

Doug Rice, Commissioner
MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

July 21, 2022

RE: **Memorial Drive Phase III – Comments on Revised Design**

Dear Commissioner Rice:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the revised proposal of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (“DCR”) to reconstruct Memorial Drive and the neighboring parkland, which was presented to the public on June 30. The Trustees of the People for Riverbend Park Trust (the “Trust”) support the detailed comments provided by the Memorial Drive Alliance (the “MDA”). We appreciate that the revised design responds to many of the concerns expressed by the Trust, the MDA, and other community members, but we agree with the MDA that the design can be further improved in some key respects.

In particular, for the safety and pleasure of park visitors of all ages and abilities, we support separating the path intended for faster-moving park visitors such as those on bikes from the path intended for pedestrians and joggers by reusing a portion of the existing Memorial Drive roadway as a permanent bike path for the entire length of the area where the road diet is implemented.

We also support a road design that includes physical elements that reflect a reduced speed limit and safe crossings; while 25 mph may as low as DCR is willing to consider for an arterial road, we note that this section of Memorial Drive meets many of Cambridge’s criteria for designation as a 20 mph “safety zone” by virtue of its proximity to parkland well-used by children and a higher than average proportion of elderly people in the surrounding residential area. Physical design features that necessitate driving at reduced speeds will be especially critical to ensuring the safety of the two proposed new crosswalks.

We also would like to preserve the existing topography without retaining coils, because it provides a continuous view of the river. As is, the slopes are better at slowing down and retaining storm water and will not disturb ecologies.

The Trust has a particular interest in protecting the signature allée of “London Plane” trees that define the historic landscape envisioned 125 years ago by Charles Eliot and Frederick Law Olmsted. We are pleased that the revised proposal halves the number of London Plane trees to be removed to seven, from 14, and that 22 new plane trees will be planted along with almost 60 other native trees. Ongoing care of these trees including regular watering of those newly planted for at least three years will be essential if they are to thrive. We see the new landscape maintenance provisions as meeting minimum standards and would be heartened to see a landscape maintenance proposal that went beyond these. We also support the MDA’s suggestion to eliminate the proposed structured viewing platforms and to instead open up the viewshed by maintaining lower native plantings along the riverbank in keeping with the pastoral nature of this stretch of the riverfront. We are interested in discussing how the Trust can help support the care of the trees and other plantings.

As a DCR partner for over 40 years, the Trust remains eager to discuss other possible park amenities such as benches, water fountains and a public toilet. Pat Sekler, the coordinator of our adopt-a-lot program, is sending a separate statement concerning lesser issues we hope you will consider when the design process enters its later stages.

People for Riverbend Park Trust,

By its Trustees,

Franziska Amacher Anne Duggan Jan Devereux Terrence Doyle Patricia Sekler