

**Lowell S. Smith**  
**25 Academy Lane**  
**Concord, MA 01742-2431**

Luis D. Berrizbeitia, Chair  
Historic Districts Commission  
141 Keyes Road  
Concord, MA 01742

February 21, 2023

Re: Main Street / Walden Street Intersection Improvements

Dear Mr. Berrizbeitia,

I listened to the presentation of this application at the Commission's meeting on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and was pleased the Commission elected to follow its customary procedure by requesting a site visit.

I would like to comment on several aspects of this application: (i) safety, (ii) an alternate approach, (iii) trees/drainage, and (iv) snow removal.

**Safety:**

The purpose of this project as stated in the application is to improve pedestrian safety by introducing traffic calming strategies in an intersection in the center of town which has been fundamentally unchanged since I was a boy in the 1950's when a member of the Concord Police Department directed traffic from a box in the middle of the intersection. Even if there is a serious safety issue at this intersection (the applicant did not provide any statistical evidence that this intersection is any more dangerous than any number of other intersections in town), I fear we will just be trading one safety issue for another.

On Sunday morning, February 19<sup>th</sup>, I awoke at about 6:15am to see red flashing lights of several emergency vehicles parked on Main Street. There is a lighted crosswalk made of brick that crosses Main Street west of Academy Lane, and a "bump out" on the eastbound side of the street just before the crosswalk. When I got to the scene, I was told a white pickup truck driven by the husband of a young couple from Marlborough whose toddler was in a car seat had hit the "bump out," lost control, completely took out an 8" caliper tree planted in the bump out, crossed Academy Lane and came to a stop after mowing down about 30 feet of lilac hedge in front of 169 Main Street. Miraculously, no one was seriously hurt, but the truck and lilacs were badly damaged and there is nothing left of the tree which was sheared off at the ground level.

At 6:15am, there were no vehicles parked in the parking spaces on the eastbound side of Main Street to keep the driver centered in the travel lane, and the driver had drifted too far toward the edge of the roadway and hit the bump out.

I can see the same thing happening at the Walden/Main intersection at times of the day when vehicles are not parked on the eastbound side of Main Street in front of Græm. In fact, there is likely a higher probability of such incidents at the Walden/Main bump out for two reasons.

First, when there are no vehicles parked in the immediately adjacent parking spaces, that bump out will be an obstacle to vehicles making a tight right turn onto Walden Street. At night and in the pre-dawn hours, with no vehicles parked there, I think it is very likely that turning vehicles will hit the proposed bump out frequently.

Second, the eastbound travel lane does not go straight through that intersection. West of Walden Street, Main Street is two lanes; east of Walden Street, Main Street is three lanes. Vehicles must steer slightly to the right of the left-turn lane on the westbound side of the street. When it is dark and no vehicles are parked on the eastbound side of the intersection in front of Græm, and with the proposed bump out extending well into that intersection, drivers who begin to move over too early will also hit that bump out.

Ironically, in trying to address one issue (if there really is one) this project may in fact be creating other safety issues that occur more frequently than the safety issues it seeks to address.

### **Alternate Approach:**

If traffic calming measures are justified near the Walden/Main intersection, then wouldn't it be better to introduce those measures before drivers actually get to the dangerous intersection itself and not when they are right on top of it? There are relatively straightforward crosswalks at either end of the Milldam; at Keyes Road and at Vanderhoof Hardware. If the traffic calming measures were located at those crosswalks, vehicles would have already slowed down before they arrive at the Walden/Main intersection. From an engineering point of view, I think this approach would be far simpler, safer, and just as effective.

### **Trees / Drainage:**

I understand from a conversation I had recently with a Main Street merchant, that rainwater runoff is an issue on the Footstock side of the Walden/Main intersection. The street slopes significantly toward Footstock, as one of the Commissioners pointed out on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the impervious street surface conveys all the runoff to the curb. In heavy rains, this merchant told me he often must take a rake and remove leaves from the storm drains to keep the runoff from cresting above the curb and flooding his fellow shopkeepers on that side of the street. Planting two large deciduous trees in the proposed bump out will only compound that issue. Removing the trees from the applicant's proposal was this merchant's highest priority.

### **Snow Removal:**

Finally, the photos and renderings shown to the Commission on February 2<sup>nd</sup> showed the intersection in prime weather conditions. But this is New England, and we still have snow occasionally, so snow removal is another matter that needs to be factored in. We have experience with bump outs in other parts of town and after snowstorms, the town's plows do not adequately remove snow, leaving piles at the end of the bump outs which invariably lead to a reduction of available parking. I attach a photograph taken at noon on February 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Sudbury Road entrance to the Library. Concord hadn't had snow for 7-10 days at that point. Need I say more?

Many thanks for considering these comments. I urge the Commission to deny the application.

/s/ Lowell S. Smith



Pile of snow in bump out at Sudbury Road entrance to the Concord Free Public Library