



**TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**
Review Memorandum: Kelley's Corner Streetscape Design
Room 9, Town Hall
August 07, 2019

DRB Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), David Honn.

Proponents in attendance: Chris Howard, PE, Greenman Pedersen project manager, Ron Headrick, RLA, and Robert White, RLA, each landscape architects with Greenman Pederson, and Kristen Guichard, Senior Town Planner for the town of Acton.

Citizens in attendance: Andrew Brockway and Tara Friedrichs

Documents Reviewed: Kelley's Corner Streetscape Design, Part of the 75% design plans for Town of Acton and MADOT, no dates given, 27 draft pages of proposed design images to be considered for presentation at the upcoming public meeting to review the streetscape.

Page titles:

Concept Plans, 2 pages
25% Plans illustrating overall package previously submitted, 2 pages
School Frontage and Charter Road, 2 pages
Normal Tree Planting in Sidewalk, 4 pages
25% Plans illustrating preferred options, 4 pages
25% Plans illustrating secondary options, 4 pages
Intersection corner parks, 3 pages
Park/Plaza, stone walls and steps, 1 page
Lighting, 2 pages
Street Tree List, 1 page

This DRB review meeting was arranged as a working session with the landscape design team from Greenman Pedersen, (GPI), to discuss and review concepts and material ideas for the proposed Kelley's Corner Streetscape. The landscape team from GPI will be presenting thoughts on the streetscape to residents of Acton at an upcoming public meeting on August 15, 2019 as they work to prepare the 75% submission package to be issued to the DOT on the first of October, 2019.

Following are several topics of discussion as GPI reviewed with the DRB the images and ideas illustrated within the Kelley's Corner Streetscape Design documents.

School Frontage and Charter Road

GPI, who are also working directly with the School Department on ideas for improving Charter Road within the school district campus, are considering the introduction of shared use pathways along the western side of Charter Road. The proposed 8ft wide path, parallel to the pedestrian sidewalk, will enhance safety significantly on Charter Road by taking the bicycle lanes off the vehicular roadway. Various studies of how Charter Road will integrate with the streetscape at the intersection with Massachusetts Avenue to align the bicycle and pedestrian paths were presented. It was noted most of the mature trees adjacent to the tennis courts will need to be taken down to allow for the new road and shared use pathway alignment. The DRB recommended that the sidewalk along Massachusetts Avenue beyond Charter Road, heading toward West Acton meander onto the school property, and not continue the otherwise formal layout of the street edge, in order not to disturb the existing mature trees along this portion of the street edge. GPI noted that the bustop for the various community bus systems, to be positioned on the west side of the Charter Road intersection with Massachusetts Avenue will be scaled down from the 25% proposal. The DRB pointed out that the proposed driveway for the 32 unit low (isn't this going to be senior housing?) income housing to be developed across from the Junior High School should be studied with respect to its possible conflict with the roadway planting island scheduled for that portion Massachusetts Avenue.

Retaining Walls

There will be two types of walls within the streetscape, short walls – below 4 ft high, and tall walls – greater than 4 ft high:

Short walls. GPI recommends use of repurposed surplus large granite blocks, (such as used on old railroad bridge abutments), to fabricate the short walls as these do not require a footing and therefore save significantly on construction costs.

Tall walls (4' to 9' in height), (the most significant of these occurs on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue adjacent to the baseball field and old high school), will be fabricated reinforced concrete retaining walls, which require footings that extend behind the wall, faced with natural stone.. The DRB encourages the continued use of large granite blocks, mixed in with smaller scaled stone for the stone facing. The assembled wall should be graphically organized in an ashlar pattern to establish a consistency between the short and tall walls.

Though not consistent with the common field stone walls seen in much of Acton, the DRB feels the use of the salvaged granite blocks is generally consistent with the vocabulary of local vernacular stone structures and offers an opportunity to establish a texture and memorable visual character that can be unique to the Kelley's Corner neighborhood, helping to establish an identity for the commercial district that is more than a series of commercial developments.

Intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street – Park(s)

The landscape team has looked at each of the four corners at the intersection of routes 111 and 27 as possible hubs and corner pocket parks. The primary opportunity occurs adjacent to the Verizon property on the Southwest corner. Due to the significant 7 foot elevation change from Main Street to Massachusetts Avenue of the sidewalk, the designers have considered several approaches on how to manage the grade change, including incorporating small retaining walls and/or terraces into the design that can be used as both planters and informal seating.. The DRB is in agreement with the general approach and prefers an option that simplifies the number of terraces and offers the opportunity for a group to meet as well as offers individuals a place to pause for a moment while in the KC neighborhood.

Sidewalk surface treatment:

The landscape team has studied prior illustrations for sidewalk and street edge hardscape treatments which visually have been quite linear. Given the many driveway interruptions that are planned or exist, the designers believe an approach that is more intentionally patterned with a series of paved blocks of textured or colored concrete can be more successful graphically across the district. The blocks will align with the street lights thereby breaking the linearity of the sidewalks in both vertical and horizontal planes. . The DRB generally agrees this concept can offer a pleasing identifiable sidewalk treatment unique to the KC neighborhood though cautions that the pattern should be created with subtle tones of color or texture intermixing with the conventional concrete walkways. The DRB strongly recommends against utilizing a red toned concrete to emulate brick for example. The landscape team will continue to develop these ideas.

Trees:

The DRB agrees with the suggestion that larger scaled groupings of larger types of trees should be targeted for the four arrival edges of Kelley's Corner where more space is available for the larger trees to thrive. Within the portions of Kelley's Corner where the space available tightens to the five foot strip between the roadway and the sidewalk, the tree species should be more ornamental and smaller in scale at maturity. The current thinking is to plant two trees within the green strips between each of the 60 foot on center light poles.

The DRB agrees with the approach of eliminating the previously suggested hardscape between the sidewalk and the street curb, to allow for the planting of grassy beds which will help the newly planted trees to potentially thrive due to the more permeable ground cover.

Light Fixtures:

Two style types of LED light pole fixtures are under consideration. One is generally contemporary and simple and will essentially be neutral within the context of the design. The second type is what can be described as transitional, somewhat contemporary and somewhat classic due to detailing that recalls historic light poles from the early nineteenth century. There is a split of opinion on the DRB as to the approach given the KC neighborhood is not a classic historic place yet there may be a desire for some detailing and texture that is familiar to many. This topic was left open to see how the public meeting attendees react to the choices offered.

The DRB is comfortable with much of the general direction of the streetscape as presented. The committee looks forward to an opportunity to review the design at a future date when the concept is much more developed.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB