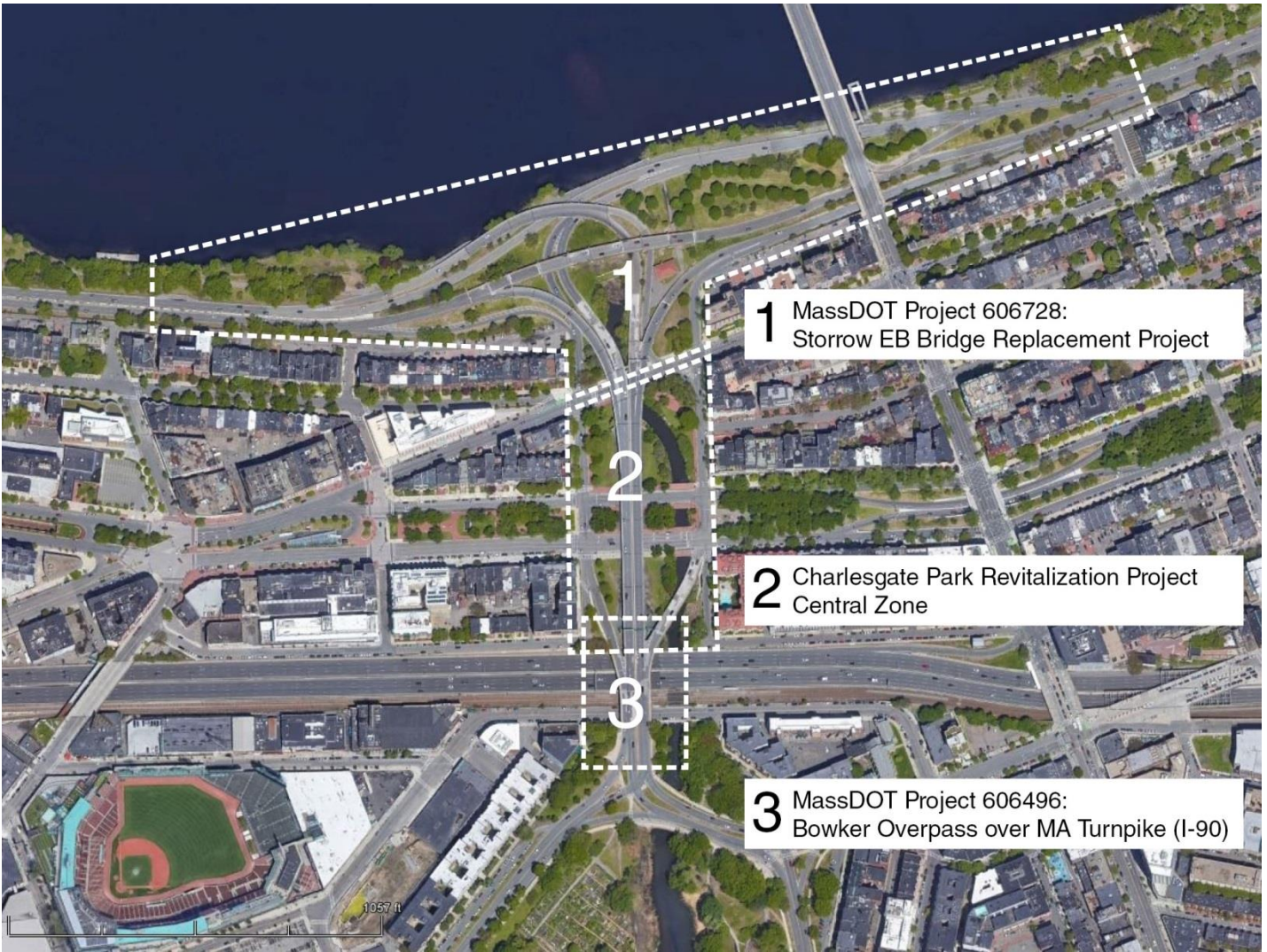
Dear Governor Baker:

We are writing to express our collective support for the revitalization of Charlesgate, including the three projects identified above. These projects, recently supported by Mayor Marty Walsh, are located at the historic point of connection between the Emerald Necklace and the Charles River Esplanade. We have been informed of these projects through presentations by MassDOT in April and October 2019 and in ongoing meetings convened by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy (ENC) and the Charlesgate Alliance (CA).

Charlesgate was built as the junction point connecting the Emerald Necklace park and parkway system with the Charles River Esplanade and Commonwealth Avenue Mall, and as the meeting point of the Muddy River and Charles River ecosystems. Together, these projects can dramatically improve environmental qualities of the region, restore connectivity between several of the most heavily utilized people-powered transportation networks in the city and region, and significantly increase the amount of accessible and useable public open space in the city of Boston.

Simply put, we want to communicate that these three projects present a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore and fully realize the benefits of an interconnected parkway and river system designed by Fredrick Law Olmsted over a century ago to serve the citizens of metropolitan Boston and the region at large.

As designs for the projects advance, we want to express our support for the best possible outcomes for the items outlined on the next pages:



**FIGURE A: Charlesgate Revitalization Projects, currently in progress**

**Project 1-** MassDOT Storrow Drive EB Bridge Replacement project (Project # 606728)  
Project to replace deteriorated portion of elevated Storrow Drive and reconfigure surface roads.  
Status: MassDOT-led alternatives analysis underway, scheduled for construction in 2023.

**Project 2-** Charlesgate Park Revitalization Project, Central Zone:  
Project to restore Charlesgate Park, a degraded and underutilized park of the Emerald Necklace.  
Status: 25% design phase underway, design and permitting to be completed in 2022.

**Project 3-** MassDOT Bridge #B-16-052 over the I-90 Turnpike (Project #606496):  
Project to rebuild bridge over I-90 that connects the Emerald Necklace Fens to Charlesgate.  
Status: 25% design phase completed, but currently paused, date to resume design tbd.



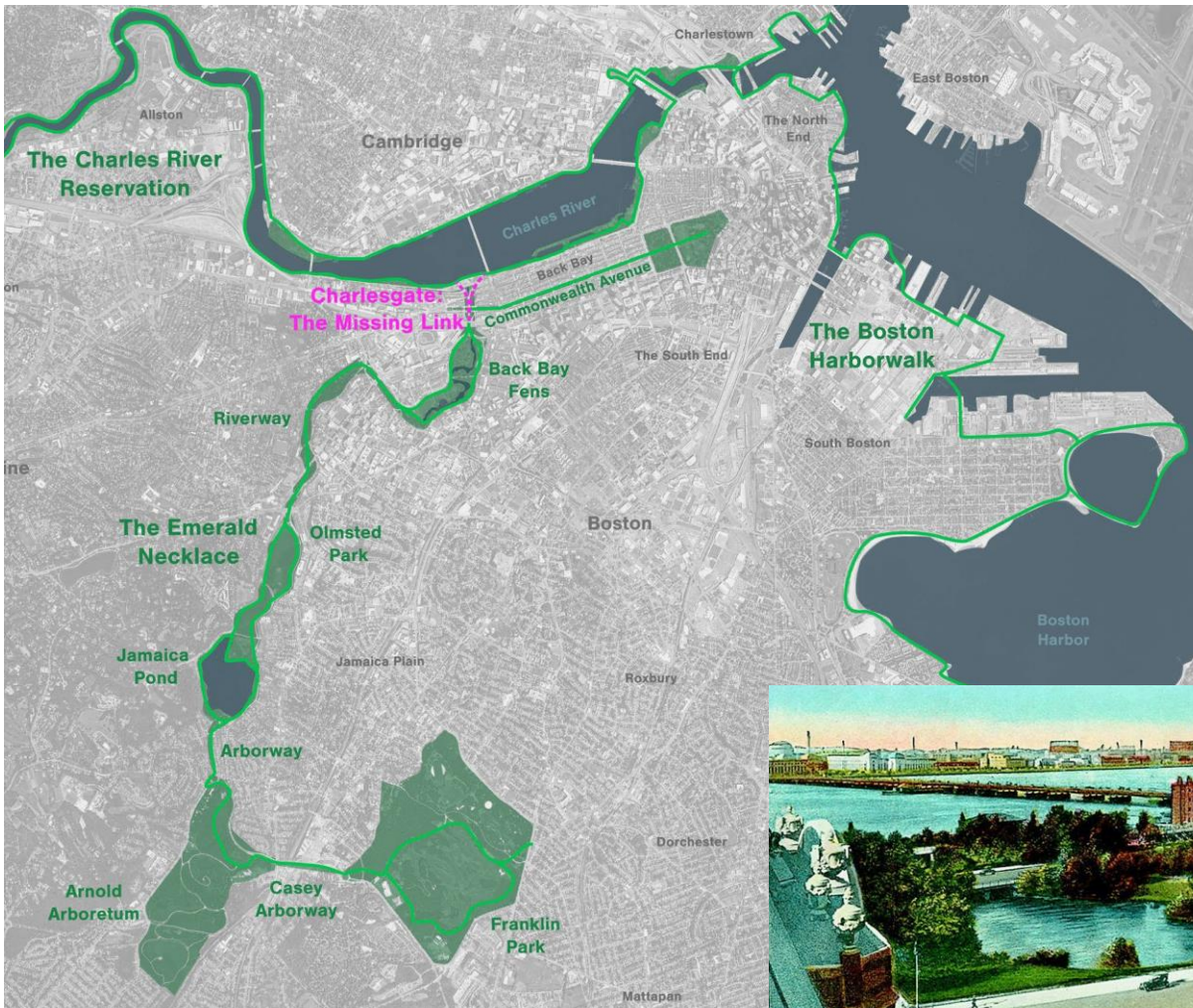
## 1. Reconnect People-Powered Transportation Routes:

These projects occur at the missing nexus between several of the region's most heavily used people-powered transportation networks: the Emerald Necklace Park System, the Charles River Esplanade pathways, the Dr. Paul Dudley White Bike Path, and the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge.

*(Please see Figure B, below, for a diagram of the park and path networks)*

- Create direct and generous people-powered connections between the Emerald Necklace (the Fens), Charlesgate, Commonwealth Avenue Mall, the Esplanade, and the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge. The current MassDOT proposed people-powered connections between Charlesgate and the Esplanade are a great start, but these currently proposed connections still involve street crossings or complicated circulation over a pedestrian bridge. We ask that MassDOT evaluate making these connections more direct.
- Create the safest possible accommodations for people-powered transportation in these parkways (such as generous, separated low-speed paths for pedestrians; higher speed pathways for bicycles; safe crossing facilities; and elimination of overly crowded intersection points).
- Eliminate existing choke-points and impaired visibility for people-powered transportation through the Esplanade and to the Emerald Necklace, especially the existing major choke point at the Patterned Behavior mural on the Esplanade.
- Construct generous sidewalks and separated bike paths for the bridge over I-90 at Charlesgate (#B-16-052). This bridge is the only point where the Emerald Necklace directly connects the Fenway neighborhood to the Charlesgate district and Kenmore Square. Currently, the non-vehicular pathways over this bridge are extremely narrow, unsafe, and uninviting. When this bridge is reconstructed, we ask that the sidewalks on the replacement bridge be designed to be as wide as possible with separated bike paths or that a separate bridge is built dedicated to people-powered transportation, providing a safe and inviting distance from high-speed vehicles.
- Create directly accessible connections between the Mass. Ave. Bridge, the Esplanade and Emerald Necklace beyond. Currently, the connection between the Mass. Ave. Bridge and the Esplanade is a major choke point in our people-powered transportation network. Pedestrians and bicyclists are channeled together onto a narrow switchback ramp. With the work in this area, please aim to create directly accessible, at-grade connections between the Mass. Ave. Bridge and the Esplanade.
- Create universally accessible pathways throughout this area, including through Charlesgate Park.





**FIGURE B**

**FIGURE B ABOVE:** Charlesgate is a critical missing link in the park and pathway system of Boston and the region.

**RIGHT (TOP):** Before the 1950's, Charlesgate was where the Emerald Necklace, the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, the Charles River and the Muddy River all connected.

**RIGHT (BOTTOM):** The construction of Storrow Drive (1950's) and the Bowker Overpass (1960's) broke the connections between the park and river systems.

**The Charlesgate Revitalization Projects can repair all of these connections.**



## **2. Improve Ecology of the Muddy River and Charles River:**

The Muddy River is currently one of the greatest polluters of the Charles River, largely due to untreated roadway runoff, the effects of which are exacerbated by the culverts at the mouth of the Muddy. To end this, we are writing to express our support for the following:

- Fully daylight the Muddy River and fully eliminate the culverts north of Beacon Street, which will improve flood storage and storm resiliency, eliminate a flood choke- point and improve habitat connectivity. This will allow for maximum light, air, and unimpeded surface flow for the Muddy River. *(Please see Figures C & D for rendered views of a daylit Muddy River)*
- Provide treatment for the MassDOT stormwater runoff, currently untreated, using green stormwater infrastructure for roadway drainage to the Muddy River and Charles River. This will massively improve the quality of MassDOT stormwater entering the Muddy River and the Charles River.

## **3. Reclaim Open Space for Boston’s Largest Park Systems - The Emerald Necklace and the Charles River Esplanade:**

For more than a generation, roadway infrastructure has isolated some of Boston’s greatest waterfront spaces from the public. At a time when the importance of green space is more apparent than ever, we ask that these projects:

- Maximize the amount of open green space for the public.
- Maximize public access to waterfront resources.
- Maximize tree planting and foliage cover throughout these landscapes to address climate resiliency issues and mitigate the growing impacts of urban heat island effect.



AFTER



BEFORE



**FIGURE C: Daylit Muddy River and new pathways at the Fens Pond Bridge**

Daylighting the Muddy River north of Beacon Street, as part of Project #1, will improve flood storage, eliminate a flood choke-point, improve habitat connectivity, and restore the historic Fens Pond Bridge as a beautiful city landmark.

**LEFT:** Today this portion of the Emerald Necklace is inaccessible to the public and the Muddy River is buried underground in environmentally detrimental culverts.

**ABOVE:** Daylit Muddy River, new pathways restored Fens Pond Bridge



**AFTER**



**BEFORE**



**FIGURE D: Daylit Muddy River at the Charles River**

Daylighting the Muddy River north of Beacon Street, as part of Project #1, would restore connection of the Muddy River and Charles River ecosystem, significantly improving water and habitat quality of both rivers.

**LEFT:** Today the Muddy River’s outlet into the Charles is barely visible at the culverts’ headwall, the culverts limit habitat connectivity and prevent people’s connection to the Muddy River.

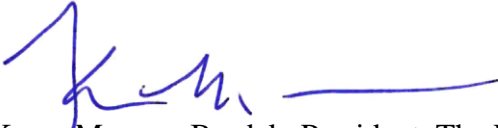
**ABOVE:** Daylit Muddy River and new people- powered transportation bridge over the meeting of the two rivers.



Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing these goals for these Charlesgate Revitalization projects.

We look forward to meeting and working on this wonderful project with all our great partners in our neighborhood, our city, our watershed, and our great commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Karen Mauney-Brodek, President, The Emerald Necklace Conservancy



Pam Beale, Co-Founder, Charlesgate Alliance



H. Parker James, Co-Founder, Charlesgate Alliance

**Supporting Organizations:**

Back Bay Association

Bay State Road Neighborhood Association

Boston Cyclists Union

Boston Harbor Now

Boston Red Sox

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance

Charles River Conservancy

Charles River Watershed Association

Esplanade Association

**Continued on next page**





**Supporting Organizations** *(Continued)*:

Fenway Alliance

Fenway Community Development Corporation

Friends of the Public Garden

Garden Club of the Back Bay

Hill House

Kenmore Association

Kenmore Community & Economic Development Corporation

Kenmore Residents Group

Kingsley Montessori School

The Learning Project

LivableStreets Alliance

Magazine Beach Partners

Mark Development

Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition

Meredith Management/Fenway Center

Muddy Water Initiative

Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay

Parkland Management Advisory Committee, Southwest Corridor Park

Related Beal

Samuels & Associates

Solomon Foundation

Speak for the Trees

The Trust for Public Land

WalkBoston



CC:

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

Senator William Brownsberger

Representative Aaron Michlewitz

Representative Jay Livingstone

Representative Jon Santiago

MassDOT, Secretary Stephanie Pollack

MassDOT, Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver

MassDOT, Project Manager Steven McLaughlin

Energy and Environmental Affairs, Secretary Kathleen Theoharides

Energy and Environmental Affairs, Assistant Secretary Sean Pierce

Department of Conservation and Recreation, Commissioner Jim Montgomery

Department of Conservation and Recreation, Director of Historic Resources Patrice Kish

**City of Boston**

Mayor Martin Walsh

Councilor Kenzie Bok, City Council

Energy & Open Space, Chief of Environment Christopher Cook

Parks & Recreation Department, Commissioner Ryan Woods

Water & Sewer, Commissioner John Sullivan

Note: This Letter was also provided to Representative Aaron Michlewitz and the House Committee on Ways and Means on November 4 2020, and follows a letter from Mayor Walsh, dated October 21 2020, supporting these goals (enclosed) |





CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
MARTIN J. WALSH

October 21, 2020

His Excellency Governor Charles D. Baker  
Massachusetts State House  
Office of the Governor, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

I am writing in support of the Charlesgate Revitalization Project. Over the course of my administration, I have put forward an agenda that provides for a thriving, healthy, and innovative Boston. Preserving open space and investing in sustainable green infrastructure have been cornerstones of this work.

My administration has invested over \$60 million in critical stormwater management projects along the Muddy River and the Emerald Necklace park system. This work follows the goals of the *Climate Ready Boston* plan, including strategies for improving environmental quality and resiliency for Boston's waterfront. We have worked with partners like the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, the Charlesgate Alliance, the Esplanade Association, the Charles River Watershed Association—and others, who are also directly involved with the Charlesgate project—to achieve these improvements to our open spaces. These investments and efforts are vital to the improved health of our rivers, our long-term environmental and economic resilience, and quality of life for all of Boston's residents and visitors.

The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced the value of our beautiful, public green spaces, which have supported our residents' physical and mental health during these difficult times. Frederick Law Olmsted's visionary work creating the Emerald Necklace in the 1800's is still proving to be the benchmark of modern urban green infrastructure. We need to preserve and build upon that legacy.

Your administration, specifically the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, has provided a tremendous amount of thoughtful and diligent work on the Storrow Drive EB Bridge Replacement Project # 606728 and the Massachusetts Turnpike Bridge Replacement Project #B-16-052. This is the meeting point of two great open space systems which have national significance: the Emerald Necklace and the Charles River Esplanade. Together, these projects can transform the vehicle, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure in the region while also providing an opportunity to restore Charlesgate to its historic environmental and cultural prominence.

This unique situation and our decisions here and now will be felt for generations. For decades, roadway infrastructure has isolated, disrupted, and polluted some of Boston's greatest parks and waterfront spaces. We have a chance to change that. At a time when the importance of green space is more apparent than ever, this is a once-in-our-lifetime opportunity to fully realize the benefits of interconnection.

The following recommendations are key steps that MassDOT can take in order to ensure the health, longevity, and resiliency of Charlesgate Park and the Muddy River. In turn, the City and the Commonwealth will benefit from enhanced environmental sustainability and stormwater management.

- "Daylighting" the remaining culverted portion of the Muddy River, which is now under Storrow Drive. The "daylighting" needed is the last 250 feet of the Muddy River where it joins the

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Charles, eliminating the need for the current 70-year-old dilapidated culverts north of Beacon Street to improve stormwater storage, eliminate a flood choke-point, and improve habitat connectivity. This will allow for maximum light, air, and unimpeded flow for the Muddy River and improve the water quality of both the Muddy River and the Charles River. The Muddy River is the number one polluter affecting the Charles River today.

- Provide treatment for currently untreated MassDOT runoff from Storrow Drive and the Bowker Overpass using green stormwater infrastructure for roadway drainage to the Muddy River and Charles River. This will massively improve the current quality of untreated stormwater entering the Muddy River and the Charles River, and provide open space improvements.
- Eliminate the key “pinch point” at the Patterned Behavior mural on the Esplanade and create a safe and inviting pedestrian and bicycle environment where the Emerald Necklace and the Charles River Esplanade meet with new safe crossings and generous pathways.

Both MassDOT projects occur at the missing links between some of Boston’s most heavily frequented people-powered path networks: the Emerald Necklace Park System, the Charles River Esplanade pathways, the Dr. Paul Dudley White Bike Path, and the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge. Supporting and encouraging more people to walk and bike is a top priority for the City and essential in our pursuit of both our mobility and climate goals. In order to create the safest possible accommodations for people-powered transportation in these parkways, please further consider:

- The bridge over the Mass Pike at Charlesgate (#B-16-052) is the only point where the Emerald Necklace connects the Fenway neighborhood to the Charlesgate district and Kenmore Square. Currently, families, students, fans, and visitors moving between neighborhoods and children walking to the park must walk on a narrow chain link edge of a roadway unprotected from heavy, high-speed traffic. Simply put: it’s not safe and it’s not inviting. When MassDOT rebuilds this bridge in coming years, please make the sidewalks on this new bridge as generous as possible including separated bike paths, or build a separate connection for encouraging and protecting people-powered transportation from the high-speed vehicles.
- Currently, the connection between the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge and the Esplanade is a major choke-point in our people-powered transportation network. Work planned in this area should aim to create accessible connections between the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge to the Esplanade and Emerald Necklace beyond.

As we move forward in building a city for future generations, we must all be sure to do our part. As a City, and a Commonwealth, we must strive for better to deliver equitable, meaningful, resilient, accessible and safe spaces to the entire Boston community and the region. These projects accomplish that. I thank you in advance for your consideration of this important matter. I hope that you will support these projects and the additional thoughts shared above, and I look forward to continuing our collective work to make Boston and the Commonwealth some of the best places in the world. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly or you may contact Yissel Guerrero or Alyssa Ring in my Office of Intergovernmental Relations at (617) 635-3817.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Walsh  
Mayor of Boston

CC: Secretary Stephanie Pollack, Massachusetts Department of Transportation  
Secretary Kathleen Theoharides, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs