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Town of Belmont

Community Path Advisory Committee

Wednesday, March 26, 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. Amy DeDeo captured the minutes for this meeting.

CPAC members present at the meeting included Jeffrey Roth, John Dieckmann, Joe Noone, Brian Burke, Amy DeDeo, Price Armstrong, Tomi Olson, Charlie Conroy, and Vincent Stanton. Jeffrey Wheeler from Community Development was present. Community members in attendance included Bruce MacKinnon (Channing Road), Rick Macchi (Becket Road), Mike Cicalese (Channing Road), Phil Lawrence (Aggasiz Avenue), Ann Tierney (Channing Road), Paul Conazzi (Channing Road), and Hank Thidemann (Warwick Road).

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

Minutes were reviewed from the last meeting, as captured by John Dieckmann. Brian Burke motioned to accept the minutes as amended, and Joe Noone seconded. All voted in favor of accepting the minutes as amended.

Notes and Correspondence Received

The CPAC briefly reviewed recent letters received from the community. A letter from Russell Leino in support of the off-road trail options was received and distributed. Also a letter from Cindy Taylor was received that referenced a petition opposing a trail on the former Mass Central Railroad right-of-way. Cindy Taylor organized a door-to-door canvass to solicit signatures of Channing Road residents. As part of this canvass, Charlie Conroy's house was visited. Charlie reported that the petition's solicitors did not present any of the accommodations or measures that the CPAC has presented to address many of the issues and concerns raised, and therefore he felt that it did not seem presented objectively. Price Armstrong requested a copy of the petition, and Bruce MacKinnon said he would email it to Jeff Roth.

Upcoming Events

John Dieckmann spoke about an upcoming event for the Mass Central Rail-Trail. It is Saturday, April 12th and is open to anyone. It is a \$22 to attend the luncheon. All segments will provide updates on the progress of their segments. Then the group will do a walk through-of the proposed 900-foot tunnel in Clinton. John took the action to send the invite to the committee.

Events since last Meeting

A presentation was made to the Belmont Housing Authority (BHA) Board on March 24th by Jeff Roth and Vincent Stanton about the Committee's route concepts. The BHA is supportive of a Path adjacent to their property. They are also supportive of using some of the BHA land to route a Path, provided that

the parking capacity is maintained. Preliminary conceptual drawings were shown to the BHA Board for how a Path might be routed through Belmont Village, while maintaining the parking capacity. There were also productive discussions about utilizing BHA property connect between Pearson Road and Clark Lane, in order to access the Royal Road area.

Tomi Olson presented to the Safe-Routes to School (SRTS) Initiative. She captured detailed notes. In summary, the SRTS Initiative seemed glad to hear we were thinking about how we could enhance safe routes to school. Tomi announced that on April 8th, a walkability assessment will be held beginning at Burbank at 8am.

Jeff Roth and Brian Burke presented to the Board of Selectman meeting last week on March 17th. They provided a summary of our 2013 activities, where we are today, and how we will continue. The Selectman suggested this committee might be extended or transitioned into a permanent committee in the next phase. The reason for this position of continuing the committee in some form is to ensure that progress continues without interruption. As part of the presentation, CPAC requested the Town officially reach out to the MBTA to formalize the request to the MBTA for feedback on the potential routes provided. The Selectman wrote a letter to the MBTA per this request. A copy was distributed at the CPAC meeting. The Selectman also all expressed favor toward a safer crossing of the Fitchburg Line near Alexander Ave.

A side discussion occurred related to the route information provided to the MBTA. The presentation was reviewed by the Committee and approved at a previous meeting. It represented the routes as they were defined at that time. Tomi Olson pointed out that the letter from the Selectman addressed them generally, so there could be a window of opportunity to revise our proposal to the MBTA as it becomes more refined. It was decided that the current set of routes would be updated after the MBTA provides feedback, since the MBTA already had those routes in hand.

Summary of Comments and Responses oral and written comments made at the Potential Abutter's public forum on Jan. 22

The lists of questions contains some discrepancies in names and addresses. It was suggested that this be reconciled against the sign-in sheets at the meeting to correct names/addresses.

In response to Austin Bennett's comment, "The Selectman will not green light the project until all portions of the project presented to the public are fully funded."

In response to the comment by Ed Mallowney of 4 Clark Lane, the response would be edited to include: "Since the Public Forum that segment has been modified with the cooperation of the Belmont House Authority to minimize the impact to Clark Lane".

Related to Duane Bronson's comments, Tomi Olson asked how paths generally gets plowed in winter. There is no obligation to clear the path of snow, however many towns do so. Some are paid for from town funds, some are privately funded, others are plowed by DCR. For example, New Balance clears the Charles River path in Boston, and DCR plow the new trail from Alewife to Brighton Street in Belmont.

Bruce Mckinnon requested that his comment be revised to reflect his intent. It will now read that "He is against a path adjacent to a rail line".

Price Armstrong motioned to accept the oral comments as amended. Vincent seconds. All in favor unanimously.

Price Armstrong motioned to accept the written comments as amended. Charlie seconds. All in favor unanimously.

Tomi Olson also reviewed all the written comments and used a "semantic evaluation" to summarize common themes. Overall, the community supports a path and in particular an off-road path. The main concerns were privacy, crime and safety. Safety concerns were raised about trails on or adjacent to busy streets and trails in close proximity to the rail.

New Proposed Route – Belmont Greenway

Brian Burke presented a new route to the Committee. He had been listening to the concerns about a route on or adjacent to the busy Concord Avenue roadway as well as the concerns from Channing Road neighbors. He did extensive research reviewing every deed the length of the proposal to understand the available and restricted parcels. The segment begins at Clark Street Bridge and travels all the way to the Cambridge path staying entirely off-road on Belmont-owned or MBTA-owned land. The proposal includes a relocation of the Belmont Center train platform slightly east. It continues along School property but does not technically utilize it. He proposes the Path dip toward the end and go under the tracks, stays below grade to Brighton and under Brighton Street. The Path returns gradually to grade onto the Path to Alewife. The proposal does not depict spurs or a crossing at Alexander Ave. Many committee members spoke strongly of the value for all routes or if there were no modifications at all of adding a crossing at Alexander Ave. Hank Thidemann inquired whether there were concerns about flooding with a below-grade tunnel at Brighton Street. The tunnel would have to have backup pumps. Concerns were raised about the impact to the Belmont Station train platform in terms of further ADA requirements that will be imposed. The Committee recognizes that this proposal will need to be forwarded to the MBTA, but before revising the segment proposals, more details must be vetted. There are obvious impacts to the School Committee, but before speaking to them we need to further research the deeds and think through routing around/through School property. Brian Burke provided a summary of pros/cons for the new segment which were distributed to the committee.

Vote on preferred paths to recommend to the Selectman

Jeff Roth recommends we vote on an east segment including the new proposal and whether to proceed with a crossing Alexander Ave separately. The committee agreed they should be evaluated separately. The committee was not comfortable voting on an east path until the new proposal can be digested further by the Committee members. Vincent Stanton reminded the group that we followed a process as a Committee and we should not diverge from this. The Committee agreed to re-evaluate the routes based on the new information presented in the meeting, and continue evaluation of this route at the next CPAC public meeting.

To better understand the feasibility of the proposed paths, Joe Noone proposed that we request the Selectman, School Committee, and CPAC organize a meeting to discuss route options in relationship to the School property. Joe Noone took the action to make this request to the Selectmen.

Amy DeDeo motioned a vote to recommend to the Board of Selectman a crossing from Alexander Ave. to the High School as a stand-alone path segment to provide safe travel for pedestrians and bicyclists, and to access Town resources. Charlie Conroy seconded the motion. Eight voted for the underpass and

one voted against the underpass. Joe Noone was the vote against, stating that this segment does not fall under the charter of the Committee.

CPAC Final Report

There was not time to cover the Final Report at the meeting, and therefore will be pushed to the next meeting on April 9th. Members should review the suggested changes prior to the next meeting.

Summary of Actions

Joe Noone will request a joint meeting with the School Committee, Selectmen, and CPAC.

Brian Burke will research land court records for the new route that was discussed.

John Dieckmann will forward to the interested parties the invite to the Mass Central Rail-Trail Luncheon on April 12th in Clinton, MA.

Jeff Roth will distribute the route-evaluation rubric and the definitions for the three potential East Belmont routes. Feedback is required by Saturday April 5th.

All CPAC members need to come with comments on the report to the next meeting.

Joe Noone motioned to adjourn the meeting and Brian Burke seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:05p.