

Advisory Board

Kathi Anderson, Executive Director, Walden Woods Project & Thoreau Institute

Representative Cory Atkins (honorary)

Ed Begley, Jr., Actor, Environmentalist

Douglas Brinkley, Author, Professor of History, Rice University

Richard D. Brown, Professor of History, Emeritus, University of Connecticut

Ken Burns, Director, Producer, Historical Documentarian

Edward Countryman, Professor of History, Southern Methodist University

Robbie Cox, Former President, National Sierra Club, Professor Emeritus, UNC

Joan Cusack, Actress

Michael S. Dukakis, Professor, UCLA & Northeastern University, Former Governor of Massachusetts

Eric Foner, Professor of History, Columbia University

Doris Kearns Goodwin, Historian, Author

Don Henley, Recording Artist, Founder, Walden Woods Project

James O. Horton, Professor of History, Emeritus, George Washington University

Laura Johnson, former President, Massachusetts Audubon Society

Representative Jay Kaufman (honorary)

Michael Kellett, Executive Director, Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance & RESTORE: The North Woods

Congressman Edward J. Markey (honorary)

David McCullough, Historian, Author

John Hanson Mitchell, Author,

Richard Moe, Former President, National Trust for Historic Preservation

Wesley T. Mott, Editor, Emerson Society Papers, Professor Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Congresswoman Nicola S. Tsongas (honorary)

Edward O. Wilson, Naturalist, Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

Executive Director

Anna West Winter



Save Our Heritage

Protecting the birthplace of the American Revolution,
the cradle of the American Environmental Movement,
and the home of the American Literary Renaissance.

March 2, 2017

Mark Giddings, Chair
and the Commission
Historic Districts Commission
141 Keyes Rd
Concord, MA 01742

RE: Lexington Rd and Cambridge Turnpike Intersection Reconfiguration

Dear Historic Districts Commission,

We would like to provide comment and make suggestions regarding the proposed changes to the intersection of Cambridge Turnpike and Lexington Road at the Concord Museum.

This location will be a vista of primary importance for welcoming visitors to the town and the Museum, and it will be a key location projecting the image of the town. Therefore, it is critical that it have a visual presentation that is appropriate with the many other historic locations nearby.

This is also a location where there is likely to be considerable foot traffic, particularly by visitors to the museum and other historic sites, and further that this foot traffic will consist of people unfamiliar with the town and the flow of traffic. For this reason it is critical that the flow of foot traffic adhere to well-defined and safe paths, and that traffic calming features be implemented to the maximum extent possible for safety purposes. It is important that we implement pedestrian flow in a way that is appropriate in a historic area.

With these considerations in mind, we believe that there are a few important issues that should be corrected as part of any approved plan. The current plan, reviewed in the HDC site visit of March 2, calls for the elimination of the group of tall pine trees within the fork of the current intersection. This has the benefit of making the Federal brick NW façade of the museum more prominent to both walking and auto traffic, which improves the visible connection of the museum to the town. However, when these trees are removed, what remains will be a row of unsightly

utility poles and wires in front of the museum, poles that are now somewhat masked by the current tall pine trees. These utility poles will also be prominent for people viewing the Emerson House from the historic walk along Lexington Road. It will not be feasible or desirable to attempt to replace trees of this size to mask the visible intrusion of the utility poles and wiring. The current utility poles have a relatively light complement of cables. We learned at the site visit that at least some of these utility poles will need to be relocated, which will cause the various utilities to rework the cables. This presents a unique opportunity to depress those utilities underground. Since the utilities must be re-worked anyway, now is the time to depress the utilities, at least to a point beyond the Emerson House and the Concord Museum. Only after the trees are removed will it become apparent just how much these utility poles and wires will detract from the historic area.

Removing the utility poles would be transformative for the Concord visitor experience. The HDC should not approve a project that installs new utility poles in this historic corridor and should require the proponent to demonstrate that the project is not feasible unless new utility poles are installed. This should include, at a minimum, demonstrating that the additional cost of depressing the utilities, namely the cost above the cost of relocation, is a barrier to the project.

The current plan calls for the road along the Emerson House and Concord Museum to have paved road shoulder parking on both sides of the road, parking which is clearly needed. However, this causes the paved width of the street to be approximately 42 feet wide in that area. Such a wide swath is both visually detracting from the village atmosphere, and is not consistent with traffic calming practices. A common practice in a situation like this is to set in brick or cobblestone in the road shoulder parking areas, to visually keep the apparent road width to an appropriate width, and to calm the traffic. In keeping with the local historic landscape, such a parking area could be either cobblestone or brick, but asphalt is inappropriate. It was expressed that there is a desire to mark the parking spaces, which could be accomplished, for example, by using accenting cobblestones installed into a brick area. The use of brick in this area would be consistent with the period of the 1828 Emerson house and consistent with the Federal brick façade of the Museum. The HDC should not approve a project that expands the asphalt width in this historic corridor and should require the proponent to demonstrate that the project is not feasible unless asphalt is used for the parking. This should include, at a minimum, demonstrating that the additional cost brick in the parking area, namely the cost above the cost of grading and paving, is a significant barrier to the project.

The current plan calls for the two major pedestrian road crosswalks at the intersection to be white painted crosswalk with diagonal stripes on asphalt. These painted stripes will be a visibly jarring urban feature in this historic setting. A treatment that would be more consistent with a village landscape would be to use a brick inserted crosswalk, of the kind the town has installed at the Sudbury Road / Thoreau St intersection, or on Main Street between Concord Academy and the Library. In addition, these types of features have a known traffic calming effect, which will be especially important on the Lexington Road crosswalk. At the site visit, it was said that this approach was feasible and had been considered but that the town engineering department was provided guidance that such a feature might not be preferred. The HDC should inspect the brick crosswalks the town has used in other places and reevaluate whether this approach is more suited to a historic landscape, given the alternative of white painted diagonal lines on asphalt.

The museum and the town are undertaking major projects that will open up and transform the vistas of the museum and the Emerson House. When completed, there are many locations where visitors and residents will get new views of the museum and the Emerson House. The current draft plans will greatly expand the sprawl of asphalt, will place utility lines central in the visual landscape, and place bright painted diagonal crosswalk markings. This will significantly modernize and urbanize this setting.

We believe that small changes to the plan could have major impacts on preserving a historic village feel to this area, including: use of brick in the road shoulder parking to visually reduce the asphalt impact, using brick instead of painted diagonal white lines on the crosswalks, and depressing the utility poles from the intersection to beyond the Museum. We urge the HDC to consider these impacts to the historic village feel of this important area. If any of the above suggested changes to the plan are beneficial to historic protection, there should at least be information provided to the HDC and the public regarding what factors might make them infeasible from a cost or technical standpoint.

Thank you for your consideration,



Neil Rasmussen
President, Save Our Heritage
neil@saveourheritage.com