



**Plympton Historical Commission**

5 Palmer Road, Plympton, MA 02367

781.585.3220

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October 29, 2003

Thomas F. Broderick, P.E.  
Chief Engineer  
Massachusetts Highway Department  
10 Park Plaza  
Boston, MA 02116-0012

Attn: Geoffrey Fulgione

Re: Rte. 58 (Main Street/Palmer Road) Safety Improvement Project  
MassHighway Project Number 602337

Dear Mr. Broderick:

We appreciated the opportunity to view the plans and provide comment at the public hearing on Thursday, October 16, 2003. This letter serves to follow-up on that meeting and provides more detail regarding the Plympton Historical Commission's (PHC) thoughts on the initial design of this project. We apologize for the delay in forwarding, but based on conversations with personnel at the hearing, we understand that the delay would not pose a problem.

On October 1, 2003, the Massachusetts Historical Commission sent a letter to PHC advising that the Plympton Center area, from the Hillcrest Cemetery at the northern end to the intersection of Main Street, Mayflower and Parsonage Roads to the south, was eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. While PHC recognizes the need to make improvements to this stretch of roadway in Plympton to address current safety issues for residents and non-resident users alike, it is hoped that safety improvements can be satisfied without significantly impacting the historical character and landscape, particularly in the Plympton Center district.

The comments provided herein concentrate on 4 areas in the Plympton Center district: the Main Street, Mayflower and Parsonage Roads intersection, sidewalk and roadway widening, existing guardrails, and signage.

- **Main Street, Mayflower and Parsonage Roads intersection:**

PHC was pleased to note the reduction in fixtures from 11 to 9 in the current design plans, along with the use of only 4 poles on which to mount these. Certainly the safety of the users is paramount in such a design, but the fixture reduction will obviously help to reduce the visual impact of the signals.

That said, PHC would strongly encourage you to consider aesthetic modification to standard poles and mast arms to help mitigate the overall impact of the signals, particularly since a majority of this intersection resides within the district eligible for listing on the National Register. It is our understanding that a number of economical solutions exist for use in such applications.

We would also strongly encourage the "greening-up" of the southwest corner of the intersection - where the current center entrance to the Mobil station exists. We believe a planting of this area would greatly reduce the visual impact of the fixture mounted on this corner while providing an overall aesthetic improvement roadway and area alike. Based on comments made at the hearing, it is our understanding that the owners of the Mobil station are already considering this as part of their overall relocation plan. We would encourage you to keep abreast of their plans as it will be an important part of helping to retain the historical character of the bordering district.

- **Sidewalk and roadway widening:**

PHC is aware that ADA requirements dictate the widening of the sidewalk from the current 3 feet to 5 feet, and that the roadway requires widening to 9 meters to conform with MassHighway standards. We would like to call two areas within the Plympton Center district to your attention where particular concern should be taken with respect to how the widening is accomplished. First, there is a stretch of sidewalk on the west side of Main Street at about the center of Plympton Green where the residences (all of which are eligible for listing on the National Register) sit very close to the road. It is our hope that the widening of the sidewalk, along with the road widening, will not encroach further toward the structures. The current locations of the sidewalk and road already impact their historic character and further expansion of the western border of the sidewalk would only cause additional harm.

The second area sits north of this area as Main Street curves around to meet Palmer Road. The sidewalk that runs by the Library currently sits between the roadway edge and a significant hillside that leads up to the library. Here it would seem that a widening of the sidewalk by 2 feet would burrow into the hillside leading to two concerns: One, if a wall were to be used, that the material considered would be appropriate and would not detract from the historic character of the district, and two, if a wall were not used and the hillside were re-graded, that steps would be taken prevent damage to the large healthy trees that grace the area.

PHC is also concerned about the material that will be used on the new sidewalk. The current sidewalk, at 3 feet, has a grass or gravel strip between it and the roadway that provides a visual break. We strongly encourage you to consider incorporating a brick strip or other similar alternative to provide that visual break within the district and prevent the visual impact and effect of a 10.5 meter wide road (9 meter road and 5 ft sidewalk). To further differentiate the sidewalk from the roadway, we would encourage the evaluation of the different materials available. We believe that use of alternate materials and a brick strip would go a long way to mitigating the impact of the widening of the sidewalk and roadway on the historical character and landscape of the district and the potential for an increased "road speed" that a 10.5 meter paved area could produce.

Finally, from a safety standpoint,, we would like to see the sidewalk continue south down Main Street to the Post Office parking lot which sits immediately south of the Mobil station. Given the significant amount of traffic at this intersection, it would seem appropriate to have the sidewalk terminate at the Post Office parking lot.

- **Guardrails:**

Currently two sets of silver metal guardrails exist at the northern end of the district by Hillcrest cemetery. These detract significantly from the landscape and impact the historical character of the cemetery. It is our hope that alternative materials could be employed to meet safety requirements that would also reduce the detrimental impact to the adjacent historical resources. Perhaps a wooden or "rusted" metal surface guardrail with wooden supports could be employed. We would be happy to consider alternatives that you might suggest.

- **Signage:**

PHC encourages MassHighway to look for creative ways to minimize signage within the district in order to help preserve the historic landscape and character of the area, particularly if improvements will result in the addition of signage. Perhaps certain signage can be combined on a single pole (such as bike path signage mounted to the same pole as the speed limit sign). We understand that certain minimum requirements must be met, but hopefully some creative solutions can be found within those guidelines.

PHC looks forward to working with MassHighway, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., and James Mulcahy, the Town of Plympton Highway Surveyor, toward the completion of a final design that cooperatively and creatively addresses both safety concerns and the need to preserve the historic character and landscape of the Plympton Center district and surrounding area. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly to discuss in more detail.

Sincerely,

Jon K. Wilhelmsen  
Chair, Plympton Historical Commission  
781-582-1305 (Home number)

Enc.: MHC 10/1/03 ltr.; MHC Forms A & E - Plympton Center district

cc: Paul Holtz, Preservation Planner  
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