

## DRAFT Frequently Asked Questions: Community Path Phase 1

1. What is Phase 1 of the Community Path?

Phase 1 of the planned Community Path will span approximately one mile between Brighton Street and the Clark Street Bridge, and includes an underpass from Alexander Avenue to the High School/ Middle School campus.

2. I hear that there is a change order request from the consultant on Phase 1. What's going on?

Projects like the Community Path, whose construction will be entirely funded through state and federal transportation funds, are reviewed by state agencies including MassDOT and MBTA at several points in the design process. The 25% design documents were submitted through MassDOT in November of 2021 for the state agency review process. The Town's design consultant, Nitsch Engineering, has now received hundreds of comments on the submitted documents as well as numerous requests for changes to the work to be submitted prior to the 25% approval. These requests include: changing the construction method for the underpass and planning for the construction to be done in a very short window of time; doing underground utility mapping in the area of the underpass and at the Brighton Street crossing; changing the way retaining structures are to be built; and additional preparation for right-of-way use. The extra work entailed in redesigning structures and engaging additional subconsultants is resulting in a total change request of \$476,925. Some of this can be covered by the funds already allocated for Phase 1 design, so the request to the Community Preservation Committee and Town Meeting is to provide \$335,868 to the project design.

3. Why didn't the consultant anticipate these requests?

Nitsch Engineering is a highly qualified consultant that has worked on numerous transportation projects similar to the Belmont Community Path. They were selected for this project in part because they have a long history of experience working with state agencies including MassDOT and the MBTA. On March 9, 2020, Nitsch, along with Town officials, met with senior representatives from the MBTA who insisted there would be only one acceptable method of constructing the underpass. Nitsch designed the underpass accordingly. However, during design review, the MBTA shifted positions and stated that an alternative method should be used instead. The alternative method will actually result in a better outcome for path users, because it enables the pathway below the tracks to be wider and thus safer. The alternative method will also result in significant construction cost savings, but will require re-engineering and new design by Nitsch Engineering and its sub-consultants. The MBTA and MassDOT have also asked for different methods of supporting retaining walls, and for a substantial amount of utility survey information.

4. What does this mean for the project schedule?

Nitsch Engineering has been directed by the Town to complete the engineering design work for the 25% submission in order to avoid any further delays to design approval. It appears that the state review is nearly completed and that the project schedule will be maintained to begin construction in Federal Fiscal Year

2026, as the funding through the state's Transportation Improvement Program has been programmed.

5. What has the Town done to mitigate these costs?

The Town has reviewed the submitted change request and negotiated a savings of \$15,925. By way of comparison, typically design costs are normally about 10% of total construction costs. When this project was originally conceived, the estimated construction cost was approximately \$14M, so the original CPC request for design for Phase 1 was \$1,400,000. However, the current estimate for construction cost is approximately \$21 - 22M. Even with the additional \$335,868, the design costs remain well below the industry norm.

6. Has anyone looked into alternate sources of funding than the CPC?

Yes. Given that the MBTA contradicted its first design directions, and that new scopes of work were requested beyond what was originally conceived, the Town made a request to MassDOT for funding assistance, which was denied. Due to the urgency of need to keep this project moving forward, the best way to fund it is through CPC funds, allowing the Town to leverage a relatively small investment in the project design in order to have the state cover the full cost of the path construction. The Town did apply for and receive a \$150,000 grant through MassTrails in 2020 to contribute toward the design costs.

7. Will this be enough money to get the project to construction?

Yes, barring any additional unforeseen design changes.