

Traffic Advisory Committee Public Hearing – Minutes for Tuesday, August 2, 2005

In attendance: M. Frisoli, L. Nickens, A. Masciari (I did not write down other TAC members. If you were there, please let me know, and I will add you to the minutes)

Also attending: G. Clancy, BSC Group Representatives C. Kalaskas, P. Briere, M. Murphy. Representing the Belmont Housing Authority (BHA) – Sallye Bleiberg (Chair of the BHA Board of Directors), Donald Becker (BHA Member), Donna Hamilton (Executive Director), Jennifer Page (Chair of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee), and other members of the Vision 21 Implementation Committee, approximately 40 residents and business owners

7:10 Meeting called to order

Peter Briere (PB) gave a brief overview of the process we'll follow that will enable us to get on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). BSC will draw up the plan and will present it to Mass Highway (MH) as its fall meeting. MH will then decide if this project meets the requirements to be included on the 2006 TIP.

Sallye Bleiberg (SB) said that the 160 tenants of the Trapelo Road and Sycamore Road senior housing developments use the Corridor on a regular basis. Rita Scarfoli, who was killed last year on Trapelo Road, was a tenant of the BHA. The seniors often walk along Trapelo Rd. to Shaw's where there is no sidewalk. Ms. Bleiberg would like us to ensure that a sidewalk is installed on the north side of Trapelo Road from the Waverley Oaks housing development up to Shaw's market. A sidewalk would allow seniors to lead more independent and healthier lives.

Donna Hamilton (DH) reiterated Ms. Bleiberg's concerns.

Donald Becker (DB) seconded that concern, and encouraged coordination of walk lights that will allow traffic to flow and residents to be safe. He would also like to see walk lights at the bump-outs at Hawthorne St. and Flett Road. "Pedestrian safety should be considered throughout the Corridor."

M. Frisoli (MF) said that the new plan for Pleasant/Trapelo intersection includes dedicated lights and a sidewalk and a safety island.

L. Nickens (LN) stated that this will be done before the Corridor project is done.

J. Page (JP) Committee uses the Vision 21 vision statement as a basis for Vision 21 Implementation Committee. This sets the groundwork for the Town's vision which was adopted by Town Meeting in 2001. JP cited much of the information from that statement, and a link to that statement is provided here:

http://www.town.belmont.ma.us/Public_Documents/BelmontMA_BComm/vision21/vis21vision

Some of JP's comments, many of which are available at the above-referenced Web link: "Belmont will retain a small-town atmosphere." "We don't want to replicate Route 2." "The number of lanes as it pertains to certain parts of the road is good for Belmont's vision as well as for making the road more a "town street." Would like to see a "green strip in the center with trees." Wonders if it's possible to install bicycle paths down center of road, and wonders if there are ways to "honor the memory of the trolley) that once traveled along the Corridor. Would like to see lots of trees, wider sidewalks, and benches to create a sense of "intimacy and comfort." Would like to create spaces to allow informal contact with benches set up in clusters, facing each other instead of solo. Envisions "mini-parks" to promote small-town atmosphere. JP feels that ample parking is important for the creation of that small-town atmosphere. Suggested coordination of gateways in Belmont Center and the Corridor. "Gateways can convey values by announcing things that are important to us."

For traffic "through and around Town," we need more speed limit signs, especially along the Corridor. The United Kingdom utilizes a variety of humorous and thoughtful signs with funny phrases. She suggested that we look on the Internet for examples of such signs. JP hopes we will explore many ideas for making bike lanes and intersections safer. Would like to see dedicated pedestrian walk lights. The MBTA might want to consider moving bus stops out of business districts. Believes that business centers will contribute to the enhancement of the Corridor. The Town should rethink its parking limits from two hours to three hours to give people more time to shop and eat. Town should remove No Parking and 30 minute parking signs on residential streets and issue parking permits to business owners.

Feels that homeowners are rude and abusive to business owners and employees who are legally parked in residential neighborhoods. Believes that deliveries to businesses should be limited to certain times during the day. Suggested a stop light that turns red when speeding as the business community is concerned about speed. Reiterated desire to have MPH posted along the Corridor, with wider sidewalks that are conducive to strolling and window shopping. Town should consider rezoning to attract future businesses.

Part of the Vision 21 vision statement asserts that the Town "will be environmentally responsible..." So, we should have LEAD certified roads and buildings. We should seek solutions to making a road "green," thus the Corridor could be the "greenest, most sustainable road in Massachusetts." This could attract serious state money. Road can be designed to mitigate further degradation of land and water and air. This would have a positive impact on residents. The highest priority of a "green road" would make the highest priority pedestrians, bikes, commuters and then automobiles. We should employ lots of bike racks, cluster seating, upgrade bus stops, good lighting and signage including bus schedules. We should create pedestrian alleyways leading from one place to another between the Corridor and neighboring streets.

Ralph Jones, Sewer/Stormwater Committee briefly discussed sewer and water issues as they pertain to the redesign of the Corridor. Will try to attend another TAC meeting.

MaryBeth Murphy (MM) gave a brief presentation of landscaping along the Corridor. Shade trees are crucial wherever feasible. For sustainable design and beauty, they should be planted at regular intervals, careful of species which should be drought and salt resistant.) Tree canopies will assist in less absorption of heat by the road. Someone suggested silver maples, but they are not salt resistant. It should be noted that a few business owners were angry that MaryBeth was giving her presentation, as they could not see the relevance to the matters we were discussing. In fact, at least two of them left the room and returned after her presentation.

Electric lights and stoplights should be maximally energy efficient. "Full cutoff lights" can be directed only where you want the light to be. The bulbs do not extend beyond the casing of the fixture. Examples at Cambridge Common and our football field.

Further comments: We must care for needs of children. Green islands in wide roadways and extending sidewalks will make it safer for children and seniors to cross busy street. SB – If legal, would like to lower speed limits in school zones and around senior centers. PB reiterated schedule. Talked about project development to get consensus in town regarding the roadway. One that "we can live with and Mass Highway can fund." Briefly explained what we have already discussed.

MM – Streetscape issues can be seen at the BSC Group PowerPoint presentation. She discussed colored awnings, medians, benches, planters.

Argument ensued about problems with neck-downs.

DB is concerned that we should not divert bike traffic away from intersections although it will be difficult to fit the mandatory bicycle accommodation along the Corridor. Believes that cyclists will not go around the intersection. Cited the balance and shared space between pedestrians, bikes, cars at Huron Avenue and Fresh Pond Parkway in Cambridge.

PB – This is one of the toughest waivers to get from Mass Highway. There is not a lot of hope for a waiver such as this. MH will not fund shared bike/auto lanes in intersections.

Further Comments: Adam Tocci (AT) very concerned that Corridor cannot accommodate four lanes. The Planning Board recommended four lanes in some sections of the Corridor. PB said Mass Highway might allow a right turn lane to share a bike lane. MM will try to combine poles to alleviate some of the unsightliness of them.

MJ – Corridor is more than engineering and lanes. We have an opportunity to grow businesses, create intimate gathering places. MJ asked for rebanding of BEDPG to apply for grants for aesthetic additions. "We can make it what everyone wants if we compromise."

Someone was concerned about the town having to comply with Mass Highway's demands. He also wanted to know who would maintain the roadway after construction.

Paul Solomon (Chair, Board of Selectmen) – reiterated why we are going through this process. We are trying to get 10-20 million dollars that the Town does not have. The Town will have to maintain the roadway.

PB gave a brief presentation of some of the Corridor's intersections.

Cushing Square at Common Street – eliminated left turn going West. Several business owners concerned that their businesses will suffer from lack of traffic. Changed light cycles. Level of Service (LOS) will be about the same as it is today. The bus will stop traffic and loading is also a problem. Mass Highway will probably buy into the current plan. We can move bus stops later.

Resident comments: Many riders like getting off the bus before Ben Franklin. Residents expressed concern about removing left-hand turn at Common Street. Another resident suggested a turn restriction during rush hours only. PB will look for places where bushes can pull over without blocking road. Resident suggested bike lane in middle of road. Donald Mercier suggested that we paint before we build.

C. Kalaskas – Mass Highway is rewriting its design guide book. The BSC Group will apply any of the new flexibility to this project.

Motion to adjourn – Linda Nickens

Seconded – Andrea Masciari

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 pm