

## **Methuen Rotary Project**

Noise Barrier Meetings Summaries: August 2 and 4, 2011, 6:30 p.m.–8:00 p.m.  
Forest Street Union Church, Methuen

### August 2 attendees

Brian Ackley, Tetra Tech	Scott Ridder, Tetra Tech
Rita Brown, Smith Avenue	Caroline Rossi, Smith Avenue
Darren Conboy, Jacobs	Andrew Schlenker, MassDOT Hwy. Division
Paula Hannagan, Smith Avenue	Raymond Stone, Cherry Hill Circle
James & Arlene Keleher, Smith Avenue	Matt Walker, Smith Avenue
E. Ryan McNeill, MassDOT Hwy. Division PM	Doris Williams, Cherry Hill Circle
Anne McKinnon, Jacobs	

### August 4 attendees

Brian Ackley, Tetra Tech	George & Shirley Martin, Riverside Dr.
Darren Conboy, Jacobs	E. Ryan McNeill, MassDOT Hwy. Division PM
Mary Daigle, Noyes Street	Anne McKinnon, Jacobs
Frank & Colleen DaSilva, Noyes Street	Scott Ridder, Tetra Tech
Peter & Cathy LaCroix, Noyes Street	Andrew Schlenker, MassDOT Hwy. Division
Robin LaTorre, Forest Street Union Church	Christine & Robbie Valcourt, Noyes Street

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Anne McKinnon, Jacobs Engineering, led introductions. This is the second meeting on noise barriers. The first meeting in May was to determine if front-row abutters wanted noise barrier, which are not mandatory. The second meeting will focus on the visual characteristics of noise barriers.

### **Project Update**

Ryan McNeill, MassDOT project manager, and Darren Conboy, Jacobs Engineering, gave a brief update on the project. These meetings are important because the 75% design plans will be complete in October and the landscape plans are part the submission. The 100% design plans will be done in October 2012.

### **Noise Barrier Aesthetics Landscaping, Color, and Texture**

Andrew Schlenker, MassDOT Highway Division landscape architect, described the MassDOT landscape approach and mission at noise barriers (resource protection, restoration, and mitigation). Goals include: protect existing vegetation, restore vegetation removed for construction, and create buffers from the barrier. Site-specific issues include abutter impacts, safety (plantings too close to the road could be hazards to motorists and pedestrians), aesthetics, and maintenance. MassDOT restores landscapes so they look similar to existing and avoids formal planting plans. Finally, the design must enable safe maintenance and snow removal.

Color and texture of noise barriers: Texture helps break up visual monotony. Color matters, in that brighter, contrasting colors make an object more dominant while subdued, harmonious colors tend to make an object less dominant. Most MassDOT noise barriers are neutral in color, the result of community input. Examples of noise barriers with vertical striations and Ashlar stone patterns were shown. A red brick-like color and a neutral, earth-tone color were shown.

Scott Ridder, Tetra Tech landscape architect, described the types of plantings proposed at the noise barriers. The noise barrier will be 15 feet away from the property line, where possible (space needed to build the barrier). No trees on private property will be removed, and as many trees as possible on State property will remain. Plants will be mostly native, hardy, and salt-tolerant. Examples of trees include fur, spruce,

pine, oak, ample, ash, hawthorn. Examples of shrubs and vines include evergreen and deciduous and silver fleece and trumpet vine. A mix is used in case one variety doesn't survive. MassDOT contractors provide a one-year guarantee and replace plants that die during that one-year period.

Proposed noise barrier landscape plan in NE quadrant"

1. **Cherry Hill Circle area:** a lot of the existing vegetation between I-93 and the noise barrier will remain. A combination of deciduous trees and evergreens are proposed on the neighborhood side of the noise barrier.
2. **Smith Avenue cul-de-sac:** Primarily deciduous trees and vines on the barrier are proposed.
3. **Northbound I-93 on-ramp:** much of the existing vegetation behind #12 to #26 Smith Avenue will remain, but where the new on-ramp will be built, a mixture of deciduous trees and evergreens are proposed next to the noise barrier.

Proposed noise barrier landscape plan in SE quadrant"

1. **Noyes Street area:** the noise barrier will be about 24 feet high and significantly higher than the houses on Noyes Street because I-93 is elevated. It will be built about 10 feet (the minimum distance) away from the road. Between the noise barrier and the property line, a good deal of the existing vegetation between I-93 and the noise barrier will remain. A combination of deciduous trees and evergreens are proposed to fill in where the existing vegetation will be disturbed and where the existing vegetation is not deep. A detention basin on State property near #7 and #5 Noyes Street will be screened and the rest of the area planted to the extent possible.
2. **Noyes/Lincoln streets:** In this area at the curve of Noyes Street, the noise barrier will be very close to the roadway. It will be stepping down from 24 feet gradually to 12 feet at the end just past Lincoln Street. Evergreen, shrubs, and vines are proposed.

**Discussion**

Most attendees preferred the neutral colored Ashlar stone pattern. The images in the presentation showed unpainted galvanized metal vertical supports, and most attendees requested that the metal supports be painted or powder-coated to blend into the wall instead of popping out.

Matt Walker, Smith Avenue, asked if there would be access through the noise barrier (a door). McNeill said no access is anticipated, but if by chance a door was desired, it would be locked and accessible by the fire department.

Rita Brown, Smith Avenue, requested flowering vines and shrubs for areas that will be visible and prominent.

There were several requests for MassDOT to remove the invasive bittersweet and knotweed. Schlenker said this project would not eradicate all invasives and bamboo. State regulations are very restrictive and limit use of pesticides.

Frank DaSilva, Noyes Street, requested more evergreen to give better coverage in winter.

Christine Valcourt, Noyes Street, asked if the debris and trash on the State right-of-way would be cleaned out along with poison ivy and weeds. Schlenker said he would prod District 4 to review the situation and do something relatively soon and not wait until the Rotary Project construction. The presence of the noise barrier should cut down dramatically on the amount of trash from the highway.

There were several requests to minimize the number of large trees removed. Schlenker said residents may request that MassDOT include in the construction documents to identify individual trees to avoid impacting. He suggested putting specific requests on the Comment Sheet (attached), noting the house number and any distinguishing characteristics.



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Several asked about the size of plantings. Schlenker said MassDOT typically plants trees less than 4” caliper because they are easier to grow and have a higher success rate.

Colleen DaSilva, Noyes Street, asked about using prickly shrubs to deter graffiti artists. Schlenker said his experience is that graffiti artists prefer to do their work in highly visible locations where it will be seen by many, not on neighborhood streets. MassDOT has seen the highway side of noise barriers “tagged” more often than in neighborhoods where there are also a lot more eyes on the street providing a deterrent.

Several asked when the noise barriers could be built. McNeill said the goal is to build as early in the Project as possible and MassDOT will encourage the contractor to do so. It is in the contractor’s interest to build the noise barriers early to minimize complaints during construction. However, MassDOT must give the contractor leeway or the construction price would be exorbitant.

Frank DaSilva asked what was being planned for landscaping at Allen and Griffin streets as a visual barrier. McNeill said the team is working on getting strong plantings for that neighborhood.

### **Next Steps**

McNeill encouraged residents to note their preferences and suggestions on the Comment Sheet or via e-mail. The presentation will be on the project website [www.mass.gov/mhd/methuenrotary](http://www.mass.gov/mhd/methuenrotary) and comments may also be made there. The input received at these two meetings and in the mail will be used by the Jacobs team in the 75% design plans.