

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN - SEPTEMBER 2016

### Project

The Town of Belmont seeks to design, fund and construct a community path to provide recreational space for walkers, runners, cyclists and disabled individuals; to provide walkable and bikeable routes connecting schools, parks and other recreational and cultural facilities, and to link Belmont to the surrounding communities.

Presently, a 600-foot segment of the Fitchburg Cutoff Path in east Belmont links Brighton Street to the Cambridge border and, continuing east, to the Alewife MBTA Station, the Minuteman Trail, the Alewife Greenway Path and the Cambridge Linear Path. To the west of Belmont, Waltham has been working with the Massachusetts Division of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to design the Waltham segment of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail (MCRT), a route that will eventually extend to Berlin, MA.

A path through Belmont has been the subject of multiple studies by regional and local groups since 1997. As in any densely settled community, there are technical issues (e.g. road and rail crossings), legal and regulatory issues and community concerns which must be addressed, including especially concerns regarding the possibility of eminent domain takings and potential impacts on private property. Many of these issues are well documented in prior reports.

In 2012, the Belmont Board of Selectmen appointed 10 residents and 1 local business owner to the Community Path Advisory Committee (CPAC) and asked them to review prior work, survey Belmont residents about their preferences regarding path uses and design, and propose route options. The CPAC delivered its final report and recommendations to the Selectmen in 2014.

In December 2014, the Belmont Selectmen appointed 4 residents and 1 local business owner to the Community Path Implementation Advisory Committee (CPIAC) to procure a Feasibility Study of route options reviewed by CPAC (with a few additions) and, based on the results, make recommendations to the Selectmen regarding path location, design and funding.

CPIAC, on behalf of the Board Selectmen and the Town of Belmont, has engaged the consultant team lead by Pare Corporation with K3-Landscape Architecture, LLC (Consultants) to assist in evaluating route options (with the goal of addressing or mitigating to the extent possible

the community concerns noted above); engineering assessments of path infrastructure (e.g. bridges and tunnels); cost estimates of path design and construction; and advice on how to proceed with path design and funding via MassDOT's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and DCR.

This Feasibility Study is the first phase of an anticipated multiphase project. The goal of the Feasibility Study is to achieve a level of project specification that will allow the Town, upon selection of a specific route by the Board of Selectmen, to pursue funds for 25% path design. As part of this Study, a rigorous process of public engagement is planned in order to ensure that the Feasibility Study reflects the input and priorities of the community.

### Purpose

The purpose of the Public Engagement Plan (PEP) is to describe and outline the various public engagement efforts that will inform the Belmont Community Path Feasibility Study (Study). This document identifies outreach strategies, methods and tools for reaching target audiences. It also describes the roles of key groups that will be involved in the process. The Draft PEP may be updated or revised following consultation with Town staff and stakeholder groups. A preliminary schedule of engagement activities is included.

### Engagement Goals

There are many levels at which a municipality might engage the public. For this project the Town of Belmont Board of Selectmen and CPIAC is looking to *Collaborate* with the public.

Level of Engagement: Collaborate (See page 6, Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities)

	Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Partner
Engagement Goal:	<i>To provide stakeholders with factual, balanced, and timely information to help them understand the project.</i>	<i>To obtain stakeholder feedback on project analysis, alternatives, or decisions.</i>	<i>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that perspectives are consistently understood, considered, and reflected in project decisions.</i>	<i>To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of decision making in order to develop and implement collaborative project solutions.</i>

The Town of Belmont is committed to creating a Study that aligns with local needs, preferences and priorities. Community input will be integral to each phase of the Study development and is designed to:

- increase community awareness of the project;
- provide easy access to project information and opportunities for participation;
- offer a range of communication and engagement tools to accommodate residents' interests and preferences;
- gather ideas and input from a broad range of community members, including those who do not typically participate in the Town planning process;
- ensure the final Study reflects community priorities and values; and
- gain community support of the recommendations of the Feasibility Study for adoption by the Board of Selectmen and future implementation.

## Stakeholders

The Town invites participation and input from all interested community members and wishes to ensure diverse and balanced perspectives are heard. To this end, the following have been identified as target audiences (Stakeholders) for public engagement in this Feasibility Study.

- Town residents, including:
  - Youth and students
  - Families
  - Seniors and older adults
- Trail and facility users:
  - Current users
  - Potential users
  - Non-resident users
  - Commuters
  - Sports enthusiasts
- Town Departments' staff and Commissions
- Schools and school districts
- Other community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Advocacy organizations and interest groups
- Representatives from traditional and online media
- Local employers
- Non-profit organizations

## Outreach Strategies and Methods

This extensive outreach strategy includes a variety of engagement tools and activities that will encourage Belmont residents and other interested community members to actively participate in the planning process. This strategy includes multiple opportunities for input, using tools that range from a current and relevant website to interactive community workshops so that residents can participate in a manner that is convenient and comfortable. Each Tool is described below.

### 1. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Consultants will periodically develop materials and content for the Town to distribute through its established communications channels, including the Town's website, newsletters and social media accounts. Content will be adaptable for use in a variety of media and will be shared with Town Departments and Commissions and partner organizations for inclusion in their regular communications.

### 2. PROJECT WEBSITE

The Town has created, hosts and manages content for the project landing page <http://www.belmont-ma.gov/community-path-implementation-advisory-committee>. The project website will serve as the main information hub for the project. CPIAC will provide regular content updates, including Consultant project updates, meeting notices, PDF documents for posting, and links to surveys. Town staff will be responsible for posting content to the website.

### 3. INTERCEPT ACTIVITIES

Intercept events are an effective tool to elicit input from residents and visitors who otherwise may not participate in the planning process. These activities will include engaging people for a short amount of time in informal settings. CPIAC and consultants will conduct one (1) intercept event at "Meet Belmont" on August 30<sup>th</sup> and two (2) intercept events at "Walk-the-Trail" opportunities (dates TBD). Formal comments will not be gathered at these events. However attendees will be encouraged to participate in other engagement opportunities where formal comments/responses will be documented.

### 4. DEPARTMENTS AND COMMISSIONS MEETINGS

The Town will convene a set of Departments and Commissions Meetings to be held consecutively throughout one day with the Consultants and representatives from interested Town Departments and a spokesperson from each Town Commission so they may provide input on the Feasibility Study. The Town will plan, facilitate and record these meetings. The Town has developed a list with approximately 20 Departments and Commissions and will follow-up with Town staff via email.

## 5. PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Town will convene several Public Meetings as outlined on the Preliminary Engagement Schedule (Page 7) so attendees may provide input on the Feasibility Study. These meetings are open to the public and anyone may attend. The Consultants will plan and facilitate and the Town will record these meetings. The purpose of each of these meetings will be twofold: for the Consultant Team to present work representing the current status of the Feasibility Study and to solicit comments and input from the Public on specific aspects of the Feasibility Study. In some cases, the Public Meeting will include a Workshop as described below. Public Meetings will generally meet all of the Title VI and ADA guidelines and latest version of the MassDOT Public Participation Plan (PPP) and the protocols and resources therein to ensure diversity and inclusivity in the public engagement process.

## 6. WORKSHOP

Workshops are an opportunity for residents and other path users to learn about the Feasibility Study process and provide input through a range of participation methods, including written comments, interactive exercises, and/or group discussion. In consultation with the Town and CPIAC, the Consultants will plan and facilitate and the Town record one (1) community workshop. We will collaborate with the Town and CPIAC to promote the workshop and encourage community participation. At the workshop the team will collect input on specific issues, to prioritize matrices and to gather feedback on the Path elements.

## 7. COMMUNITY SURVEY

A community survey will be developed and widely distributed – both online and in hard copy – to collect data on community needs and priorities and ideas for this project. The project team will widely promote the survey to solicit results from a broad section of the Belmont community and will analyze data to inform the project matrices, design and preliminary prioritization. The survey will be distributed after the first Public Meeting Kick-off and Workshop. It will include topics considered at the Workshop and provide an opportunity to reach a broader audience and individuals who may not have attended the Meeting.

## Project Team Meetings

In addition to the community and stakeholder engagement activities described above, the Project Team: Town, CPIAC and Consultants, will work collaboratively and meet regularly. The Consultants will be responsible for providing monthly updates to the Town Project Manager (PM) Jeffery Wheeler and the CPIAC. The PM and CPIAC will be responsible to forward monthly status reports to the Board of Selectmen. They will also regularly review and guide the work of the Consultant. The PM will take meeting notes. All meetings with the PM and CPIAC will be open to the public. Additional conference calls may be held to support communication with the Project Team.

## Belmont Board of Selectmen

In addition to the community and stakeholder engagement activities described above, the project team will work collaboratively with Town staff and CPIAC to inform and engage the Board of Selectmen throughout the planning process. Town staff will be responsible for providing regular updates to the Board of Selectmen. The Final Feasibility Study and the CPIAC Recommendation will be brought before the Board of Selectmen for approval and adoption. The Board will review community input, review the draft Feasibility Study and approve/disapprove the Recommendations of the Study.

## Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

The Stakeholder's role is to provide input and guide the direction of the Study. This does not include a formal vote. The final decision will be made by the Board of Selectmen. All stakeholders are expected to work collaboratively to identify issues and opportunities, create and refine design concepts and provide input toward final project recommendations for approval by the Board of Selectmen. Participants are expected to engage in the process in a manner that promotes respectful civil discourse and enhances mutual understanding of all stakeholder viewpoints. Any requests for public or project information should be directed to the PM, Jeffery Wheeler at 617-993-2666.

Preliminary Engagement Schedule	
June 22, 2016	Project Team Meeting
July 14, 2016	Project Team Meeting
August 30, 2016	Meetings with Town Departments and Commissions
August 30, 2016	Intercept event #1: Meet Belmont
September 21, 2016	Public Meeting #1 – Kick-off and Workshop (Introduction, Site Analysis, Break-out Groups) 6-9 pm at Belmont Middle School
October 1 and 8, 2016	Intercept events #2 and #3: Walk-the-Trail
October 2016	Project Team Meeting / Conference Call
October 25 or 26, 2016	Public Meeting #2 (Segment 1, 2 and Waverly Station: alignment alternatives, design options, and feasibility matrix)
November 1 or 2, 2016	Public Meeting #3 (Segment 3 and Downtown: alignment alternatives, design options, and feasibility matrix)
November 9 or 10, 2016	Public Meeting #4 (Segment 4: alignment alternatives, design options, and feasibility matrix)
November 15, 16 or 17, 2016	Public Meeting #5 ('Hot Topics' and feasibility matrix)
December 2016	Project Team Meeting / Conference Call
Mid-January 2017	Public Meeting #6 (Segments 1, 2 and Waverly Station: evaluation of alternatives, design approach, feasibility matrix with costs)
Mid- Late –January	Public Meeting #7 (Segment 3 and Downtown: evaluation of alternatives, design approach, feasibility matrix with costs)
Late-January	Public Meeting #8 (Segment 4: evaluation of alternatives, design approach, feasibility matrix with costs)
Early February 2017	Public Meeting #9 (Full length of trail, full matrix, full costs, funding opportunities and 'Hot Topics')
February 2017	Project Team Meeting / Conference Call
Late February 2017	Public Meeting #10 (Presentation of Recommendations)
March 2017	Project Team Meeting / Conference Call
March 2017	Presentation to Board of Selectmen