



TOWN OF ARLINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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M E M O R A N D U M

To: Select Board

Cc: Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager
Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning & Community Development

From: Ali Carter, Economic Development Coordinator

Date: February 20, 2020

Re: Whittemore Park Tree Hearing Appeal

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) embarked on the project to make improvements to Whittemore Park in 2016. With the encouragement of the Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC), DPCD applied for and received a CPA grant in 2017 to create a plan for Whittemore Park. The community visioning project for the park was launched in 2018 with the goal of creating a conceptual and schematic plan with cost estimates for construction. Three community forums; a Design Day event in the park for public input; a survey that received over 500 responses from residents throughout the town; and the work of a project committee comprised of residents, members of the Arlington Historical Commission, Historic Districts Commission, the Dallin Museum, the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture, and the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, all culminated in the Whittemore Park Conceptual Plan, which was released in August of 2018.

The overall project goals of the conceptual plan, based on the feedback we received during the community outreach process, were to improve circulation in the park; increase visibility and prominence of the park; cultivate opportunities for passive recreation, programs, and events; and to enhance historic, cultural, and natural landscape in Arlington Center. The community and design goals were to create a park that was democratic in that it could be used by many types of people, flexible in use for many kinds of activities, and a place that was beloved, inspires stewardship, and is culturally appropriate for town.

Whittemore Park is located in the heart of Arlington Center, on one corner of the intersection of Mass Ave and Mystic Streets. With 5 lanes of traffic on Mystic Street and 6 lanes of traffic on the Mass Ave side of the park as well as adjacent to the Minuteman Bikeway, it is a major focal point of Arlington Center. The park itself lacks basic amenities including ADA-compliant walkways and, according to a

survey completed during the planning phase of the project, was serving as more of a cut-through rather than an attractive gathering place for the community.

Through a competitive RFP process, the Town hired Michelle Crowley Landscape Architects (now Crowley Cottrell Landscape Architects) to complete the conceptual plan, and through a second competitive RFP process also won the contract to implement Phase I of the plan.

Since 2019 Annual Town Meeting, where the CPAC recommended and Town Meeting approved the allocation for funding to move ahead with implementing Phase I of this project, the project has advanced under the guidance of the same project committee that oversaw the planning phase, as well as under the advisement of local and state regulatory commissions. To date we have taken the following steps toward the implementation of Phase I of the Whittemore Park Revitalization Plan.

First, we presented the conceptual plan to the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and the Arlington Historical Commission (AHC). The MHC and AHC approved the preliminary plans.

We conducted two rounds of soil testing to ensure that the conditions of the soil around the railroad tracks and throughout the park were within the Massachusetts Department of Environment Protection thresholds for public safety.

We met with several different groups and individuals regarding the current signs, markers, and monuments in the park. We are working with the team at Crowley Cottrell as well as community members who originally had the Alan Hovhannes marker placed in the park to find the best treatment and placement of that monument. The granite marker for Samuel Whittemore will remain in situ and the marker that commemorates the contributions of John and Artemis Mirak will either be repaired or replaced. The remainder of the granite markers are in poor condition. We will work with the Arlington Historical Commission to determine an appropriate method and location for interpreting the stories told on those markers.

Finally, we attended a tree hearing on January 28, 2020, seeking permission to remove three trees in the park that are in the location of the new path outlined in the conceptual plan for the park. At the tree hearing there were objections from the public to the removal of these trees, which led to a denial of our request. We are appealing the decision made at this tree hearing.

The proposed design calls for a circular walkway through the park. It will improve circulation for people passing through the park while also creating green space for people to gather for active and passive recreation.

Phase I of the plan calls for the planting of seven trees of native species, and an additional 2 trees are planned to be planted in Phase II. To date, five trees have been removed from the park by order of the Tree Warden because they were dead or a hazard to public safety. At a hearing with the CPAC in 2019 and at 2019 Town Meeting, DPCD presented their intention to remove seven trees from the park and replant nine. The plan to replant nine remains, however once we engaged in a thorough design process to create construction documents, it became clear that an additional tree that was not expected to be

requested for removal needs to be removed. This Yellowwood tree, which is located in the northeastern portion of the park, would be in the middle of the walkway. After conducting a survey of the site at the beginning of Phase I, it became clear that the grade change at the eastern portion of the park (closest to the businesses) was too abrupt to align the path around the tree and achieve ADA compliance. If we moved the pathway closer to the west, it would disturb even more healthy trees. The Town hired Bartlett Tree Experts to assess the viability of the Yellowwood's health if it were to be relocated elsewhere in the park. They determined that its survival is not likely if it were relocated, and estimated the price of relocating the tree at \$40,000. The Town received a second opinion from another firm, Brightview Landscape; they reaffirmed Bartlett's findings. The proposal will increase the number of trees estimated for removal by one from what was presented at Town Meeting in 2019.