



river valley co-op

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Dear Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito,

We are writing to request you intervene to end the MassDOT project's plans to build a roundabout at the Y intersection of North King Street/Rte. 5&10 and Hatfield Street in Northampton. We objected to this project years before because of the severe and long-lasting economic impact it would have on our business, which employs over 170 people and makes \$7 million in purchases directly from over 450 local food producers every year. Other local businesses impacted have long objected as well. With COVID, the severity of those economic impacts has only increased this economic threat. But today, our immediate concern is not seeking to mitigate this economic impact with requests for overnight construction; it is to save the historical site in the path of this construction project.

This project is absolutely unacceptable because moving forward will destroy an important ancient Plano (late Paleo/early Archaic period) cultural site eligible for the National Registry of Historic Places on two criteria. We are joining thousands of other community members, Native American Groups including the Aquinnah Wampanoag and the Narragansett, in calling on the state to preserve this site.

The MassDOT recently launched a public information website for outreach on this project. We object to allowing MassDOT to continue the MassDOT archeologist's pre-recorded presentation on this website, which tells a significantly different story than what was presented in the State's Archeological Report. The MassDOT archeologist took great liberties in its presentation, omitting facts and departing significantly from the state archeology report's conclusions, which called for preserving this rare site. He denied this was a habitation site with more hearths and artifacts likely to reveal more about life in this period of Plano culture we know little about. He portrayed the site as a single site, where someone stopped briefly to gather stones from the exposed roots of a treefall, made a few stone tools, and moved on. The MassDOT presentation serves to dismiss the site as unimportant.

We've read the actual report and hope you will as well. Actually, thousands of people have already read the state archeological report for themselves. A link to a copy of the report is here (shorturl.at/qCQRW) for your review, with some key sections highlighted. The state archeological report recommends NRHP registration and preservation for further future study of additional hearths and artifacts likely located on this very rare 8,000-10,000-year-old site.

The MassDOT appears to have intended to bulldoze this ancient historical site as soon as possible since its discovery, rather than being proactive in their response to the archeological report. They failed on multiple occasions to adequately consult with the federally recognized Tribes with cultural interests in this site before taking action as required by the federal law under the Historic Preservation Act. First, in 2018, they failed to secure an agreement on the memorandum of agreement with the archeological services firm from the federally recognized Tribes. Police intervened in November of 2019 to stop bulldozers hired by the state that were in the process of

destroying a stone wall and the remains of the historical site. This was months before providing the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) a copy of the state archeological report or the completion report for THPO review and consultation. Again, in 2020, site work was planned to start July 1st, even though MassDOT had still not submitted the draft archeological report or draft completion report to begin the required consultation and review process with the THPOs involved.

The Federal Historic Preservation Act requires consultation with federally recognized Tribes with cultural interests in the site before decisions are made about preservation or mitigation and proceeding with construction. Fortunately, the Attorney General stepped in at the end of June 2020 to stop MassDOT from further work on the site until the Federal Highway Administration could complete the required consultation process.

That consultation process is still ongoing, with federally recognized Native American Groups calling for the preservation and state authorities pushing to proceed with construction. This is a shameful position for our state to take. The series of actions by MassDOT, which violate federal law on this federally funded project, is equally disgraceful. We respectfully suggest you review the communications from the federally recognized Native American Groups involved with the required 106 consultation process to get up to date information on the Native American objections and the depth of those objections.

State statistics show an extremely low number of Native American sites listed on the National Registry of Historic Places compared to colonial-era sites. This suggests our state has a long history of opting to bulldoze Native American sites in the path of development. It is not acceptable to continue to follow this pattern of cultural erasure of our state's Native Americans.

We ask you to use your executive authority to intervene by ending this project and preserving this site. We hope this is the start of recognition by our state that Native American historical features are an opportunity for preservation and learning, not obstacles to overcome. As you may know or have hopefully been informed, over 55,000 people have signed a petition to stop this site's destruction. While we are a single business, we are cooperatively owned by over 11,700 community members, have over 450 local food producers that we purchase millions of dollars of products from annually, and we have 170 employees. This is one letter, but we assure you, many hope that your administration will not allow the destruction of this significant Native American historical site in Massachusetts, erasing the 10,000 years of history it holds forever.

Stopping this project will be a good thing for our community and state, and future generations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryan Cordeiro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

CC: Bryan Cordeiro, MassDOT