Joyce Hatch, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance

I am going to do an introduction and give you some background on the project, and then Jim Cahill will go through some of the details that have been approved and general theory about guidelines.

I want to thank you for this opportunity. We talked a little bit at the beginning of the semester, and I said I would be back with more information about what we call CLIP (the Campus Landscape Improvement Plan). A little over two years ago, some of us in Facilities Planning and in the Physical Plant had some discussions about what else we needed to do in conjunction with the Capital Plan, the construction plan that is underway. We have a master plan for the next buildings and different area plans that were completed in the mid-nineties, but we have not had a comprehensive landscape plan to look at how to unify the campus. We all know the buildings on campus are rather eclectic, and some are noteworthy, but we know we are not going to make major changes in the existing buildings. So, some of our discussions included: how can we include some elements that unify the campus? We came up with some guidelines of what we would look for, and we hired some consultants.

We were investing a lot of money in the Capital Plan, and with every project—new construction, steam lines—you dig up the dirt, and then you have to replace it with something. Why not have some guidelines so every time we spend that next dollar, we are implementing some consistent plan and efficiently using every dollar we spend in the landscaping?

The other convincing moment was when we were about to install one more split-rail fence. Upon asking some questions, we found that we did not have a policy on fencing. That is what led to a consultant helping us with some guidelines and helping us look at what we do on campus. How can we unify the campus? We came up with some principles, first in order to develop an RFP, and we have: a campus environment that is durable, maintainable—nothing too fancy that takes too much work to maintain; designs that enhance pedestrian-vehicle safety. In our discussion, not only were we looking to unify the campus, but we were also looking at how we can make it safer, knowing that we had the statistics and the data on accidents on different roads throughout the campus.

We are also looking at creative solutions for parking, and, as I said, a way to unify the campus. In response to our RFP, we had one response that had co-consultants. There are three firms working together: Carol Johnson Associates, landscapers; the SEA consultants, an engineering company looking at vehicle pedestrian ways and traffic flow; and Roll, Barresi Associates for wayfinding. We gave them a charge, and they all met together. The first thing they did was look at the master planning that had been done during the 90s. Some of it is still very valuable; some of it we have implemented. The next thing they did was hold over a dozen focus groups. There were different targeted groups, the Faculty Senate Campus Physical Planning Committee and other groups: faculty, staff—just getting some feedback on what the campus might be looking toward. Actually, one of the firms, SEA, did a lot of traffic studies. They came to the campus, looked, and counted traffic in different areas that we identified as problem areas.

That is the background. Jim is going to explain some of the recommendations, some of which we have started to implement, and some that are just out there as guidelines and plans for the future.

Jim Cahill, Director of Facilities and Campus Planning

I have about 25 slides or so. I am going to try to go through them fairly quickly, so that there is time for questions. I am not going to go into a great level of detail.
The first thing I want to say is the Campus Landscape Improvement Plan is not a master plan. That has been confused, I think, by some—that the intent was to provide a landscape master plan. That is not what it is. The primary goal of the Campus Landscape Improvement Plan was to develop a set of guidelines and standards that would help us provide uniformity across the campus landscape by interconnecting buildings, open space, and circulation systems in a coherent and aesthetically-pleasing manner while improving safety, reducing or minimizing overall maintenance costs, and enhancing the overall experience of the campus users.

These guidelines and standards are aimed at providing strategies for the design process. We are not talking about designing but to provide the strategies to help us. They need to be flexible. We recognize that because every project is unique. For each project that we engage in, we want to provide the ability for designers to be creative. The guidelines are set up in that way. Standards really help provide the uniformity across the campus by using standard materials, standard site furniture, for example. It also provides aesthetic quality. You are not seeing something different every time you walk from one area of the campus to the other. Durability: materials that can be maintained and will last for a long time. One of the important elements, also, of the Campus Landscape Improvement Plan, or the CLIP, is to provide a document that we can continually review as we go through and we apply these principles, standards, and guidelines, and we can determine how to measure the success of what we are doing. And, we can improve upon or change them if needed.

The way to think about this, in terms of the elements of the plan—I’m going to break it down into some of its elements—starting with open space. These are campus photographs we have up here (referring to slides), using open space to emphasize a green, healthy, well-maintained landscape. We also use open space in a way to emphasize the historical sense of the campus—showing the Chapel across the campus pond. The campus pond is probably the premiere open space on the campus.

Another thing that we focus on when we talk about open space is: how do you connect the open spaces to the buildings that surround the open space? Everybody knows what a quadrangle is. It is a standard campus planning methodology, and it can be quite effective, as long as the open space is not too large. Sometimes you have very formal open spaces like Haigis Mall. Not too many people use Haigis Mall, but it is still an important campus open space as it leads up to some of our larger works of architecture, and it is an entry point of the campus. Two smaller spaces, like quadrangles, and areas with buildings surrounding them, are where the students and campus community can use though spaces. They can sit; they can read; they can communicate with one another. Another element is to minimize the hardscape, so there is a good balance between your hardscape and your softscape.

One of the things that we think is a problem on campus is that, over time, if plantings are allowed to grow without any attention to pruning them, they can overgrow, and they can block the short and long views on the campus. Providing clear views to destination points is an important element of the unified campus plan. People want to be able to see entrances to buildings. That is where you are going, and you should be able to see those entrances to buildings from a distance away, not just when you get up to the front steps.

Providing consistent pavement throughout the campus is a unifying element. Using benches, steps, low walls, and other types of landscape features that can be used by pedestrians and users of the campus, and then encouraging bicycles on campus, paying some attention to how you would separate regular pedestrian traffic from bicycle traffic, so that they do not collide.

Shrubs and lawns. Pay attention to those elements. Planting material should contribute to the University’s teaching mission, but it should also be maintainable. This is not a rigid standard that we are talking about here, but focusing primarily on native plants, and this is somewhat controversial, is a good thing in terms of minimizing maintenance costs, but it is still okay to use other types of plantings that are not native material, but do it in special places, in special ways.

Eliminating plants. I spoke a little about obscuring views. Eliminating plants or trimming plants that obscure the views that you want enhanced on the campus and focusing the smaller plantings, like flowers and scrubs, in strategic areas on the campus for maximum effect.
Tree plantings. There are some principles here. Using, again, the trees to support the teaching mission of the University. We do have a School of Landscape Architecture. That is an important element on this campus. Using trees to delineate open spaces, not just along pathways, but actually to use the trees and the canopies over the trees to enclose spaces. It enriches and enhances the open space. You have to space your trees at a certain distance, so you have room for the root growth. The other thing that we have not done a great job of in the past on the campus is to manage the demise of older trees that are diseased or have some sort of problem. Sometimes you have to remove a tree because it is diseased and it will not live forever.

Outdoor furniture and site elements. Using site furniture to promote campus life, student life, and safety. You have all probably seen some of the attempts in the past where campus landscape elements have been used to block traffic, and we are trying to get away from that and use them only in areas that promote their use. Locating benches in groups that promote and support interaction.

Lighting is an extremely important element in terms of pedestrian paths, locating the lights at the appropriate distance apart, at the appropriate height so they are at human scale.

Sidewalk standards. I have talked a little about the lights. One of the things that you will see repeated as we go through the rest of the slides: light poles, right now, are some other color than black. We are talking about black poles; they tend to disappear in the landscape, and having them at regular intervals. Down lighting, so we are not lighting the sky, but we are lighting the walkways underneath the lamps.

We have a recommendation to use concrete for primary sidewalks as opposed to bituminous concrete or asphalt. We are accepting that recommendation because concrete has a longer life; it is easier to maintain; it has a cleaner appearance and stands up to abuse better. We will maintain service routes and roadways in bituminous concrete or asphalt.

Here again, you see the black theme. Site furniture, benches, trash barrels, recyclable barrels, planters, and bicycle racks, all black. That is a theme onto itself, and we have selected a standard so that we have only one type of trash receptacle, recycling receptacle, and benches. There is some flexibility on where you chain up your bikes. This is one example of it; there are some others, but they are all black.

Fences. We have ushered out the split-rail fence, and we are talking now about fencing and gates and so forth that are black. There is some range. We have a standard. This is basically it, but we do have some variations depending on what that fence or barrier is doing—if it is there to obscure the sight of garbage pails, trash receptacles—the big ones, near building service areas—that is one approach. Then, if they are enclosing or preventing access to certain areas, that may be another approach. But, they are all similar in style, and they are all black. Again, for uniformity.

The transportation improvements. This is something that we need to focus on on an ongoing basis. But, improving vehicular circulation to allow better accessibility for campus visitors and other users. Greater mobility on the campus is important. Vehicles are a problem on a campus where it is primarily pedestrian-based. We want to attempt to keep the vehicular congestion low, manage the flow of pedestrians and vehicles in a safe manner. Reduce conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, utilizing traffic calming measures to slow cars down in specific areas is an important element of the plan, and encouraging the use of the ring-road system in penetrating the campus from the ring-road with service routes.

Pedestrian safety, improvements on roadways. Everybody who has been here for a while knows that we have had unfortunate accidents in the past. In some cases we have had some deaths. Pedestrians were killed by automobiles. We can never let up our attention on this. But, in some cases, and North Pleasant Street is a good example, there are too many crosswalks. There is something like 17 crosswalks, and people use all of them and everything inbetween. To the extent to which we can reduce some of the crosswalks and try to use landscape elements to promote the use of certain paths that lead to crosswalks, clearly identified, that would be a huge accomplishment on the campus. That includes the redundant crosswalks and increasing the width of them, raising them up. You have all seen some of the examples of traffic calming that were employed at Amherst College, and those are the kinds of things that we are looking at doing here as well.
Another thing is we have a spin-off of the CLIP to develop the vehicular or the service vehicle routes on the campus. There is a policy that has been developed, and there is a plan to enforce that policy to keep the service vehicles where we want them. Everybody has seen the results of not seeing the service vehicles where we want them. Damage to the landscape. It is a perpetual maintenance problem when service vehicles drive on the walkways, a little bit off the walkways, in-between the walkways. Like I said, we developed a policy and put some teeth to it in terms of enforcement, and that will be issued. It is imminent.

Wayfinding is another important element of unifying the campus through signage. Wayfinding is essentially signage. We have different examples of signage on the campus. Over the years, different things have crept into the landscape. This plan has some recommendations and some ideas about standardizing that. It is important not only for the campus users to determine where you are, where you are going, but, also for visitors to the campus, it is crucial to have a good, coherent signage system.

There is a hierarchy in terms of these signs, and I will run through them quickly. Major gateways. The recommendation is to use granite-type block for the major gateways into the campus. It is big. It has nothing but “The University of Massachusetts Amherst” on it. That is all you need to know when you are coming on the campus: you have arrived. Campus identification. These are smaller signs that are on different locations on the campus, and there is a plan for where these signs actually go. Directional signage. What you can see is a standard way of presenting these signs. It is all material that is readably available, that you can stockpile, and actually the wayfinding system is something that can be generated on the campus, can be maintained on the campus. We can actually produce these signs at the Physical Plant, so that we can keep them maintained. You can see the hierarchy. Each sign has its own place in the hierarchy, all the way from the gateway to the street signs.

Building identification, and even the standards for how you would put a name on the building. I actually got a phone call about the Computer Science Center because people were afraid that we were naming the building, and this is just an illustration. It is an illustration of the type of lettering we would use and perhaps a location over a major entryway to the building.

Parking lot identification. Again, these are all standard. Standard widths, heights, and standard materials to provide a little bit of color and uniformity when you are approaching parking lots, looking for parking lots.

Temporary and directional construction signage. You have all seen some of what we have had out there. This is, again, in keeping with the standard. These materials are a little different. They are temporary; they are not expensive, and they go up and they come down.

We have also included, and this is sort of an addendum to the CLIP, campus banners. There are some principles behind these, and that is that they are really temporary. They go up, and they come down. Banners do not last forever. It is hard to find the material to use as a banner, that the color will not wash out in the sunlight. These are the kind of things that require continual maintenance. It is also something you can use for special events, for special information purposes, and they can add color and interest to the campus.

This just illustrates some of the areas where you could enhance the image and identity of a particular place on the campus, like the Fine Arts Center. These things could be changed overtime, so you have some variety as well.

The application of these principles, guidelines and standards is intended to eventually achieve a comprehensive and consistent image on the campus. This was an exercise in looking at the campus and identifying some areas, significant public areas that the campus should focus on in the future as time goes by. It is also related to all the concepts that I have talked about up until now. Another way of achieving some of these goals and enhancing individualities is through the Capital Project, so that each Capital Project owns a piece of the landscape, a little bit larger than the property line that the building is built within.

This is just an example. One of the primary areas on the campus is the North Pleasant Street corridor that runs through the campus. If you go back—many, many years back—there was a plan to actually relocate North Pleasant Street (that unfortunately did not happen.) That certainly would
have unified both the East and West portions of the campus. That is probably never going to happen now, but that corridor could be improved. Some of the things that we are looking at there is we still have overhead electric lines on North Pleasant Street. It is a town of Amherst road. We do not own it. We cannot make unilateral decisions on what we do but can cooperate with the town of Amherst to bury some of the electrical lines, to clear up some of the visual clutter along North Pleasant Street. Upgrading curbs to granite. That is a simple sort of a thing. Creating a tree belt along the street to add some interest. That, in and of itself, can help slow down traffic. Improving drainage. Improving, as I indicated before, pedestrian traffic calming measures in the crosswalks along the road. We see that, and you have major views along North Pleasant Street as you traverse the campus. That makes that an important experience, traveling through the campus.

Just another concept, and there are many of these, but time does not allow putting them all out in front of you. The alumni walk was a suggestion that we actually thought was a pretty good idea. Whether it will be exactly where the dash line shows it here is still a question, and that will be left to a more in-depth design process. But, introducing visitors to the campus and reminding alumni of the experience that they have had, developing the circulation route, showing off key buildings, buildings that speak to history, focusing on some of the longer views on the campus that people recollect from years gone by, and making it accessible so that everybody can travel the route are all key elements to this particular part of the plan.

So implementing it—it obviously has to be a phased approach. It would be cost-prohibitive to go after a comprehensive plan across the campus, improve all the circulation systems, all the open spaces and other elements of the landscape all at once. We have to phase it to make it manageable and affordable. You can do a lot of things overtime with funding and, again, trying to use Capital Projects to further the plan is a good idea.

Right now we do have some projects that have been funded. We intend to implement Phase I of the wayfinding plan to develop the campus signage. That is underway right now in terms of design. The Stockbridge Road corridor: we have the Art Building, the Skinner renovation, the Integrated Science Building under construction, and we have closed Stockbridge Road. We have, actually, an RFP out on the street right now; that comes in, I believe, next week. We get proposals in to hire a designer to actually design a connection between the Art Building and the Integrated Science Building which is along the path of the former Stockbridge Road. That is an exciting project. We are really looking forward to that.

Mass Ave.-Commonwealth Ave. intersection. Anybody who has come onto campus during rush hour or when there is a lot of traffic knows there are problems with that intersection. We do have a solution, and we are entering into a design process to improve that intersection for the purpose of moving traffic faster through there.

You have perhaps seen the crossing guards out on the Sunset Ave. pedestrian crossing by Southwest, coming across Mass. Ave. We have probably struggled with this for years, looking at physical solutions to this problem. Not all of the students use the tunnel underneath the road, and I do not think there is anything short of putting Starbucks at the north end of the tunnel that will get people to go through it every day, all the time. But, what does work is crossing guards, because students are actually paying attention to those crossing guards, and during the intensive use of the crosswalk, that is what we are doing now, and it seems to be working. There may be some other physical improvements we can make, but that is the solution to the conflict and the congestion between vehicles and pedestrians.