#### Friends of the Malden River

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Malden • Medford • Everett

May 26, 2016

BY EMAIL: <a href="https://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/public-outreach/submit-publiccomments">www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/public-outreach/submit-publiccomments</a>

Leo Roy, Commissioner Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation c/o Office of Public Outreach 251 Causeway Street, Suite 600 Boston, MA 02114

RE: <u>Comments on DCR's Concept Designs for Potential Improvements to Torbert Macdonald State Park in Medford</u>

### Dear Commissioner Roy:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR's) proposal to upgrade and revitalize Torbert Macdonald State Park along the Mystic River in the city of Medford. The park is an important amenity in an area that suffers from few such amenities yet is home to significant environmental justice populations. DCR's plan—to bring the park into the 21st century—is to be commended.

By way of background, Friends of the Malden River (FoMR) is a grassroots group of community members — most of them residents of one of the three cities (Everett, Malden and Medford) that ring the visible Malden River — who are deeply concerned about the ecological and recreational health of the river. FoMR's mission is "to promote awareness of and interest in the Malden River, improve its water quality, and increase access for public enjoyment." Formed in 2012 through the joint efforts of local residents, the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA), and a graduate-student

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Practicum team affiliated with Tufts University's Water: Systems, Science & Society (WSSS) interdisciplinary program, FoMR is committed to restoring the Malden River to, and preserving it as, a priceless community haven and ecological resource. We are keenly interested in seeing that Macdonald Park remains an accessible resource that responds to the needs of its urban community — particularly so because the park sits near the mouth of the Malden River and directly relates to FoMR's continuing effort to ensure that the entire river is publicly accessible for community recreation and conservation.

To repeat, Friends of the Malden River applauds DCR's proposal to upgrade Macdonald Park—in particular its plan to remove non-native invasives like phragmites, Japanese knotweed and Oriental bittersweet. It is time to do this, and we believe that the DCR proposal, as outlined at the public meeting on May 11 at River's Edge, offers a variety of thoughtful improvements. In particular, we have been impressed by other work that your landscape architect, Lexington-based Shadley Associates, has completed (e.g., River's Edge).

We believe, however, that the proposal and the overall plan to make the park as accessible and attractive as possible would benefit from several additions that do not appear to be included in the specifications, at least as presented at the public meeting. Many of these are environmental measures or low-impact development (LID) features that have become virtually mandatory markers of sustainability. They are organized by general topic:

## A. Accessibility

- 1. Consider providing pedestrian access to and from Meadow Glen Mall via a new crosswalk (or even a pedestrian/bicyclist ramp/bridge system of the type found along Storrow Drive in Back Bay).
- 2. Facilitate extension of the river path so that it aligns with Presidents Landing or Earhart Landing roads at Station Landing across Route 28.
- 3. Reduce the number of paved pathways. Dirt pathways are better for water cleansing and soils, and they help visitors feel closer to nature. Contrary to what some may think, strollers and wheelchairs do move easily on well-made dirt paths that are free of rocks and roots.
- 4. Include educational signage, as well as plaques or other signage highlighting the area's rich natural and human history.
- 5. Make the park's shoreline accessible to kayakers and canoers.

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### B. Amenities

- 1. Include an adult parcourse installation for outdoor exercise. This has been a wonderful addition to the trails near the Flynn Rink in Middlesex Fells. Preferably, exercise stops should be placed at intervals throughout the park, instead of at a centralized location.
- 2. Spots should be designed and designated for family gatherings and picnics. In its 2015 Advisory Services Panel Report for Everett and Malden, the Urban Land Institute found a strong public desire for this type of park amenity (see <a href="http://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/MaldenEverett\_PanelReport\_web.pdf">http://uli.org/wp-content/uploads/ULI-Documents/MaldenEverett\_PanelReport\_web.pdf</a>. This will bring families together in an outdoor setting.
- 3. Include art installations, both permanent and temporary.
- 4. Consider constructing a performance stage or small arena to host cultural events.

# C. <u>Low-Impact Development (LID)</u>

- 1. To reduce fertilizer use and required mowing, replace existing turf in selected areas with low-maintenance native meadow plantings (similar to what is proposed for the pollinator meadow).
- 2. Remove the existing closed subsurface drainage system and rework drainage to include best management practices (BMPs), such as porous pavement, bioretention sites and vegetated swales. Alternatively, redirect the existing drainage system into rain gardens in the park's entrance area.
- 3. Overall, upgrade stormwater drainage to at least the level required by the just-issued federal MS4 stormwater regulations.

### D. Site Remediation/Maintenance

- 1. Clean up the brook that flows parallel to the Fellsway, running south from the Medford State Police Barracks (station A-4); this area is constantly filled with trash and other debris.
- 2. Take advantage of regular cleanups available through the correctional and judicial systems.

In closing, we appreciate the excellent work that DCR is doing to reimagine Torbert Macdonald State Park in a fashion that more broadly welcomes members of our community. We believe that, with the additional of measures relating to access,

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recreation and environmental stewardship, this project will truly become a jewel in DCR's verdant crown.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this important project. If you have any questions or require additional information please contact us at <a href="mailto:friendsofthemaldenriver@gmail.com">friendsofthemaldenriver@gmail.com</a>.

Sincerely,

Karen Buck

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#### Friends of the Malden River

cc: State Senator Patricia D. Jehlen, Second Middlesex District

State Representative Christine P. Barber, Thirty-Fourth Middlesex District

Mayor Stephanie M. Burke, City of Medford

Mayor Carlo DeMaria, City of Everett

Mayor Gary Christenson, City of Malden

Jon Norton, Chair, Conservation Commission, City of Everett

Roberto DiMarco, Chair, Conservation Commission, City of Malden

Alicia L. Hunt, Director of Energy and Environment/Environmental Agent, City of Medford

Amber Christoffersen, Greenways Director, Mystic River Watershed Association Mary Werowinski, Friends of the Mystic River