

BELMONT HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
MEMORANDUM 5/14/08

TO : Andy Healey and Beth Macaluso, McLean Hospital
FROM : Belmont Historic District Commission
RE : Wall Treatment at the junction of Olmsted Drive and Pleasant Street

You have graciously consulted with the Belmont Historic District Commission on several topics concerning the McLean campus development, including the design and construction of the walls along Pleasant Street. As a result, the newly constructed walls which run from the driveway entrance to Shaw Market to the McLean Gatehouse at the corner of Trapelo Road and Pleasant Street have been developed with great skill and sensitivity to the character of the historic dry-laid walls which originally surrounded the campus, as we had requested. Your masons respected the original feel of the open, dry laid joints and of the scale and placement of stones.

However, the mortared wall which follows up along Olmsted Drive is of an entirely different character in scale, construction and color. How to handle the junction of these two walls has been the subject of several meetings, without a clearly successful resolution.

This juncture represents an extraordinarily challenging design problem with numerous unknowns. It is not clear what utilities will be required here and of what size, shape and exact location - Poles?? Signaling?? etc. Nor are plans available for the various signs announcing the several entities accessed by Olmsted Drive. The signs, anticipated to 'decorate' this corner, are potentially variable and competing in size, character and placement. Moreover, the exceptionally steep terrain behind the walls offers an additional problem for replanting and long-term maintenance.

However, these unknowns and difficult site conditions simply exacerbate the main challenge about which we have been meeting- how to bring these two walls into some artful relationship, while accommodating the problems mentioned above. Having the two walls simply join together, as has been suggested, is unacceptable to the Commission since they 'speak two entirely different languages' and such a union will diminish the good work that has been done in the Pleasant Street walls to reflect the original historic fabric. From the beginning, our concern has been to keep as much of the original rural character as possible in the face of the ensuing major changes to McLean and to Pleasant Street.

At this point, while we have discussed several alternatives, it would seem to be wise to refer to the original planning done by your initial landscape architect (who, I believe, was Pressley Associates) as to how they conceived of the treatment of this area. Perhaps a meeting could be arranged and the original ideas referenced before any irrevocable, unaesthetic and unmanageable treatment is constructed. It seems it would also be wise to have some commitment from all the 'signage parties' involved to work toward a discreet, aesthetic and coordinated approach to their needs.

The Belmont Historic District Commission will continue to work with McLean and the other parties involved to develop the best solution to this challenge, one which enhances and respects this important legacy landscape.