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BELMONT, MA**

DATE: November 7, 2023
TIME: 10:07 AM

Belmont Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Meeting

Minutes for Thursday, 21 September, 2023

Present: David Coleman (Chair), Larry Link (Vice Chair), Katie Baratta, Daniel Eldridge, Jane Lappin, Ken Lind.

Absent: Jeffrey Roth (Secretary), Heather Barr, Chip Gaysunas.

Also present:

Town Staff: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Office of Community Development (CD) Director), Sergeant Richard Murphy (Belmont Police Department (BPD)), Tim MacIntosh (Vanasse Hangen Brustlin).

Town Public Residents: Sue Bass (Resident, 530 Concord Ave.), Jonas Budris (Resident, 57 Marlboro St.), Caroline Olsen (Resident, 57 Marlboro St.), Charlotte Dobbs (Resident, 13 Clarendon Rd.), Sara Lazar (Resident, 34 Foster St.), Tom Locket (Resident, 112 Dalton Rd.), Ira Morgenstern (Resident, 21 Clarendon Rd.), Steve Pinkerton (Resident, 139 Dalton Rd.), Donna Ruvolo (Resident, 36 Choate Rd.), Ruth Sacks (Resident, 10 Choate Rd.), Matt Taylor (Resident, 59 Edgemoor Rd.), Steve Warne (Resident, 66 Oxford Ave.).

Draft minutes, compiled on 2 November 2023.

Announcements

1. Tonight's public meeting occurred online using a zoom video conference forum.

This meeting was held remotely using Zoom video conferencing technology, as permitted by the Massachusetts Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations, that became effective July 16, 2022.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00p by Chairperson David Coleman.

Review and Approval of Minutes (3 August 2023)

08/03/2023

The Committee reviewed the draft meeting minutes from the TAC meeting on 3 August 2023. These TAC meeting minutes were reviewed, and accepted unanimously for approval.

The Committee voted unanimously by roll call in favor of approving the drafted minutes.

Grove Street – Huron Avenue to Belmont Street

The first item on the agenda was the public forum for the proposed reconfiguration of the intersection of Huron Ave. and Grove Streets and the section of Grove Street from Huron Ave. to Belmont Street.

Presentation of Project Scope

Residents were invited by mailing to attend a public comment session on the section of Grove St. that includes the Huron Ave./Grove St. intersection and the length of Grove St. extending down to Belmont St. to the south. VHB (Vanasse Hangen Brustlin) with offices in Watertown has been retained to study the area and design an improved layout that enhances vulnerable (pedestrian, cyclist) road user safety.

At the start of the forum, Dave Coleman, Glenn Clancy and Tim MacIntosh (VHB) each spoke about the purpose and expectations for the information gathering. Dave Coleman mentioned that Charlotte Dobbs had accessed crash data from MassDOT for Grove St. since 2002, that pointed to both the lack of good pedestrian crossings and the confusion often experienced at the intersection with Huron St. Dave also mentioned that problems with the crosswalks were ongoing, with a pedestrian being struck in the crosswalk at the opening to Choate Rd.

Tim MacIntosh and Glenn Clancy (Belmont Community Development) both emphasized that the design concept is a blank slate, and the process is best served by residents explaining their experience with the current layout so that VHB gets an accurate starting point in its design process. Tim emphasized that the public comment is important because the project has limited space at the intersection of Huron and Grove to work with. The length of Grove we are concerned with lies between Belmont St. and Grosvenor Rd.

Glenn Clancy mentioned that the Belmont cemetery has an historically important entrance at the Huron-Grove St. junction, and proposals for the intersection are not intended to impact the current entrance design. A rotary design has been mentioned for the Huron – Grove intersection in the past, but it is not clear if this is a viable alternative.

Public Comment Session

The meeting now moved into an open public-comment session on this topic.

Sara Lazar (Resident, 34 Foster St.) — Sara Lazar said that putting stop sign is needed, because cars stopping is a problem at the Huron Ave./Grove St. intersection. She also said that left turns from Huron Ave. to Grove St. or Grove St. to Huron Ave. are nearly impossible at rush hour. She finds Grove St. difficult to cross in this area, in part because the north-bound cars on Grove St. speed up as they get close to the Huron Ave. intersection because of the downhill roadway segment there.

Charlotte Dobbs (Resident, 13 Clarendon Rd.) — Charlotte Dobbs said that she walks down Grove St. to Huron Ave. on the sidewalk in front of the cemetery, and feels that it is super dangerous to cross Grove St. She has a young child, and like to go to Fresh Pond to walk around the reservoir and to the Grove St. playground in Belmont often. Charlotte also said that soccer games bring many cars parking on both sides of Grove St., creating no visibility from the sidewalks for drivers on Grove St. to see walkers starting to cross by walking between tightly-packed parked cars. Charlotte said she backs into Grove St. with her child in a stroller and sometimes has to yell “STOP”. She feels like the crosswalk placement seems to have no logic, as there is no logical entrance into the Grove

St. park from the crosswalk closest to Huron Ave. On the park side, the crosswalk ends in a stone wall with no cut in the wall to allow entrance into the park. She said that she has to backtrack up Grove St. for an entrance to the park. Further down south, there is also no crosswalk between Choate Rd. and Unity Ave., and cars come around that bend in the road very quickly. It is too great of a distance to get to a crosswalk in this area. From the MassDOT data she researched, she said 164 crashes were reported in the last 10 years as compared to 62 crashes on School St. in the same period.

Steve Warne (Resident, 66 Oxford Ave.) — Steve Warne said that the crossing at Fairview Ave. is problematic, and the Choate Rd. crossing is a real problem also because drivers cannot see walkers or cyclists, especially on the park side. He said that this crossing is locally notorious for this. Steve reported that his family uses their phone flashlights on to cross this street. He also added that the crosswalks that are there seem oddly placed, around Choate Rd. and Huron Ave. Steve said that he supports the use of RRFBs (Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons) that he has seen other places, and thinks something like that could be useful here.

Donna Ruvolo (Resident, 36 Choate Rd.) — Donna Ruvolo, who co-chairs the Friends of Grove St. Park group, said that her home office looks out onto the tot lot of the Grove St. Playground. She said that she can see drivers coming onto Grove St. from Huron Ave, and that the visibility is a real issue. She said that cars make the left hand turn then encounter the crosswalk at the Cemetery immediately, so it is hard to react in time if there is someone in that crosswalk. The Choate Rd. crosswalk also has bad sight-lines, and the crosswalk across Huron Ave. at the Grove St. end is a very long traverse in the roadway. She said she feels very exposed in this crosswalk from cars turning onto Huron Ave. from Grove St. Donna said that closer to Belmont St., she often gets off the bus on Belmont St. and walks up Grove St., and that sidewalk is slanted and makes you feel very exposed to hazardous car traffic which is moving quickly. She said that there is no crosswalk between Park Ave. and Fairview Ave. She often gets off bus further up Belmont St. to come down a side street like Falmouth St. and then walk home to Choate Rd., just to to avoid Grove St.

Glenn Clancy (CD Director) — Glenn Clancy responded that Donna and her co-chair Steve Pinkerton were instrumental in getting this safety review of the Grove St. corridor started.

Jonas Budris (Resident, 57 Marlboro St.) — Jonas Budris said that he wanted to echo the points already made about safety for walkers. For him, the Fairview Ave. area is a real concern, due to the speed of cars there, making crossing Grove St. at this location very unsafe. Jonas said that he is hoping this project will improve the area, and that he also wishes for improved public transit access along there.

Caroline Olsen (Resident, 57 Marlboro St.) — Caroline Olsen lives close to the Belmont Cemetery, and discussed the crosswalk at Unity Ave. She said cars coming here from Huron Ave. arrive at very high speeds fast, from either direction. The section near Fairview Ave. feels like a blind curve. She said that when she walks in the evenings, she chooses to go into Cambridge or Watertown because she feels safer there. She also feels that her neighborhood is cut off from the rest of Belmont by this heavily car-trafficked road.

Ruth Sacks (Resident, 10 Choate Rd.) — Ruth Sacks said that she goes to Fresh Pond frequently in middle of the day, and that the intersection of Huron Ave. even then is dangerous to her. She observed a general feeling of lawlessness and unenforced speeding

and safety problems along this roadway section, as though drivers don't care about safety of walkers. Ruth agrees with the other comments already made. She said that the Grove St. – Choate Rd. crosswalk is poorly designed and that walking on this corner feels dangerous to her. She added that a tree crowding the sidewalk on this corner exacerbates the problem, and she often runs around this corner. Ruth reported that she sees issues of people attempting to cross Grove St. frequently at other places with no protection from a crosswalk, likely due to the current arrangements.

Tom Locket (Resident, 112 Dalton Rd.) — Tom Locket said that he wants to echo other people's comments on Huron Ave./ Grove St. He also mentioned that there is a significant natural gas leak on the Belmont side of Grove St. that has been long-standing.

Steve Pinkerton (Resident, 139 Dalton Rd.) — Steve Pinkerton echoed Tom's comments on the gas leak, and said that this gas leak has been going on for 20 years in one form or another. He added that there is no place to safely walk across Grove St. between the playground and the Washington St. rotary. Steve also said that he finds it treacherous to bicycle through this area. Steve instead uses Grosvenor Rd. to Grove St. to Huron Ave. to the Belmont Cemetery. He said that he uses the crosswalk in front of the playground and cemetery, and that he likes the use of RRFBs that he sees in other areas.

Ira Morgenstern (Resident, 21 Clarendon Rd.) — Ira Morgenstern said that he is a heavy user of the of the Grove St. playground for the dog park. Ira thinks that a lack of fencing along Grove St. makes this park more dangerous for kids. He echoed Charlotte Dobbs' comments that there is no bus stop at Huron Ave. and Grove St. for the MBTA #75 bus, and asked why this is the case. Ira said that a bus stop is shown on Google Maps, but it is not officially a stop.

Ruth Sacks (Resident, 10 Choate Rd.) — Ruth Sacks remarked that she has observed someone waiting for the bus in this location, and was told that the bus uses this unmarked location.

Steve Pinkerton (Resident, 139 Dalton Rd.) — Steve Pinkerton also remarked that he is surprised that this unmarked MBTA #75 bus stop exists.

Matt Taylor (Resident, 59 Edgemoor Rd.) — Matt Taylor said that the roundabout at Washington St.–Grove St. does a decent job slowing down traffic. However, he said that the Grove St. width encourages drivers to go too fast. The sweeping corner at Huron St. encourages drivers to turn at speed, and drivers treat Grove St. as a two lane highway with excessive speeds. Drivers turning onto Huron Ave. from Grove seem to start their turn before looking for walkers. Drivers may stop occasionally, and then the cars bunch up. Matt continued that drivers coming onto Grove St. from the side streets have to accelerate hard to get up to speed, which is a poor design. He said that drivers doing this are constantly getting surprised by pedestrians crossing at the crosswalk in front of the Belmont Cemetery.

Dan Eldridge (TAC) — Dan Eldridge said that residents can email additional comments to David Coleman or to Glenn Clancy on this topic.

Ken Lind (TAC) — Ken Lind asked how this project fits into the rest of the safety and traffic-calming efforts in the Town. He also requested that a speed study for Grove St. be done to collect more data.

Jane Lappin (TAC) — Jane Lappin asked whether the City of Cambridge has communicated what effect a road diet might have on their section of Huron Ave. and their thoughts

on this intersection. It was reported that Cambridge is installing a dual-lane separated cycle track on the north side of Huron Ave. adjacent to the Fresh Pond Reservation, though it ends near the golf course parking lot, and does not continue all the way to Grove St. Jane asked Glenn to check with Cambridge on this.

Sue Bass (Resident, 530 Concord Ave.) — Sue Bass said that she drives on Grove St. often, and is impressed with the goals of this safety project for Grove St.

Larry Link (TAC) — Larry Link asked about the history of the placement of the two crosswalks already there on Grove St. Larry also asked about the origin of this proposed project, and whether Senator Brownsberger contacted Glenn Clancy with the intersection of Huron Ave./Grove St. specifically in mind. Larry in addition asked whether the Town ever considered having a special speed zone in front of the Grove St. Playground.

Glenn Clancy (CD Director) — Glenn mentioned that the crosswalk placements were done some time ago, and that there likely is not a record of the reasons why they are located so. In regards to the question about Senator Brownsberger, Glenn responded yes and mentioned that he had asked that this area between Huron Ave. and Belmont St. be included because of the longstanding safety issues mentioned tonight by residents, and Senator Brownsberger agreed with some of these safety hazards. Glenn also responded that Belmont does have special speed zones in various places, but that this has not been considered for this section of Grove St. under review for this proposed project.

Crosswalk Policy and Vote to Recommend to the Select Board

Chairperson David Coleman presented the suggested changes to the Crosswalk Policy that was forwarded in June to the Select Board. The policy had been edited by Select Board member Roy Epstein and additionally by Glenn Clancy. The Chairperson summarized the suggested changes and brought up discussion of changes to the criteria suggested by Roy Epstein. After discussion with the committee, the Chairperson was tasked to review the document and fold in the suggested changes that were in keeping with the policy intent. This revised draft would be reviewed and voted on at a future TAC meeting.

Belmont Middle/High School Opening and Concord Ave./Hittinger St. Neighborhood Traffic-Safety Issues

The Committee did an overview of the physical changes affected in the area over the summer to account for opening of the new 7th – 8th grades middle-school building. Several of the committee members had not been briefed on these changes, and doing this now prepared the committee for future discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

Ken Lind motioned to adjourn tonight's meeting, and Jane Lappin seconded the motion. All voted unanimously with this measure, and the meeting adjourned at 9:00p.

These minutes were respectfully submitted by David Coleman and Jeffrey Roth.

Appendix 1: Agenda for 2023-09-21 TAC Meeting

DATE: September 15, 2023
TIME: 8:59 AM

Reserved for Town Clerk Use Only

BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
THERE WILL BE A PUBLIC MEETING OF

Committee Name: Transportation Advisory Committee

Subcommittee Name if Applicable: Click here to enter text.

Date: Thursday, September 21, 2023

Time: 7:00 PM

This meeting will be held remotely using Zoom video conferencing technology, as permitted by the Massachusetts Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations, that became effective July 16, 2022. Should the audio function stop working during the Zoom meeting and it cannot be restored, the meeting will end and be rescheduled.

TAC Meeting

Time: Sep 21, 2023 07:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87633955779>

Meeting ID: 876 3395 5779

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,87633955779# US (Chicago)

+16469313860,,87633955779# US

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| 7:00 PM | Roll call of Committee members present; Call to order |
| 7:00 - 7:10 | Review and approval of minutes (August 3, 2023); corrections and motion to approve. |
| 7:10 – 8:00 | Grove St.- Huron Avenue to Belmont Street <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Presentation of project scope▪ Public Comment session on goals for the design; the public is asked to comment on their experiences in this area and their desires for the new design. |
| 8:00 – 8:30 | Crosswalk Policy and vote to recommend to the Select Board. <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Review of suggested edits from the Select Board and committee members▪ Vote on recommendation for approval by the Select Board. |
| 8:30 – 8:45 | Belmont Middle/High School opening and Concord Ave/Hittinger neighborhood Traffic Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Review of Arrival/Dismissal Guidance from Belmont Schools<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Reversal of Underwood and effect on Traffic Flow○ Removal of timed Do-Not-Enter signage on Baker St. and possible challenges in the Hittinger-Baker-Trowbridge-Underwood area.▪ Review of submitted Traffic Calming Request for Concord Ave.▪ Condition and initial assessments for crosswalk installation/improvement at<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ New Library building○ Requested Clay Pit Pond location○ Underwood Ave○ Trowbridge St. |
| 8:45 – 9:00 | New Business: Introduction to Automated Traffic Enforcement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of Current proposed Massachusetts House/Senate legislation for ATE in ten communities in Massachusetts. |
| 9:00 | Adjourn |