



BOARD OF SELECTMEN

TOWN HALL BUILDING
8 PARK STREET

Wednesday, March 23, 2022, 6:00 p.m.

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER: On the above date the Board of Selectmen held a workshop at the Town Hall Board of Selectmen Room. The meeting was called to order at 6:22 p.m. by Chairman Duval. Present from the Board of Selectmen were Chairman Duval, Vice Chair Hoyt, Members Blanchard, and Nowak. *Member Rosenberg was absent.* Also present were Community Development Director Coughlin, Administrative Assistant Dunlap, Matt Chase, Christine Champeau, and Amanda Bazinet from VHB. Brian Rhodes from iBerkshires, and Dan Jin from the Berkshire Eagle were also in attendance, as well as several citizens.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation on Route 8, Howland Ave Redesign: *Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.* Community Development Director Coughlin introduced Matt Chase, Christine Champeau, and Amanda Bazinet from VHB, and reviewed that a three-hour Open House to review the conceptual design of the Route 8, Howland Avenue project took place to begin the process. He noted the intention to tweak the design and incorporate input from those that attended the Open House. *Ms. Bazinet* reviewed the proposed project design going from just south of Lime Street to the North Adams town line. She explained the design emphasized a “road diet” to give more of a boulevard feel and include pedestrian and bicycle travel areas on both sides of the roadway. She explained the goal to reduce vehicle speed and create a more attractive gateway to the town. She noted the goals of the meeting were to discuss the project, gather public input, and then discuss the project with MassDOT. She gave corridor facts to the Board, including the average vehicle speed currently at 55 MPH despite being posted at 45 MPH. She advised between 2016 and 2021 there had been 75 vehicle crashes there, the intent was to reduce crashes and make for a safer passageway while addressing poor pavement conditions and the lack of sidewalks on both sides of the roadway. Proposed improvements included new pavement, a sidewalk with a shared use path, ADA compliance and rapid flashing beacons at crosswalks. The pavement would be narrowed to two lanes and include a median green space. She showed and explained the proposed design and the locations of turning lanes, as well as the transition back to four lanes at the North Adams town line. She noted receiving support for the two lanes but push back on the median green area. She outlined a list of concerns received including truck access, school buses, passing stopped vehicles, and maintenance of the median area. Suggested alternatives were a two-way left-turn lane, removing trees from the median, having roundabouts for turning, adding more street openings and trees and landscaping being added beyond the sidewalk. Salt impact on trees and grasses was noted, as well as reducing speed and increasing enforcement. It was explained that additional comments may be submitted to Community Development Director Coughlin at ecoughlin@town.adams.ma.us. Discussion of the project with MassDOT about funding it through the TIP will take place. A field survey of existing conditions will take place in late spring, and the project at 10% design will be submitted for review in the summer.

A timeframe of five to seven years for construction to begin was estimated. It was noted that the Board of Selectmen was not making decisions about the design, but just receiving the initial presentation. It was pointed out that state and federal guidelines require shared use for pedestrians and bikes, which this project meets. The same process was utilized for the Commercial Street Project. *Member Blanchard* addressed concerns about the only entrance to the Apremont, Brown Street area would create congestion for cars getting in and out, as well as potentially being too narrow for fire and emergency vehicles to get through. It was noted that the Fire Chief had also expressed turnaround concerns as well as hydrants on the east side of the road. Further meetings with him will take place and hydrants may be located on both sides of the road or added to the median. It was emphasized that traffic was going too fast. *Vice Chair Hoyt* clarified that this information was brought to the Board of Selectmen on June of 2017 and there was a good response. The process was explained as having to go to MassDOT at 10% design before it is awarded a number before becoming a project that the Town submits for consideration. A pre-meeting takes place with MassDOT, then the next step is to map it before going to a BRPC meeting in three to six months, to be issued a number potentially by the end of the year. *Mr. Chase* advised that the presentation was for Complete Streets in 2017, and Route 8 South was the higher priority so now is the time to invest in this location. He noted that there were other ideas to address and comments to be compiled. *Vice Chair Hoyt* advised that there were five designs presented to the Board in 2017 and pieces of those are in the presentation today. The Complete Streets Policy includes accessibility for all ages and abilities, which takes time. She expressed concern about the Howland Avenue area where cars are turning into Bounti-Fare Restaurant for large functions, and are using parking across the street where pedestrians cross a four-lane highway. The jurisdiction change at North Adams was noted in that location to the state, and it then becomes a four-lane area. It was explained that MassDOT must be approached for approval to modify the state highway, and see what other options are there. It was pointed out that the event space holds 200 people and the location hosts hundreds of events annually. *Ms. Bazinet* noted that MassDOT constantly changes the shared paths and design standards. *Member Nowak* noted concerns about single lanes impeding truck traffic and not allowing for proper distance for turning, which will slow down traffic. He noted bellying of pavement caused by the wheels causing bevels in the roadway, and that few median trees do well in salt conditions. He noted though it would make it safer, he is not sure if it would be better with two lanes. He explained where it will open up to four lanes it will become a raceway. He asked the public to stay involved, but noted that safety should be the main concern. *Member Blanchard* inquired if an 18-foot width is enough space for repaving, and it was explained repaving would require staging and alternating traffic, night paving, or short-term detours. It was explained that the road is designed from a maintenance perspective to keep it from requiring another major pavement effort until twenty-five years down the line. *Member Nowak* requested VHB look at the hydrology as the water table is high in that area and it may need drainage. It was explained that VHB is not currently working off the survey plan but will initiate the survey and drainage later in the summer and fall to get that level of detail. It was noted that input was received on culverts that have failed, catch basin and drainage issues. Truck traffic will also be considered. The public was asked to provide input. *Erica Girgenti* of Donald Avenue noted she is excited to see a project design like this which addresses an age-friendly community. She detailed how she has assisted people crossing the street with a cane while carrying groceries. She asked VHB to consider the green space and DPW maintenance requirements for that area. *Victor Reese* of Howland Avenue expressed that Howland Avenue is a major raceway and expressed concern that children will be run over. He advised he did not agree with sidewalks on both sides, or having a median. He noted water runoff is a problem as the culvert to Specialty Minerals goes to the river, catch basins are poorly designed and water is an issue since going up to four lanes.

He said it is not safe backing out of driveways and safety is a big problem. He suggested putting in a light to reduce speed by the Bounti-Fare and to have police department surveillance. He pointed out that the median will make it difficult for people and the fire department going down the roadway to come back will create a burned down house. Thomas Labes, the Manager at Specialty Minerals advised he sees some positive things about the design. He noted the high speed on the roadway currently and expressed concern about trucks making turns with the median strep. He said the bike and walking trail is a concern with trucks turning. Jody Fijal of Newark and Old Columbia Streets expressed that having people come down Friend Street is problematic. She noted that people are speeding down Old Columbia Street and someone is gong to get killed there. She said from Newark, Apremont and Brown Streets to go up and around is not fair to the property owners there. There were no more public comments shared at the meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND GOOD OF THE ORDER: *Vice Chair Hoyt* announced that Thunderfest will be held on Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Visitors Center and recommended those that attend patronize the local small businesses. *Member Nowak* asked that everyone think of the people in Ukraine and keep them in their prayers.

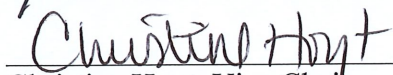
ADJOURNMENT: *Motion made by Member Blanchard to adjourn, second by Vice Chair Hoyt. Vote: unanimous. Motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborah J. Dunlap, Recording Secretary

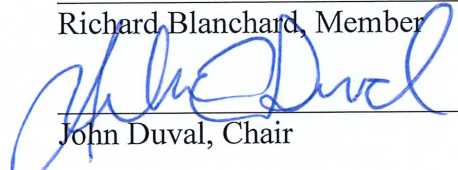


Joseph Nowak, Member



Christine Hoyt, Vice Chair

Richard Blanchard, Member



John Duval, Chair