



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs*  
*100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900*  
*Boston, MA 02114*

DEVAL L. PATRICK  
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

IAN A. BOWLES  
SECRETARY

Tel: (617) 626-1000  
Fax: (617) 626-1181  
<http://www.mass.gov/envir>

July 25, 2008

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

PROJECT NAME : Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project - Phase III  
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY : Newton  
PROJECT WATERSHED : Charles River  
EOEA NUMBER : I4269  
PROJECT PROPONENT : City of Newton  
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR : June 25, 2008

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (G. L. c. 30, ss. 61-62H) 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).

Project History

In August 1995, the City of Newton prepared a master plan for Commonwealth Avenue *The Commonwealth Avenue Master Plan* to improve the capacity, safety and visual appeal of Commonwealth Avenue and the Carriageway which runs parallel to Commonwealth Avenue but is separated by a landscaped center median ("Reservation Area") that was originally occupied by a street railway system. As listed below, the Master Plan identified a six phase re-construction and restoration program of modifications and improvements to the roadway, Carriageway and Reservation area, and landscaping enhancements located along a six-mile segment of Commonwealth Avenue from Boston College to Route 128 in Newton.



### Phase I

Phase I work was completed in 1995 and involved the redesign of the existing Carriageway and Reservation Areas, and the reconstruction of two segments of Commonwealth Avenue (approximately .75 miles total) including roadways and intersections surrounding Newton's City Hall and the Valentine Street/Commonwealth Avenue intersection (the Civic Center area), and the Auburndale Center area between Lexington Street and Melrose Street.

### Phase IV

As originally described in the June 1997 ENF (EOEA# 11175) submitted for this portion of the project, Phase IV work consisted of the redesign and reconstruction of 5,745 feet of Commonwealth Avenue from Grant Avenue to Walnut Street. The Phase IV work included the resurfacing Commonwealth Avenue and the Carriageway, installing new traffic signals at Walnut Street and Center Street, installing ornamental/historic street lighting at entrances to side streets, reconstructing the sidewalk and installing granite curbing and granite edging along Commonwealth Avenue and the Carriageway, and planting new trees and shrubs. The Commonwealth Avenue roadway remained in its existing footprint except for some minor widening at the Centre Street/Commonwealth Avenue intersection. The typical cross-section of the main roadway consisted of two 11.5-foot travel lanes with 2.5-foot wide shoulders and an 8.2-foot parking lane, a 6.6-foot planting median strip with a 6-foot wide sidewalk.

A 22-foot wide Carriageway, located north of the main roadway, runs parallel to the Commonwealth Avenue roadway. A 38-foot-wide planted median ('Reservation Area') separates the Carriageway from the main Commonwealth Avenue roadway. The typical cross-section of the Carriageway consists of one 11.5-foot travel lane with an 8.2-foot-wide parking lane located on the western side of the carriageway and a 2.3-foot-wide planted median shoulder, a 5 foot planting strip and a concrete sidewalk.

The Phase IV project included the installation of new traffic signals at the Grant Avenue and the Centre Street intersections. This project also involved the relocation of hooded stormwater catch basins with sump pumps to accommodate proposed Phase IV roadway improvements. The Phase IV construction activities were completed using Chapter 90 funds. A Secretary's Certificate was issued for this project on July 11, 1997 and found that the Phase 4 project did not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

### Future Development – Phases II, V and VI

The Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project calls for the future construction of Phases II, V, and VI involving improvements and landscaping enhancements to the specific sections of the Commonwealth Avenue roadway, the Carriageway and the Reservation Area described in the Commonwealth Avenue Master Plan.

As currently designed, the Phase II project corridor includes Route 128 to Auburndale Center (Regina Road) and from Auburndale Center (Pamela Court) to Auburn Street (approximately 1.25 miles total). The proposed improvements along these sections of Commonwealth Avenue include:

- Removing approximately 40 existing trees and re-planting a variety of approximately 500 of trees and shrubs;
- Adding granite pavers, benches, and crosswalks with handicap ramps;
- Covering the Carriageway with stone dust to discourage through traffic and to encourage parking adjacent to the Charles River Watershed Association and adjacent to the Ash Street intersection;
- Placing a 'Welcome to Newton' sign on the reservation adjacent to the Oakland Avenue intersection;
- Reconfiguring the Reservation Area and the Carriageway to allow left turn eastbound entrance to Marriott and westbound acceleration lane from the Marriott;
- Reconfiguring the Reservation Area to discourage the use of the Carriageway by through traffic adjacent to the Woobine Road intersection;
- Reconfiguring the intersection of Rowe Street and Commonwealth Avenue to reduce the pavement width and to improve pedestrian safety. Also, necking down the Carriageway on both sides of the intersection;
- Providing short term parking on the Carriageway adjacent to the Rowe Street intersection;
- Closing the public park to vehicles at the Massachusetts Turnpike overpass; and,
- Closing the Carriageway to vehicles west of Robinhood Street and necking down the Carriageway to the east of Robinhood Street.

In Phase V, project work will include roadway and Carriageway improvements and landscaping enhancements from Exeter Street to the Civic Center Area (Valentine Street). The proposed improvements along this 1 mile section of Commonwealth Avenue will include:

- Removing approximately 30 existing trees and re-planting a variety of approximately 400 trees and shrubs;
- Adding granite pavers, benches, and crosswalks with handicap ramps;
- Reconfiguring the reservation edge to allow for easy turning from westbound Commonwealth Avenue lane and necking down the Carriageway on both sides of the intersection at Dartmouth Street;
- Necking down the Carriageway on both sides of the intersection at Chestnut Street and Prince Street; and,
- Narrowing the pavement width at the intersection of Commonwealth Avenue and Evelyn Road.

The City of Newton proposes to construct roadway and landscaping improvements along a one mile section of Commonwealth Avenue from Auburn Street to Exeter Street in Phase VI. The proposed improvements will include:

- Removing approximately 30 existing trees and re-planting a variety of approximately 400 trees and shrubs;
- Adding granite pavers, benches, and crosswalks with handicap ramps;
- Smoothing the curve on the reservation and necking down the westbound Carriageway at Arapahce Road intersection;
- Reducing the width of the eastbound roadway and aligning the lanes with a south edge adjacent to the Washington Street intersection;
- Reconfiguring the reservation to provide for a smooth transition in alignment for westbound Commonwealth Avenue lanes adjacent to Oldham Road intersection;
- Necking down the Carriageway at the Oldham Road and Temple Street intersections;
- Aligning the eastbound lanes with south edge of roadway at Day Street intersection; and,
- Closing the opening in the Reservation at the Wimbledon Circle intersection.

### **Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project - Phase III**

As described in this ENF, the proposed Phase III construction program represents the most recent phase of the City of Newton's Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project and involves the reconstruction and landscape improvements for approximately one mile of Commonwealth Avenue from 300 feet west of Grant Avenue to approximately 525 feet west of the Boston city line. Similar to the work proposed and completed for Phase IV, the Commonwealth Avenue roadway will remain in its existing footprint and have a cross-section consisting of two travel lanes (11.5-foot westbound, 14.8-foot eastbound) with 8.2-foot-wide shoulders and an 8.2-foot parking lane, a 6-foot planting median strip with a 6-foot-wide sidewalk. A 38-foot-wide planted median Reservation Area, located immediately north of Commonwealth Avenue will separate Commonwealth Avenue from the Carriageway. The cross-section of the Carriageway will consist of one 22-foot-wide travel lane with a 4.3-foot-wide planted median shoulder, and a 5-foot-wide concrete sidewalk. According to the information provided in the ENF, the proposed improvements along this section of Commonwealth Avenue include:

- Removal of existing shade trees and replanting a variety of new trees and shrubs;
- Adding granite pavers, benches, and crosswalks with handicap ramps;
- Reducing the pavement width at the intersection with Grant Avenue and adding a paved island;
- Aligning and necking down the Carriageway on both sides of the intersection at Grant Avenue, Hammond Street, Manet Road, and Old Colony Road;
- Installing new traffic signals at the Grant Avenue and Hammond Street intersections;

- Restoring and replanting the existing 30-foot-wide cut of the Reservation Area median at Garrison Street;
- Creating a separate curb opening for Wachusett Road and Hammond Street and adding a curb edge planting and walkway;
- Reconfiguring the reservation nosing to improve the turning movement from westbound lanes at the Manet Road intersection;
- Maintaining the full width of the Carriageway and adding granite pavement at the ends at Mt. Alverina Road and Waban Hill Road intersections; and,
- Replacing the barrier fence at Mt. Alverina Road and Waban Hill Road intersections.

The Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project - Phase III is undergoing MEPA review pursuant to section 11.03(6)(b)(2)(b) of the MEPA Regulations because it will result in the cutting of five or more living public shade trees 14 or more inches in diameter at breast height. The project, as currently designed, does not require an Order of Conditions from the Newton Conservation Commission. The project must comply with the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for stormwater discharges from a construction site of over one acre. Because the project involves state funding or financial assistance from the Commonwealth, MEPA jurisdiction extends to all aspects of the project that may cause significant Damage to the Environment.

#### Shade Tree Removal

As currently designed, the proposed Phase III project activities will result in the removal of approximately 50 existing shade trees from within the Phase III project corridor. The City's proposed tree removal plan is based on an evaluation of the existing condition of these existing trees, their conflict with the project's proposed roadway, and Carriageway reconstruction and redesign and/or their conflict with the Commonwealth Avenue Master Plan. The City has committed to re-planting approximately 400 new shade trees of appropriate species and size, in locations throughout the project corridor. The City estimates that, when completed, the Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project will result in the removal of approximately 200 existing shade trees from the 6-mile project corridor. The City has committed to planting approximately 2,000 new shade trees (10:1) of appropriate species and size in locations throughout the full-build project corridor as mitigation. I encourage the City to continue to consult with the Newton Conservation Commission and others during the final design and scheduling of any shade tree removal and planting activities.

#### Pedestrian and Bicycle Accommodation

As described in the ENF, the Phase III design accommodates safe bicycle activity in the westbound direction along the Carriageway.

The City received approval to omit the inclusion of certain bicycle accommodation standards from the Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project to avoid potential impacts to additional trees and utility poles within the project corridor.

According to the comments received from WalkBoston, the City's proposed use of granite paver material at Carriageway crossings will create challenging and potentially unsafe crossing conditions for many pedestrians. WalkBoston also notes that numerous existing pedestrian signs are proposed for removal as part of the Phase III project activities. WalkBoston has requested that the City develop a new pedestrian signage plan to locate new pedestrian signs within the project corridor to remind motorists to safely accommodate pedestrian activity along Commonwealth Avenue, the Carriageway and the Reservation Area. The City should consult with WalkBoston to identify additional opportunities for incorporating pedestrian signage in the Phase III project corridor.

In its comments, the Newton Bicycle/Pedestrian Task Force (NBPTF) provided thoughtful and detailed comments regarding the City's proposed bicycle accommodations and routing plan. NBPTF has requested that the City continue to explore opportunities for providing bicycle accommodations within Commonwealth Avenue's westbound and eastbound shoulder areas. The City should also incorporate 'Share the Road' signage on the eastbound and westbound sides of Commonwealth Avenue to remind motorists and bicyclists to safely accommodate bicycles and pedestrians within the project corridor. The City should work closely with the NBPTF and others during the preparation of the final design plans for Phase III and the remaining project construction phases to ensure a meaningful response to these comments.

### Stormwater Management

The Phase III project will result in a decrease in the amount of impervious surface area within the project corridor by approximately 14,000 sf. The City has proposed to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) to mitigate the potential stormwater impacts associated with project construction activities. The City estimates that the remaining future project construction phases (Phases II, V and VI) will result in further decreases in impervious surface area and a corresponding net increase in open space. For each of the three remaining construction phases, approximately 14,000 sf of new additional open space will be created throughout the Reservation Area (median). Upon completion, the Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project will result in an estimated total increase of approximately one acre of new open space.

Overall, the City of Newton appears to have designed the Commonwealth Avenue Improvement Project to minimize its impacts particularly to land alteration, public shade trees and stormwater management. Based on a review of the information provided by the proponent and after consultation with the relevant public agencies, I find that the potential impacts of this Phase III project, together with the potential cumulative impacts associated with the currently proposed future construction of Phases II, V and VI (full-build project) do not warrant the preparation of an EIR. The proponent can resolve the remaining issues during the process of final design and during the permitting process.

July 25, 2008  
DATE



Ian A. Bowles, Secretary

Comments received:

07/11/08 Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) - MassHighway  
07/18/08 WalkBoston  
07/22/08 Newton Bicycle/Pedestrian Task Force (NBPTF)

ENF #14269  
IAB/NCZ/ncz