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Arlington Planning and Community Development Department

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From: Phil Goff and Chad Gibson, co-chairs
East Arlington Livable Streets (EALS) Coalition

Re: Comments in preparation of the 75% submittal of the Mass Ave Corridor project

Date: December 8, 2011

CC: Laura Wiener (Town Planner), Arlington Board of Selectmen (via Marie Krepelka), Brian Sullivan (Town Manager)

As co-chairs of a neighborhood organization representing hundreds of residents throughout East Arlington, we are pleased to hear of the on-going progress of the Mass Ave Corridor planning effort. In the lead-up to and at April's 25% design hearing, we felt the Town and your staff did a great job in explaining the plan to the community. This clearly helped to draw out the many supporters who spoke in favor of the plan at Town Hall.

We understand that the Town and the engineering consultants are close to completing the 75% design plan for review by MassDOT. While this progress is encouraging news, we and many members of our organization feel that public input on the details of the plan has been lacking since the 25% hearing. While the overall design of the corridor has remained intact—the primary three-lane configuration, the bike lanes, traffic lights, etc—elements of the “new” Mass Ave that residents and visitors will experience on a daily basis remain largely unknown to the community. These elements include sidewalk materials, landscaping, street furniture and other amenities.

As such, we recommend that the Town seriously consider hosting another public meeting or open house to receive feedback on these critical elements of the plan. It should be made very clear that the purpose of the meeting or open house is not to debate the core elements of the plan, but rather to gather comments and ideas on the details that are being developed for the 75% submission. An alternate idea could be to conduct an on-line visual preference survey on the landscape and streetscape elements, using Survey Monkey. We believe giving the community one last chance to weigh in on the plan would create additional enthusiasm and support for the effort. It would also mitigate the frustration some Mass Ave plan supporters feel because they have not been able to provide input on the streetscape elements that will alter the look and feel of Mass Ave for those who use it on a daily basis.

With or without another formal opportunity for the community-at-large to weigh in on the 75% plan, the EALS Coalition Board would like to suggest some potential enhancements that we hope will be seriously considered as the plan moves to 75% and beyond. Nearly all of these comments are modest in nature and are not intended to create the need to re-analyze motor vehicle level of service or intersection/signal performance that would be costly and time consuming.

Pedestrian Accessibility and Safety

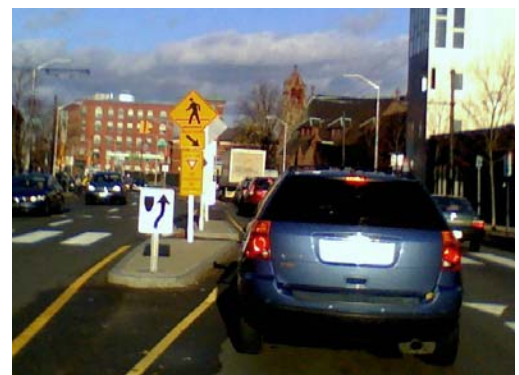
- Crosswalks:** The crosswalks that run parallel to Mass Ave cross numerous local service streets along the corridor, with the exception of Bates Road and Lake Street (both designated collector streets). All cross streets are exclusively residential and house many families with young children. Vehicles turning off of, or onto Mass Ave, frequently encroach on to the crosswalk and make the turn too quickly. We are happy to see that the project reduces the turning radii on some of the side streets perpendicular to Mass Ave. We also recommend the inclusion of raised crosswalks or speed tables into the plan, especially at the side streets that suffer the most significant problems with cut-thru traffic and speeding (i.e. those that offer direct connections between Mass Ave and Broadway). Raised crosswalks will slow turning traffic and encourage vehicles to come to a complete stop prior to the crosswalk. This is a critical safety feature that puts priority on pedestrians walking along Mass Ave, rather than vehicles turning onto side streets. In areas with the highest level of pedestrian traffic—the blocks between Grafton/Orvis and Milton Street—the raised crosswalks will help to define the Capitol Square business district and encourage drivers to become more aware of those on foot in this area.



Raised crosswalks like this one on Mass Ave in Cambridge prioritize pedestrian and ADA access and slow turning traffic onto side streets

- Bus Stops:** With the MBTA’s simultaneous planning for potential changes to the operation of the #77 bus line and stop locations, we want to reiterate our support for maintaining the stop locations that were developed during the corridor planning effort, including bus stops presented as part of the 25% plan. All stops were maintained within a half block of their existing locations and were carefully coordinated with existing and proposed traffic signals and crosswalks. In particular, the stretch of curb in front of the Arlington Diner is the ideal spot for the inbound stop at Milton Street and should remain. This location maintains the maximum number of on-street parking spots in the area and provides for the new crosswalk and curb extension in front of Za restaurant.

- Refuge Islands:** We were pleased to see that median refuge islands were included in the 25% plan at a few un-signalized crosswalk locations. We continue to support their inclusion along portions of the corridor in which the flush median is planned. We urge the design team, however, to be especially careful when including signage at these crossings. The small islands can be easily overwhelmed by multiple signs and poorly-located signs can hide pedestrians who are waiting at the refuge. The signs located at refuge islands in Porter Square are unfortunate examples of ones that actually decrease motorist visibility of pedestrians and are counter-productive.



The number and placement of signs can make it harder for motorists to see pedestrians waiting in refuge islands

Bicycle Accessibility and Safety

- **Bike Lane Striping:** It is our expectation that the current plan includes four-inch wide lane lines that separate the bike lane from both the vehicle travel lane and the adjacent parking lane. While this is standard, we recommend the use of six-inch stripes in order to make the lines more visible, especially at night. This additional visibility will improve bicyclist safety and will further clarify the presence of the bike lanes. A six-inch stripe is currently the standard in Cambridge where the newly-striped bike lanes create a more clear separation from passing traffic (see photo). Also, both the 1999 AASHTO guide and the recently-published NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide recommend six inch (or eight inch) stripes for all new bike lanes. <http://nacto.org/cities-for-cycling/design-guide/bike-lanes/conventional-bike-lanes/#design>



The 6" bike lane lines on Hampshire Street in Cambridge are clearly more visible than the 4" stripes adjacent to the parking lane.

- **Green Bike Lanes:** More and more cities incorporate green bike lanes in areas where conflicts between motor vehicles and bicycles are likely, primarily where bike lanes run adjacent to right-turn lanes. According to Ch. 3G of the 2009 MUTCD, the green treatment—either regular paint, epoxy paint or thermoplastic—is intended to “enhance the conspicuity of a bicycle lane and extensions of bike lanes through intersections.” The treatment has received interim approval from FHWA and is currently used in numerous locations in the City of Boston. Along the Mass Ave Corridor, green bike lanes should be incorporated on the inbound approach to Lake Street and the outbound approach to Bates Road, and extend through both intersections. Both are the only locations where right-turn lanes were planned as part of the 25% design.

- **Bike Parking:** While bike racks will be part of the corridor design, EALS wants to make sure that plentiful bike racks are placed along the entire corridor, with the most significant concentration in the business district between Grafton/Orvis and Milton Street. For additional consideration, unique and high capacity bike racks near the Lake Street intersection would enhance the neighborhood’s identity as a bike-friendly community and, if properly chosen or designed, could make for a small-scale work of public art at the key crossroads of the neighborhood.



Example of a unique bike rack that should be considered at Capitol Square

- **Potential Hubway Station:** Boston’s bike share system has proven to be a remarkable success in its first year. In 2012, Hubway will expand to Cambridge, Somerville and Brookline. By next summer, Hubway stations will be as close as Teele and Davis squares. In 2013, stations are likely at Alewife and elsewhere in North Cambridge. It is not inconceivable that by the time Mass Ave is under construction, the demand and desire to bring Hubway to Arlington will be present. As such, it is important to ensure that the Corridor plan does not preclude the installation of a standard-size 41’ Hubway station in Capitol Square, preferably without removing any curb-side parking. The streetscape plan should include a hardscaped area that is roughly 41’x6’ wide and

without trees, utility poles, street lights, manholes or furniture. Six feet of clearance should be maintained for a walking zone and a three-foot setback from the curb is needed to allow for passengers to exit car doors. It should also be located as close to the center of the business district (i.e. Lake Street) as possible for maximum visibility and utility. One acceptable location would be on Mass Ave in front of the Fox Library. Other Hubway stations may be desired in the future but those can likely be placed on-street outside of Capitol Square where there is far lower demand for on-street parking.

- **Bike Lane Transitions:** As you know the proposed bike lanes do not run entirely along the full length of the corridor. The bike lanes drop roughly a block west of the Rt. 16 intersection and will not extend beyond Pond Lane. The engineers should take special care to ensure a proper transition to/from each end of the corridor for bicyclists. This transition should take the form of shared lane marking (“sharrows”), broken lane lines and/or signage to alert motorists that bicyclists will no longer have their own dedicated lane. Although it is outside the scope of the project, this treatment should be considered along Mass Ave from Pond Lane to the Rt. 60 intersection so bicyclists have some level of connectivity through Arlington Center to the Minuteman Bikeway.

Streetscape

- **Sidewalk Design:** Since nearly all of the sidewalks in the Capitol Square business district will be 14'-16' in width, we support breaking down the scale of the sidewalks using multiple materials. A strip of bricks or unit pavers in the furniture zone along the curb offers a nice contrast against a smooth scored concrete surface adjacent to the storefronts. This area creates a 5'-6' zone where street trees, utility poles, benches and bike racks sit and will not offer a hazard for those with disabilities.
- **Traversable Median:** The traversable median planned between Grafton/Orvis and Milton Street presents the opportunity to not only provide small median refuge islands, but can help to distinguish the business district from the rest of the corridor. We encourage the use of Belgian blocks or cobblestones in the flush median to create a visual separation from traffic lanes and to mitigate driving on top of them.
- **Public Art:** Public art is an important component of any urban roadway project and should not be overlooked along Mass Ave, especially given the business district’s creative and commercial arts theme. Three locations should be seriously considered for public art: the intersection with the Alewife Brook Greenway, at Capitol Square and the new open space planned for the south end of Grafton Street. We urge that the narrowed section of Grafton not simply be developed as a grassy spot with a couple of trees. A strong idea is needed to hold together this space and to ensure that it doesn’t appear to be an afterthought. A large-scale public art project would be perfect at this location.
- **Stormwater Treatment:** Where opportunities arise, we urge the design team to look for spots to mitigate stormwater run-off and add unique landscape elements that feature native plants. If a public art project is not



Large scale public art such as this example in Salem can help emphasize the arts themed district in East Arlington

possible at Grafton Street, per the above, this could be a good location for a rain garden or bio-swale project. Opportunities to reduce impermeable surfaces should also be explored where sidewalks are widened or on-street parking is not needed, such as the zone in front of the Walgreen's parking lot.

- Drinking Fountain: Consider incorporating a drinking fountain into the design for the north side of Capitol Square. Drinking fountains, like clocks, are public amenities that demonstrate civic respect and care for the physical needs of people. Fountains are relatively easy to maintain in working order and exist in numerous parks throughout the area. A masonry fountain could be coordinated with other stonework such as berm benches in the final design.

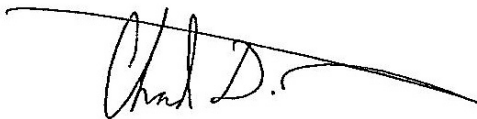
Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our recommendation that the Town host one last public meeting, informal open house (ideally at a location within the neighborhood) or an on-line visual preference survey. Any of these options could be designed simply to allow the community to weigh in on details of the 75% design and potentially comment on options for streetscape elements such as trees, lighting, bike racks, sidewalk materials, furniture and public art. This would strengthen support for the plan and help create a corridor through East Arlington that residents, business owners and visitors will be proud of.

Thank you,



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