

**Allen's Lane Station Improvement Project
Chestnut Hill West R -8 Line**

LANDSCAPE PLAN

Charles Brenton, Steve Stroiman, and Doris Kessler met on May 29th to review and discuss station improvement plans (90 % Engineering Plans dated 3/30/2007) as prepared for SEPTA by Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers. Special focus was on the Planting Plan (Drawing L01).

Charles Brenton is a registered Landscape Architect. Steve Stroiman represents the station's near neighbors and has been responsible for organizing periodic clean ups and improvement to the station. Doris Kessler is a landscape designer and Chairperson of the West Mount Airy Neighbors Street Trees Committee.

The discussion centered on the following issues:

LANDSCAPE/PLANTING PLAN

1. Design

The following comments and suggestions were made during the review of the Landscape/Planting plan:

A. Landscape improvements seem unevenly distributed. With the exception of *Clethra* in the subsidence area none are proposed on the inbound slopes. Barring any technical barriers, could these areas be included? Also see C, below.

The grove of *Clethra* in the subsidence area seems isolated. Can it be expanded to take in more of the site?

B. The arrangement of shrubs, trees and beds of herbaceous plants seems fragmentary, especially on the outbound slope. Consolidation of shrubs and trees in reconfigured beds should be considered to give the landscape more unity and to simplify maintenance. The landscaping near the center city rail tunnel approaches along Market Street could serve as a precedent.

C. Visibility and transparency are issues related to security. The use of lower growing cultivars of the woody plant species selected should be considered to allow visual access to ramps and the platform areas. Provision should be made for the eventual limbing up of the *Amelanchier*, *Chionanthus* and *Cercis* proposed. Moving a number of plants proposed for the outbound slope to the inbound slope should be considered.

D. If restoration and improvement of the lawn and staging areas are not part of this project (as it would appear from the plans), the community proposes to develop a landscaping plan for these locations in cooperation with SEPTA. It is hoped that the

budget for the Improvement Project can also fund this initiative. The community group will agree to maintain these areas in cooperation with SEPTA.

E. An underground stormwater management facility is proposed beneath the open landscape area. See Plan (CO-3). The control structure/manhole for this facility is inside the open landscape area. Moving this structure to the south edge of the open area would result in less disruption to the open play area.

2. Maintenance/Sustainability

Limited SEPTA and community resources make it important that the proposed landscape be as sustainable as possible, requiring a minimum of maintenance and renewal to remain in an attractive condition. The near neighbors have and will continue to tend station grounds. It is hoped that their efforts in partnership with SEPTA maintenance operations will accomplish this goal.

The following were questions and comments related to this issue:

A. Slopes are extremely steep and conditions on the outbound slopes will be particularly hot and dry. Have plants been selected for their ability to stabilize the soil and prevent erosion. Will they thrive in this relatively stressful environment?

B. The palette of herbaceous plants included in the plant list seems limited. Can it be expanded with additional native plants to increase diversity?

C. Planting all slopes with a short grass meadow mix should be considered for soil stabilization as well as eventual reduction in maintenance. After the establishment period maintenance of this type of planting would consist of one to two cuttings a year. Shrubs could remain and turf would be eliminated. The committee is prepared to submit a sketch plan for this alternative. Seeding the staging area across Allen's Lane with a mixture of this type should also be considered.

D. What are SEPTA's plans for maintaining station grounds during the warranty period? What maintenance operations can the community rely on SEPTA to perform on a regular basis? How often will maintenance operations take place?

3. The Landscape Plan as a Model

SEPTA has just completed its periodic vegetation clearing activities along the Chestnut Hill West R – 8 line. As is often the case when this happens, many residents living adjacent to the tracks are unpleasantly surprised at the extent of tree and shrub removal and the use of herbicides. Many are undoubtedly not aware of Right-of-Way planting restrictions and maintenance requirements imposed by the need for safe, reliable and efficient operation of commuter rails.

The Landscape Plan for the Allen's Lane Station Improvement Project presents an opportunity to educate the public by demonstrating that attractive landscapes are possible and can coexist with commuter rails. It could become a model for those whose

landscaping efforts are constrained by proximity to the rail lines, and perhaps reduce confrontation and cost when line clearing activities do take place.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

1. What will be the daily schedule of construction activity? Will work go on 24 hours a day?
2. Will all trees in the staging area (with the exception of the memorial tree which is to be moved) be removed?
3. How will the existing trees that are to remain, particularly the pin oak directly in front of the station, be protected from construction damage?
4. What are the plans for restoring the staging areas both near the station and across Allen's Lane? The Landscape Plan does not address this issue.
5. What type of planting restrictions will affect the area above the proposed detention structure in the existing lawn?
6. Have colors and finish of the retaining wall units, staircase and ramp railings, and light standards been chosen?
7. Are there plans for site furnishings?