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Transportation Advisory Committee

December 5, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Committee Members Present: Dana Miller (Chair), Larry MacDonald (Vice Chair), Annis Sengupta (Clerk) (7:02 pm), Jessica Bennett (7:28 pm), David Coleman, Clifford Gaysunas, Charles Hamad, Jeremy Romanul (7:13 pm), Jeffrey Roth (7:02 pm)

Ex Officio Committee Members Present: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Director of Community Development and Town Engineer); Jay Marcotte (Director, Department of Public Works); James MacIsaac (then Assistant Police Chief (now Chief)); Sgt. Ben Mailhot (Belmont Police Department);

7:00 pm Approval of Minutes (November 21, 2019)

Minutes approved pending minor corrections recorded by TAC Chair with six in favor and one abstention by Annis Sengupta who was absent from the meeting on November 21, 2019.

7:03 pm Traffic Calming Preliminary Evaluations

Town Engineer Glenn Clancy reported the results of the preliminary traffic calming evaluations completed to the TAC. His presentation began with an explanation of how Village Hill and Rutledge Roads are being handled in relation to proposed Traffic Calming Policy. Although the policy is not yet in place, town staff are working to use the draft policy to guide the evaluation and interpretation of results.

Based on the draft Traffic Calming Policy, the roads would need to meet at least one of three criteria to qualify for a recommendation to conduct a full Traffic Calming Needs Assessment: 1) Peak hour traffic exceeding 10% of average daily traffic; 85th percentile speed exceeding 30 mph; or three crashes in the last three years (or any fatality involving pedestrians).

Both Rutledge Road and Village Hill Road qualify for a full Traffic Calming Needs Assessment based on the first criteria only.

- On Rutledge Road, 10% of average daily traffic was exceeded in the peak afternoon hour; the 85th percentile speed was 28 mph; and there has been one vehicle-to-vehicle crash in the last three years.
- On Village Hill Road, 10% of average daily traffic was exceeded in the peak hour of traffic; the 85th percentile speed was 28 mph; and zero crashes were recorded in the last three years.

Members of the public noted that there have been two collisions involving a cyclist and a car on Park Avenue entering Village Hill Road. These are not counted because they happened on Park Avenue.

Based on the findings from the preliminary evaluation, the TAC requested a full needs assessment for Rutledge Road and Village Hill Road.

TAC members discussed whether consideration should be given to establishing, as part of the TCP criteria, a minimum traffic volume on a roadway - if a road only has ten cars a day, two cars in a peak hour would be sufficient to meet the cut-through traffic criteria. Glenn Clancy noted that both roads under consideration experience large enough daily traffic volumes that it is not an issue for the current evaluation. Further discussion was tabled until the TAC's discussion of the Traffic Calming Policy Draft.

TAC members also discussed whether the collisions mentioned by members of the public were reported to the police, and whether they should be part of the TAC's consideration. Two of the collisions were recorded by the police for Park Avenue; an additional collision at the traffic circle was not reported. The TAC agreed that it needed to base its decisions on officially recorded information; that unreported collisions had not, historically, been a significant problem in Belmont; and that cut-through traffic can be reliably documented and seems to be a pervasive problem in Belmont.

The TAC unanimously passed a motion requesting a full traffic calming needs assessment for both Village Hill Road and Rutledge Road from the Town Engineer.

Glenn Clancy noted that the public can find more details on the steps of how the process goes from resident petition to the Select Board acting on Committee recommendations in the draft Traffic Calming Policy available online under the Transportation Advisory Committee page on the Town website. Data from the speed study is available online at NextRequest Belmont.

The presentation of the full Traffic Calming Needs Assessment would be presented at a TAC meeting in January or February, 2020.

The discussion closed with Glenn Clancy providing an overview of his recommendation to maintain the 85th percentile for speed as the standard for the TCP. Then Assistant Police Chief (now Chief), James MacIssac, agreed with using the 85th percentile measure for speed. Glenn reminded the TAC that the draft TCP states that speeding is not recognized unless the 85th percentile speed is higher than 30 mph. While the Town went to a 25 mph statutory speed limit in the past two years, the police department will not enforce vehicle speeding between 25 and 30 mph. Glenn also pointed out that research shows that driver behavior can take some time to adjust to new traffic laws, including speed limits, and that we should expect higher levels of compliance with posted speed limits over time. In addition, Glenn raised the question of resources and budgeting and considering the best way to spend the Town's dollars. As Belmont decides how to spend its limited funds to improve safety for those on or near our roadways, how much money does the Town want to spend to address speeding in the 25-30 mph speed range?

7:22 pm Traffic Calming Policy Discussion

Section III: Traffic Calming Process Overview

The TAC opened the discussion by reviewing proposed changes for Section III in the Policy, "Traffic Calming Process Overview." These changes were introduced in response to feedback received at the public hearing on November 7th and included a series of eight new or amended points (2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, and 15) that provide more information about how residents can track the progress and results of the process. Key points include:

- Clarifying that the Town will maintain a database of information on traffic calming requests and decisions. If a road did not qualify based on a preliminary assessment, residents can resubmit after one year.
- Process now designates the individual who submits the request as the primary point of contact to share Town communications with concerned residents.
- Process clarifies final decision-making and prioritization of recommendations.

TAC members suggested additional clarification to ensure that the individual submitting the request will be the designated point of contact while making clear that the Town will continue to notify residents about public meetings. The individual who submits the request will serve as a general point of contact to keep neighbors apprised of process.

TAC also discussed the prioritization described in point 13. It suggests that there will be a shifting ranking as new projects come in with different scores. Charles Hamad posed the question of how that will work in practice.

Glenn Clancy clarified that implementation of the recommendations is determined by funding and that complaints about streets have been coming into the town for years. It typically happens when issues on a street rise the level where residents feel there is a need for some action. In the past most of the concerns can be addressed with relatively low-cost measures. The purpose of the scoring is to identify where the need is and what are the priorities. When there are issues that require raised elements or curb extensions, that is when prioritization will be important to determine how funding should be allocated.

TAC members also requested information on the Town's capacity to complete the preliminary evaluations.

James MacIsaac reported that the Town currently has staff capacity to complete one speed study per week. He suggested that the Town should be conducting these studies on an ongoing basis to build a comprehensive database of traffic data.

Glenn clarified that completion of speed studies will be done on a first-in, first-out basis and will be completed in conjunction with the ten roads studied each year as part of the pavement management program.

Jessica Bennett reminded the TAC that the police department is able to bring concerns to the TAC at any time as well.

Annis Sengupta suggested clarifying in point 11 that the Select Board will review the recommendation made by the TAC and vote on its approval.

Table One: Preliminary Evaluation Criteria

TAC Chair Dana Miller directed the TAC's attention to Table One in the TCP, which is the Preliminary Evaluation Criteria. Dana referred to the earlier discussion about the 85th percentile as a measure of speeding, and opened the TAC's discussion about the measure. Town Engineer Glenn Clancy provided background on why the measure is used by noting that the 85th percentile is the standard that the federal government has identified in the manual of traffic control devices to establish a speed limit on a road. A speed study is used to identify what the 85th percentile speed is and that is used to establish the speed limit on the road.

Glenn Clancy clarified that the preliminary evaluation is trying to identify the speed at which the users of the road feel comfortable and safe operating their vehicles. If the Town were to build a new road in Belmont, we would start by doing the speed study. If data comes back and says the 85th percentile speed is 35 mph, we see that users of road feel safe and comfortable driving at 35 mph. In such a case, the Town would then modify the new road to bring the 85th percentile speed in line with the posted speed limit.

In Massachusetts, the state that has decided that 25 mph is the appropriate speed for thickly settled roads. We still need to figure out whether cars are operating at a safe and comfortable 25 mph or whether they feel the road is designed for a higher speed.

When we do a speed study that says the 85th percentile is three miles-per-hour above the speed limit, we need to consider what is a practical range of speed for the TAC to address through traffic calming. How many resources do we expend to achieve a three mile-per-hour reduction in vehicle speed? He noted that the town likely does not have the resources to install and maintain this infrastructure to address issues within the range of 25 to 30 mph.

Glenn Clancy suggested that there might be alternatives to traffic calming improvements on roads where elevated speeds coincide with cut-through traffic, such as restricting access during the hours of peak speeding or using a trailer to give speed feedback might be used to bring speeds down to 25 mph.

TAC members expressed their interest in seeing whether the trailer modified behavior.

David Coleman suggested using barrels or other temporary elements to change the structure and appearance of the street without installing permanent elements. He mentioned that St. Louis is putting sawhorses across residential roads. He argued that this approach goes to the heart of traffic calming. It takes into account the perspective of the pedestrian or the cyclist. He argued that there needs to be more than one metric for comfort. There is a good, positive way to approach this where we can gather more data on how pedestrians and cyclists want to use the street.

Glenn Clancy responded that It is easy to say that the TAC has good data at the 85th percentile that can be related to driver behavior. A traffic calming policy's purpose is to get vehicles to adhere to the law. It is not trying to get motorists to do anything beyond what the law requires.

Clancy returned to the data on Rutledge Road to explore the issue further. Traffic volumes in the range of 30-35 mph on Rutledge Road peak in the hours between 4pm and 6pm. That two hour period accounts for 40% of all the cars traveling at that speed. Restricting access westbound from Clifton would remove 40% of the cars speeding between 30-35 mph on the road.

Jessie Bennett supported Glenn Clancy's advocating to spend town resources only on roads where the 85th percentile speed is over 30 mph. She emphasized the need to focus energy on streets where the need can be documented.

Charles Hamad raised the question of how the 85th percentile interacts with accident data.

James MacIsaac explained that the 85th percentile was created because it was safe. Data showed that accidents were caused by people driving too fast or too slow relative to the 85th percentile. Accident risks are highest when traveling too fast or too slow. He noted that unrealistic speed limits put police officers in a position to arbitrarily enforce speeds. The majority of motorists do not alter their speed from what is comfortable to the posted legal speed limit. People who drive at or below the 85th percentile believe that is the safest way to drive for the motorist. Weather variability, straightness of roads, all influence what is considered a reasonable driving speed. He also noted that Belmont does not have the volume of high-speed traffic it once did because of the increased congestion.

Jeffrey Roth suggested that the TAC change language in the table to reference the legal speed limit rather than an actual speed number because there are special speed zones below 25 mph in town and some roads posted at 30 mph.

TAC discussed the possibility of pursuing future revisions to the policy after completing a town-wide transportation plan that generates new data on pedestrian and bicyclist transportation routes and safety.

Clifford Gaysunas raised the question of whether a minimum volume standard is needed. Glenn Clancy responded with the observation that people on roads with low average daily traffic volumes are not likely to complain to the TAC about traffic. There may be places with relatively little traffic that are experiencing traffic issues that we should not exclude through a minimum traffic volume.

The TAC agreed to maintain the 85th percentile speed as the speeding criteria in Table One and recommended changing the speed to five miles above the legal speed limit after noting that the town continues to have speed limits that vary from the 25 mph town-wide speed limit on certain roads. The TAC agreed to

accept Table One with the speed standard revised to reference the legal speed limit rather than the town-wide 25 mph speed limit and recommended no further changes.

Table Two: Needs Assessment Scoring

TAC Chair Dana Miller shifted the conversation to Table Two. This new element of the TCP moves the text originally under the Needs Assessment section into a scoring table format.

The table has added category labels for the criteria, with four criteria falling under the User category related to pedestrians, transit users, bicyclists and students. In addition, the table has changed the wording about speeding to "For each 5 mile increment above the speed limit, 10 points are awarded."

TAC initiated discussion of the needs assessment criteria with a discussion of how the distance of 1000 feet to pedestrian generators will be measured. After examining maps to determine the relative distance and how it might be measured, the TAC decided that the 1000 feet should be measured along public roadways to the road segment under review.

Annis Sengupta proposed revising the criteria for transit routes to mirror the criteria for pedestrian generators. Since designated transit routes may be limited in what kinds of traffic calming measures can be applied, the criteria should address roadway segments within 500 feet from an intersection with a designated route for transit buses. These roadway segments support the pedestrian traffic to transit routes.

Sengupta also proposed increasing the points awarded for proximity to transit routes to 20 points from 10 points so it is in line with the other user-oriented criteria in the table. Jessica Bennett and Dana Miller voiced a preference that the criteria in Table Two give greater weight to youth over adult commuters. Sengupta observed that the transit buses serve also families with young children and the elderly as well as households with limited automobile access. After further discussion, the TAC agreed to increase the points for transit proximity to 20 from 10 and adopt the proposed language for transit access to be measured within 500 feet from intersections with designated transit routes.

TAC recommended no further revisions and agreed to adopt Table Two with the revisions described above.

Next Steps

Glenn Clancy clarified that he would work with TAC Chair Dana Miller to revise the TCP to reflect the agreed-upon changes and send it out to the TAC for final review before sharing a final revised draft with the Select Board.

9:15 pm Motion to Recommend Approval of the Traffic Calming Policy

The TAC voted unanimously to recommend approval of Traffic Calming Policy to the Belmont Select Board.

9:17 pm Upcoming Meetings

January 16th will be the date of the next TAC meeting. Agenda elements will include annual housekeeping work including electing officers, reporting, etc.

9:18 pm New Business

Dave Coleman reported to the TAC that he and Jeffrey Roth have been outlining a bicycle plan for Belmont using the Cambridge Bicycle Plan as template. The head of GIS in Belmont, Todd Constantino, is willing to work with the TAC to create GIS layers for accidents, complete streets data, and speed studies to visually overlay and use as a tool to analyze bicycling conditions townwide. There are eight layers available: lime bike data, car crashes, bike crashes, street types, bus routes, Fire Department critical routes; Complete Streets Wiki Mapping from VHB, the Complete Streets prioritization plan. Todd needs a directive from the Select Board to get his time allocated and to award the TAC permission to use the system for our meetings.

Glenn Clancy clarified that the Town Administrator can authorize him to work with us. Coleman will work with Constantino to fold in this data to inform the Bicycle Plan.

9:25 pm Meeting Adjourned



Transportation Advisory Committee

TOWN OF BELMONT

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Dana Miller - Chair
Laurence MacDonald - Vice Chair
Annis Sengupta - Clerk

Jessica Bennett
David Coleman
Clifford Gaysunas
Charles Hamad
Jeremy Romanul
Jeffrey Roth

Date: December 3, 2019

To: Members – Transportation Advisory Committee

From: Glenn R. Clancy, Committee Liaison

Subject: Agenda for Meeting on **December 5, 2019 at 7:00 PM in Conference Room 2, Town Hall**. If you cannot attend the meeting, please contact me via e-mail.

- ✓ **7:00 – 7:10** Approval of Minutes (November 21, 2019)
- ✓ **7:10 – 7:25** Preliminary Traffic Calming Preliminary Evaluations
 - Village Hill Road
 - Rutledge Road
- 7:25 – 8:45** Traffic Calming Policy Discussion
- 8:45 – 8:50** Old Business
 - No Know Items
- 8:50 – 8:55** New Business
 - No Known Items
- 8:55** Adjourn

Note: Times are tentative depending on the flow of the meeting, the time of any particular item may deviate ten to fifteen minutes from the schedule.


Cc: Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator
Sgt Marc Pugliese, Belmont Police Department
Jay Marcotte, Director, Department of Public Works
Richard McLaughlin, Belmont Police Chief



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

MEMO

MEMO TO: Transportation Advisory Committee

FROM: Glenn R. Clancy, P.E.
Town Engineer 

SUBJECT: Preliminary Traffic Calming Evaluation – Village Hill Road

DATE: November 26, 2019

Preliminary Traffic Calming Evaluation

Street Name: Village Hill Road

Data Collection Dates*: 11/4/2019 – 11/12/2019

(*Data from Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday is used to evaluate speed and volume)

Criteria Evaluation

Speed: The 85th percentile speed is 28 mph

Result: Does not meet the standard

Cut-Through Traffic Volume: 10% of the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) was exceeded in the afternoon peak hour in the southeast travel lane; in the morning peak hour in the southeast travel lane; and in the afternoon peak hour in the northwest travel lane.

Result: **Meets the standard**

Traffic Collisions: There have been zero crashes in the last three years.

Result: Does not meet the standard


Recommendation: Traffic- Calming Needs Assessment *



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

MEMO

MEMO TO: Transportation Advisory Committee

FROM: Glenn R. Clancy, P.E.
Town Engineer 

SUBJECT: Preliminary Traffic Calming Evaluation - Rutledge Road

DATE: November 26, 2019

Preliminary Traffic Calming Evaluation

Street Name: Rutledge Road

Data Collection Dates*: 11/19/2019 – 11/24/2019

(*Data from Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday is used to evaluate speed and volume)

Criteria Evaluation

Speed: The 85th percentile speed is 28 mph

Result: Does not meet the standard

Cut-Through Traffic Volume: 10% of the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) was exceeded in the afternoon peak hour in the west travel lane.

Result: Meets the standard

Traffic Collisions: There has been one crash (auto vs auto) in the last three years.

Result: Does not meet the standard

Recommendation: Traffic- Calming Needs Assessment