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

PROJECT NAME : Cambridge Common and Flagstaff Park Enhancement Project
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY : Cambridge
PROJECT WATERSHED : Charles
EEA NUMBER : 14947
PROJECT PROPONENT : MassDOT Highway Division and City of Cambridge
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR : September 5, 2012

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (M.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), the project includes transportation and landscaping improvements to Cambridge Common and Flagstaff Park in Cambridge by the City of Cambridge (the City) and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway Division (MassDOT). Cambridge Common and Flagstaff Park are central open spaces in the City of Cambridge, located approximately two blocks north of Harvard Square and surrounded by Waterhouse Street to the north, Massachusetts Avenue (Route 2A) to the east, and Garden Street to the west. Massachusetts Avenue separates Cambridge Common from Flagstaff Park. According to the ENF, approximately 10,000 cyclists and pedestrians pass through Cambridge Common on a daily basis.

The proposed improvements will improve bicycle and pedestrian conditions in and around Cambridge Common and implement landscaping improvements. Specifically the work will include the following:

- Reconstruct all pathways in bituminous concrete with brick edging;
- Re-align formal pathways along informal pedestrian routes through Cambridge Common;
- Improve pedestrian access to Cambridge Common at entryways, around the Civil War monument, and around the Washington Elm monument;
- Construct a new multi-use path along the perimeter of Flagstaff Park to connect Harvard Square bicycle lanes to Massachusetts Avenue northbound;
- Improve signage and lighting;
- Install a new permanent irrigation system in a portion of Cambridge Common;
- Remove excess paving, outdated planters and benches, and unused utility poles;
- Plant over 100 new trees; and
- Install new street furniture.

The project will also include minor geometric changes to facilitate the proposed multi-use path and proposed bike lane connection through the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue, Peabody Street, and Cambridge Street. In addition, the left turn lane from Massachusetts Avenue southbound toward Cambridge/Peabody Streets will be reconfigured to add a significant amount of green space, improve traffic flow, and accommodate the construction of the multi-use path. Signals at the intersections of Massachusetts Avenue and Garden Street and Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge/Peabody Streets will be upgraded to reflect the changes in geometry and facilitate pedestrian crossing. While the vast majority of the existing Cambridge Common path alignments will remain the same, the City and MassDOT have proposed reintroduction of the central pathway leading from the brick gate and the southern end of the park closest to Harvard Square. This modification will restore a pedestrian route that was removed in the 1976 renovation of Cambridge Common and recreate the visual connection from the gate to the central Civil War monument that was lost when several trees were planted around the monument. The ENF indicated that twenty-two (22) trees greater than 14 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) will be removed as part of the project. Several smaller trees and shrubs will also be removed while upwards of 100 new trees will be planted within the Common.

I have received comments from a number of stakeholders that reflect concern about the requirement to remove 22 mature trees to achieve overall project goals. While the MEPA process has provided a valuable forum for the collection of environmental data and varying points of view, the MEPA process does not evaluate or render a decision in support of, or against, a project's specific purpose. MEPA is an environmental disclosure process designed to facilitate a discussion in advance of State Agency Action on matters within MEPA jurisdiction. The MEPA process does not generally address issues commensurate with those often reviewed at the local site plan review or zoning board review levels within a municipality. Particularly salient to this project is a discussion of local park operations, provision of recycling or trash receptacles, and overall park policing and maintenance. In light of these concerns raised in the MEPA process by local stakeholders, I strongly encourage the City to maintain an open dialogue

through the completion of the design process with regard to selection of replacement tree species and locations, streetscape and landscape design, etc.

Jurisdiction

The project is undergoing review pursuant to 301 CMR Section 11.03(6)(b)(2)(b) of the MEPA regulations because it will be undertaken by a State Agency and will result in the cutting and removal of five or more living public shade trees of 14 or more inches in dbh. The project may require an 8(m) permit from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA).

Because the project will receive State Financial Assistance and will be undertaken in part by a State Agency, MEPA jurisdiction is broad in scope and extends to all aspects of the project that may cause Damage to the Environment, as defined in the MEPA regulations.

Alternatives Analysis

According to the ENF, several alternative routes for the multi-use path were explored. Providing safe and logical bicycle connections from Harvard Square, through Flagstaff Park, to Massachusetts Avenue are hindered by the numerous competing uses (passenger vehicles, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) buses and trolleys, pedestrians, and cyclists), roadway intersections, the MBTA driveway/tunnel to Harvard Square, and existing open space. Alternative alignments for the multi-use path were therefore dismissed due to conflicts with these uses, notably the MBTA overhead wires and driveway/tunnel access. A central goal of the Cambridge Common improvements is to restore the central pathway eliminated in 1976 to reestablish the visual connection to the Civil War monument. A No-Action Alternative with regard to this portion of the project would not recreate this visual connection, keeping the current Common layout as it currently stands. Given the purpose of the project to create a strong visual connection from the southern gate to the Civil War monument, another path alignment appears inconsistent with this goal and was therefore not considered.

Transportation

As noted previously, a major project component includes upgrading the pathway network in its existing alignment and layout to correct inadequate drainage associated with the deterioration and settling of brick walkways, and to upgrade these paths to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. A small area of new path will be created to formalize a worn dirt path created over the years by foot traffic near the Civil War Monument and the central Cambridge Common entrance from Massachusetts Avenue. Pathways will remain the same width, and will be comprised of bituminous concrete with a brick accent border. Upgraded lighting, modifications to the layout of the existing granite benches around the Civil War Monument, the removal of excess paving and outdated planters and unused utility poles, the installation of new street furniture, and the planting of over 100 new trees throughout the project area will serve to enhance the pedestrian experience within Cambridge Common, improving safety and access for all park visitors. Construction of the multi-use path connection through Flagstaff Park will reallocate existing paved areas along Massachusetts Avenue and grassy areas

within Flagstaff Park for dedicated use by pedestrians and cyclists, separated from traffic flow by a post and rail fence.

Improving and formalizing the pedestrian and bicycle connection from Harvard Square through Flagstaff Park to Massachusetts Avenue and the proposed improvements to Cambridge Common are consistent with the municipal, regional, state, and federal plans and policies related to pedestrian and bicycle transportation facilities and services. Additionally, the State Bicycle Transportation Plan lists the Cambridge Common Bicycle Path Improvements as a high-priority project under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) legislation.

Comments provided by WalkBoston include suggestions on ensuring safe and effective usage of the multi-use path. I encourage MassDOT and the City of Cambridge to consider these comments when finalizing the design for the proposed project.

Stormwater

Paved areas within the project area will be slightly altered as part of the proposed project. Within the 9.3-acre project site, paved areas in Flagstaff Park will increase by 3,350 square feet (sf), while paved areas in Cambridge Common will decrease by 1,978 sf. As noted above, elements of the proposed project include removal of excess paved areas, particularly around the Civil War Monument on Cambridge Common. The project is a redevelopment project and therefore will meet the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MassDEP) Stormwater Management Policy to the maximum extent practicable. Stormwater will generally be directed from paved surfaces to adjacent grassy areas within Cambridge Common or Flagstaff Park. Modifications in curb alignment associated with some proposed improvements will require the relocation of several existing catch basins within the project limits. In conjunction with these catch basin relocations, the structures themselves will be upgraded to include deep sumps and hoods to improve removal of total suspended solids (TSS) from stormwater runoff. The ENF stated that the minor increase in impervious area (1,372 total sf within the 9.3-acre project site) will result in negligible changes to stormwater peak flows from the project site. I encourage MassDOT and the City of Cambridge to consider the comments provided by the Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) regarding ways to help the project comply with the 65-percent phosphorous reduction goal prescribed by the Lower Charles Nutrient Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). On-site capture and infiltration of stormwater, use of infrastructure best management practices (BMPs), and phosphorus-reducing landscaping practices are all potential suggestions provided by the CRWA.

Historical Resources

According to the ENF, Cambridge Common is a contributing property in the State and National Register-listed Cambridge Common Historic District. Cambridge Common is also a contributing property in the State Register-listed Old Cambridge Historic District, which is a locally designated historic district under the purview of the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC). The ENF indicated that the City of Cambridge developed the scope of work for this project in consultation with the CHC. In compliance with the Programmatic Agreement among

the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), MassDOT, and the Federal Highway Administration, the MassDOT Cultural Resources Section will consult with MHC as part of its Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Section 106) review. As part of this process, MassDOT should consult with MHC with regard to its request for an archaeological sensitivity assessment for the proposed project to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Water Supply

The MWRA comment letter identified the potential requirement for an 8(m) permit in association with the proposed project. According to the MWRA comment letter, Section 8(m) of Chapter 372 of the Acts of 1984, MWRA's enabling legislation, allows the MWRA to issue permits to build, construct, excavate, or cross within or near an easement or other property interest held by the MWRA, with the goal of protecting MWRA-owned infrastructure. The MWRA has indicated that an 8(m) permit may be required to protect MWRA's Section 11 low pressure zone main, a water meter, and slip-lined mains in the area of this project running parallel to Massachusetts Avenue in the confines of Cambridge Common. The City of Cambridge and MassDOT should contact the MWRA to provide additional project detail to confirm if an 8(m) permit will be required and to establish construction management protocols as necessary to avoid impacts to MWRA infrastructure.

Construction Period

All roadways are anticipated to remain open to traffic throughout the construction period. All reasonable efforts should be made to clearly sign and maintain safe pedestrian and bicycle routes throughout the project area during the construction process. Erosion and sedimentation control best management practices (BMPs) should be implemented as needed to reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff during the construction period. The City of Cambridge and MassDOT should implement measures to control dust and other construction-related air quality impacts. I note that as stated in MassDOT's GreenDOT Policy Directive, MassDOT requires that contractors install emission control devices in all off-road vehicles. The project must comply with the Solid Waste and Air Pollution Control regulations, pursuant to M.G.L. c.40, s.54. All construction activities should be undertaken in compliance with the conditions of all State and local permits.

Conclusion

The ENF has sufficiently defined the nature and general elements of the project for the purposes of MEPA review and demonstrated that the project's environmental impacts will be avoided, minimized and/or mitigated to the extent practicable. Based on review of the ENF and comments received, and in consultation with State Agencies, I have determined that no further MEPA review is required. The project may proceed to State permitting.

October 19, 2012

Date


Richard K. Sullivan Jr.

Comments received:

09/20/2012	Massachusetts Historical Commission
09/25/2012	Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
09/25/2012	WalkBoston
09/25/2012	Charles River Watershed Association
09/26/2012	Heather Malkani
09/26/2012	Janet Burns
10/08/2012	Benjamin H. Beckwith
10/08/2012	Robert J. La Tremouille
10/09/2012	Deborah Knight
10/09/2012	Michael Brandon
10/09/2012	Ellen Leopold
10/09/2012	Courtney Mireni
10/10/2012	Margaret Myers

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