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Michael Paiewonsky
Senior Associate, Stantec
226 Causeway Street, 6th Fl
Boston, MA 02114
Submitted via online portal

January 26, 2022

Dear Michael Paiewonsky,

The Charles River Conservancy (CRC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Notification Form for EEA project #16495, Memorial Drive Reconstruction, submitted to the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) Office of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. We are grateful for DCR's dedication to redesigning the pathways from Gerry's Landing to the JFK Bridge for the benefit of the public. The CRC strives to make the Charles River and its parks a well-maintained network of natural urban places that invite and engage all in their use and stewardship. As such, we are invested in engaging in meaningful public conversation to promote safe and accessible infrastructure along the Charles River.

We are excited for the outcome of this important project with incredible potential to improve the experiences of all who use the parkway - pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike. As the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) continues the process of project planning, the CRC is interested in the outcome of several aspects of the project, many of which are outlined in a letter submitted by the Memorial Drive Alliance, including:

- **Road diet:** We were particularly pleased to see the reduction in vehicular travel lanes, including parking removal on the north side of Memorial Drive, and believe it will be vital for traffic calming and creating new spaces for cyclists and pedestrians. Net loss of pavement should be a priority for DCR in this phase of planning as well as the addition of bioswales and/or planted landscaping that can absorb rainwater and reduce harmful stormwater runoff into the Charles.

- **Tree protection:** The CRC applauds DCR's commitment to greening by protecting existing trees and adding new trees as a part of parkway reconstruction. We will be interested to see a final plan of trees to be removed and encourage DCR to sufficiently care for existing trees during construction and preserve healthy trees wherever possible, especially the iconic sycamore alley. Healthy, mature trees are critical for climate mitigation, CO2 absorption, air quality improvement, and flood prevention. Mature tree cover can also cool DCR's public spaces and provide habitat for urban wildlife.

Because young trees have been known to struggle after planting, rather than a one-year warranty period, we believe new trees planted should have comprehensively planned future attention and care. This might include a three-year plan for the care, watering, and pruning of new trees. The CRC is happy to partner with DCR and work together to care for new trees in order to preserve and maintain as many trees as possible.

- **Cyclist/pedestrian separation:** As much as possible, cyclist and pedestrian paths should be separate to reduce conflicts and maximize experiences along the river. In addition to preventing stormwater runoff from reaching the river, planted buffers can also act as protected separation from cars and ensure the safety of cyclists using the parkway.
- **Prioritizing native species:** We were pleased to see that reconstruction on Memorial Drive will be consistent with the Charles River Vegetation Management Plan, a project on which the CRC is partnering with DCR. Removing non-native species along the parkway will improve biodiversity and reduce invasive species' ability to choke out natives that encourage healthy ecosystems on the banks of the river. Planting and encouraging native plants on the riverbank and in bioswales will help keep pollutants from stormwater runoff out of the river.

We encourage DCR to continue soliciting public input through Phase IV design as the agency works to extend the road diet along Memorial Drive to increase access, improve resilience, and restore park experiences along the parkway. We look forward to working with DCR on this important project. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on such an important improvement and asset along the Charles River.

Sincerely,



Laura Jasinski, Executive Director
Charles River Conservancy