



RESTORE MASS AVE POSITION PAPER ON DDOT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT MANAGEMENT DIVISION (IPMD)

MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE NW REHABILITATION PROJECT (MARP) (From 20th Street to Waterside Drive)

From: Restore Mass Ave (RMA)*
Sheridan-Kalorama Historical Association (SKHA)*
Sheridan-Kalorama Neighborhood Council (SKNC)*

To: DC Mayor Muriel Bowser, Jack Evans, DC Council Member--Ward 2, Mary Cheh, DC Council Member--Ward 3, Anita Bonds, David Grosso, Elissa Silverman and Robert White, Jr. DC Council Members At Large, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions: David Bender & Ellen Goldstein ANC 2D, Daniel Warwick & Randy Downs ANC 2B, Malia Brink & Nancy MacWood ANC 3C; Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton. Kadidjatou Ayeva, DDOT, DDOT Consultants: Stacey Hemby, Community Outreach, & Huntae Kim

Date: January 8, 2018

SUMMARY

All three organizations have serious concerns with the current MARP proposal for one of the city's unique and nationally important historic thoroughfares. This project should only move forward if: 1) the issues in this letter are addressed in the next design plan and; 2) we are assured of sufficient and skilled resources dedicated to ensure their correct implementation. Please note: We may make additional requests based on expert detailed review of the current plans.

BACKGROUND

This document outlines RMA's position and recommendations on MARP as it relates to the preservation of the historic landscape on Massachusetts Avenue's Embassy Row. RMA's position and recommendations are supported by SKHA* and SKNC*, two neighborhood non-profit organizations.

Historical Significance of Massachusetts Avenue—A Grand Avenue

The stretch of Massachusetts Avenue addressed by the proposed rehabilitation project is unique and significant as the last Grand Avenue in the nation. Its historic integrity and beauty are at risk if the following issues are not addressed as part of the MARP design and planning process.

The three neighborhood organizations listed above have worked for decades to preserve the historic architecture and landscape on this Grand Avenue—for the benefit of DC residents and diplomats who live and work on the Avenue, as well as for the thousands of commuters and visitors who pass by its impressive landscape each day. Moreover, it reflects our nation’s heritage, as recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and by its listing on the National Register of Historic Places, US Department of the Interior.

RESTORE MASS AVE (RMA) CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE MARP PROJECT

RMA Goals:

- **PRESERVE MAJOR TREES AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE**
- **PROTECT PRESENT TREE CANOPY**
- **PLANT APPROPRIATE NEW TREES**
- **MAINTAIN TREE HEALTH**
- **PRESERVE THE AVENUE’S BEAUTY AND HISTORIC INTEGRITY**
- **ENSURE THE SAFETY OF DRIVERS, BIKERS AND PEDESTRIANS**

All trees referenced in RMA’s recommendations below include:

- City street trees by the curbs;
- Trees inside the sidewalk in the “public parking,” including the “second row” trees that form allées with sidewalk trees; and
- Trees on federal and private land, including the property of foreign entities.

Issue 1: PRESERVE EXISTING TREES AND ROOT STRUCTURE

Concern: *We believe the root systems of existing trees on Massachusetts Avenue will be badly damaged—resulting in the death of many trees—by the removal and replacement of infrastructure.* The MARP project will remove and replace sidewalks, curbs, gutters, street drains and the main roadbed under which some tree roots have thrived for up to 100 years. In addition, proposed underground channels for lighting and conduits will kill tree roots or curtail their growth. Our group has hired professionals who are examining IPMD’s documents. At this writing, these expert advisors make the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

- Preserve existing trees; inflict no damage to their short- or long-term health;
- Require best-practice construction for channeling and doing no harm to root zones, trunks, and branches;
- Require that every tree has undisturbed roots with 1,000 cubic ft. of good soil in which to grow.

Issue 2: PLANTING OF NEW TREES

Recommendations: *If new trees are planted, they must be ...*

- Selected from RMA/experts’ list of appropriately historic tree species;
- Planted correctly according to current best practices, including nutritious soil composition;
- Protected by sidewalks of cantilevered design or by Silva Cells, installed to protect and promote healthy roots;
- Sited appropriately to form allées and to expand tree canopy, per the guidelines for Massachusetts Avenue in RMA’s book, *A Grand Avenue Revival: Massachusetts Avenue Landscape History & Design Guide*.**

Issue 3: HARDSCAPE

Recommendations:

- Install sidewalks, driveways, and any hardscape with consideration for their color, texture, and shape. They should harmonize with existing architectural structures and historic views;
- Include cantilevered construction or Silva Cells to protect and promote the healthy roots of both existing trees and new trees;
- Install pervious and flexible surfaces where possible, but with consideration for their historic look;
- Alter or remove driveway cuts -- which are too numerous for safety -- to create planting space, wherever possible;
- Increase opportunities for bio-retention of storm runoff to nurture surrounding green space.

Issue 4: LIGHTING

Concerns: *The proposed, new street lighting threatens tree canopy and the historic nature of the Avenue.*

- We believe that high tree canopies cannot thrive when branches are cut to accommodate the planned lighting.
- Moreover, the 4,000 Kelvin (K) or 3,000 K LED bulbs that DDOT plans are too blue and harsh. Residents and travelers along an historic avenue do not need or want “soccer field lights.” The American Medical Association has reported on the health effects of such strong lights and recommends the lowest possible light levels. Given these concerns, Restore Mass Ave will be joining the District Street Light Task Force, which has brought together many neighborhood groups to influence DC policy on streetlights.

Issue 4: LIGHTING (cont.)

Recommendations:

- Review all current and proposed fixtures. The design of lamps and poles should be historically appropriate;
- Limit street light bulb color and bulb temperature to no more than 2700K;
- Account for the impact of fixture height on tree crowns in the MARP design process.

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

- The safety of pedestrian “islands” in the middle of four lanes of rush-hour traffic;
- Evidence of the relative accident rate and road decay that would justify this project;
- Clear recognition of the needs and safety of the growing number of bikers and pedestrians who would use the improved infrastructure of the Avenue.

CONTACT

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****** *A Grand Avenue Revival: Massachusetts Avenue Landscape History & Design Guide* (Restore Mass Ave, 2014) pdf at <http://restoremassave.org/grand-avenue-revival-book/>