

Town of Belmont
Community Path Advisory Committee

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Wednesday, April 9th, 2014

Homer Building, 3rd Floor Art Gallery Room

MEETING MINUTES

The Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC) meeting was called to order at approximately 7:05p by Chairman Jeffrey Roth. Tomi Olson captured the minutes for this meeting.

CPAC members present at the meeting included Jeffrey Roth, John Dieckmann, Joe Noone, Kevin Sullivan, Cosmo Caterino, Brian Burke, Tomi Olson, Charlie Conroy, and Vincent Stanton. Jeffrey Wheeler from Community Development was present. Community members in attendance included Rick Macchi (Becket Road), Holly Muson (Temple Street), Phil Lawrence (Aggasiz Avenue), and Hank Thidemann (Warwick Road).

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

Minutes were reviewed from the last meeting as captured by Amy DeDeo. Minor typographical edits were suggested to the minutes. All voted unanimously in favor of accepting these minutes as amended.

News and Correspondence Received

Jeff Roth reported new signs installed by the Friends of the Alewife Reservation along the new path from Brighton Street to Alewife Station. Jeff also reported that the Metropolitan Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) is coordinating pedestrian and bicycle counts on all trails and pathways throughout the Boston area. These counts will take place May 5, 6, 7, and 8. Counts will occur at two locations in Belmont: at the Brighton Street trailhead of the path to Alewife and at the Trapelo Road corridor in Waverley Square at White Street (near Wheelworks). Those who wish to volunteer for this should contact Jeff.

Tomi Olson reported to CPAC on the Safe-Routes to School (SRTS) walkability assessment that occurred at the Burbank Elementary School on April 8th. Tomi reported that the assessment looked at how many people were walking and what safety factors were observed that might discourage families from walking to school.

Vince Stanton mentioned that a pedestrian was struck by a motor vehicle recently on Common Street near the Belmont War Memorial. This is the same area that Vince reported as being unsafe for pedestrians to cross due to the poor sight lines caused by the curvature of the roadway. Vince had reported that crosswalk safety improvements likely could not be installed in that vicinity due to the limited sight lines.

Route Assessments and Discussions

Concord Ave:

Jeff Roth discussed an overview of potential safety improvements for Concord Ave. He mentioned that most people in Belmont live south of Concord Ave. and that many Town facilities exist along in eastern Belmont along Concord Ave. In addition, Concord Ave. is one of the major thoroughfares in Belmont, and just like Trapelo Road being upgraded to better accommodate walking and biking, Jeff mentioned that it would also make sense to consider something like that for Concord Ave. The CPAC has discussed ways to put a full-blown Path along Concord Ave. However, many of those concepts may not be feasible, and Jeff mentioned that even if they were they may not get us what we want in a Community Path. Jeff mentioned that Concord Ave. will always have a lot of traffic, intersections, and noise, and therefore would lack the positive features of an off-road route. Jeff also mentioned that cycle-tracks or adjacent pathway concepts do not generally work well in places with lots of on-street parking, driveways, and intersections.

Nevertheless, there are some immediate, low-cost options that could enhance Concord Ave. and make it safer for a wider range of people. The rationale for Concord Ave. improvements would be somewhat different than the rationale for an off-road path. Concord Ave. will connect the most number of Belmont residents to a future off-road path (wherever is it located), and it will connect to the Concord Ave. cycle tracks in Cambridge. Jeff mentioned that no matter where an off-road Path is built, improving safety along Concord Ave. is important. Jeff summarized some potential near-term and low-cost safety improvements that could be done to improve the safety along Concord Ave. and make it better suited to a wider range of people. These safety improvements included: (1) using two-foot wide solid marked buffer zones between the bicycle lanes and the parking lanes; (2) plastic bollards to prevent people from driving in the bicycle lanes; and (3) clearly marking the bicycle lanes using "green lanes" through intersection crossings to protect users at the intersections. These changes specifically address the bicycle lanes, and so would predominantly improve safety for cyclists, but would also reduce aggressive driving which could also improve safety for pedestrians. These changes would address three primary safety problems of: (a) motorists stopping or parking in bicycle lanes; (b) motorists driving in bicycle lanes; and (c) "right-hook" maneuvers at intersections.

Route Evaluations and Off-Road Segments:

Vince mentioned that the MBTA will be making infrastructure improvements near Alexander Avenue, and these signal and track installations will affect the land to the south of the railroad tracks.

Quantitative route assessments using the CPAC's evaluation criteria were performed on all of the three current potential routes in eastern Belmont. The two off-road routes to the north and side of the Fitchburg line scored highest. The Concord Ave. route generally scored lowest on nearly all evaluation criteria. Discussion ensued regarding the perspectives that Committee members brought to the evaluations. Cosmo recommended that engineering studies need to be done to evaluate the routes. Jeff R. agreed with this suggestion.

The route rankings revealed consistency in desire for off-road paths, and the two routes to the North and South side of the tracks are consistent with this off-road criteria.

Charlie did not believe that recommending Concord Ave. for engineering feasibility study as a primary Community Path would be good investment of public funds. The Committee voted to recommend engineering feasibility studies be conducted on Community Path routes to the North and South sides of the Railroad tracks, but not on Concord Ave. This was motioned by Kevin, and seconded by Brian. This motion was approved 7-2.

The Committee voted that the Northern route is preferable to the Southern route provided that the following measures are included: sunken trail with possible berm, night-time usage limitations, sound wall, landscaping, drainage, and privacy screenings. In addition, the measures would include addressing possible parking problems created by a Path if needed. This was approved 5-4 by the Committee.

The Committee voted on the alternative motion, viz. South preferable to the North. This was voted against by a vote of 4 to 5.

Cosmo motioned that the engineering firm's feasibility study not be restricted by Committee's recommendation of preferred routes if their research determines that other route options might be feasible. Joe seconded. Approved 8-1 in favor.

Jeff recommended that the above safety improvements to Concord Ave. be considered. This motion was seconded by Kevin, and approved by the Committee with a vote of 5-3.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59p. Thank you to all those in attendance.