

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2005

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chairman), Gerst, Albright, Salvucci, Stewart, Yates and Lappin

Absent: Ald. Mansfield

Also present: Gentile, Hess-Mahan, Sangiolo, Coletti, Samuelson, Danberg, Parker, Baker and Fischman

City personnel present: Mayor Cohen, Lou Taverna (City Engineer), Michael Kruse (Director of Planning) and Shawna Sullivan (Committee Clerk)

ITEM RECOMMENDED BY FULL BOARD ON 01/18/05

#432-04 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR submitting the 25% design plans for the reconstruction of Needham Street for review. The design plans provide a detailed depiction of the roadway layout for the "Three Lane Alternative," which provides the most substantial improvements for motorists, pedestrians and business in terms of safety, capacity and aesthetics as compared to the other alternatives.

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-0-2 (Salvucci and Stewart abstaining)**

NOTE: This item was recommitted by the Board for further discussion in Committee, as there were several questions raised at the Full Board (previous Committee report attached). Mr. Kruse and Bill Steffens from McMahon Associates were present for the discussion of this item.

Ald. Lappin asked if there have been any recent changes to the plans for Needham Street. Mr. Steffens stated that the plans have not changed since June of 2004. Ald. Lappin asked if they have spoken to all of the owners along Needham Street. The City has spoken to most of the owners but some of the property owners have not been willing to speak with the City. Ald. Lappin asked if the owners were supportive of the property takings. Mr. Steffens stated that the owners of the Papa Gino's and Crosspoint properties at the intersection of Tower Road and Industrial Road were very happy with the design and did not mind the property takings. However, the property owner at Christina Street is not happy that there will be a land taking. Unfortunately, the only way to align the intersection is to take the corner and two or three parking spaces that are freshly landscaped and striped. The Chairman asked whether the State or City would do the taking. Mr. Steffens stated that the City would ask the State to do the taking but the State's right of way processes can be lengthy and the State may ask the City to do the taking, as the City's eminent domain powers may be stronger than the State's. Ald. Salvucci asked who would pay the property owners for the land. The land would be paid for through the funds allocated for the reconstruction, therefore, it would be the State.

Ald. Samuelson asked why it was an advantage to traffic flow on Needham Street to align Oak and Christina Streets. Currently, the left turns on either approach conflict with each other creating an almost mini rotary within the intersection. If the streets are aligned the left turns that come out of both streets, will miss and not conflict with each other. It is very important because as traffic volumes grow it will be necessary to split the signal phasing to allow Oak Street and Christina Street traffic to go separately, which takes time away from the Needham Street traffic. It is very important for safety reasons and future traffic flow. Ald. Samuelson asked how much the traffic at Oak and Christina is predicted to increase in the future. Mr. Steffens responded that the traffic study predicts growth along the Needham Street Corridor, which affects the volume of traffic that comes out of Oak and Christina Streets. Ald. Gerst asked how much land would be taken at Christina Street. The taking is roughly about 400 sq. ft. and the Mayor stated that it is a large lot and should not affect the owner's ability to conduct business. Ald. Lappin asked if the land taking would create zoning issues for that parcel of land. Michael Kruse was not sure that there would be any impact on zoning due to the taking but will investigate.

Ald. Lappin also wondered if pedestrian crossings had been taken into consideration. Mr. Steffens responded that there are additional pedestrian crossings on Needham Street but the plan does not include the Avalon Bay crossing or signal, as it is not part of the reconstruction plan but funded and constructed by Avalon Bay. The goal is to make Needham Street a much safer place for pedestrians.

Ald. Fischman explained that he submitted a resolution at the last Board meeting in order to put on record a number of issues that have been raised. However, many of his issues have been addressed in the past week but there are still some concerns regarding the traffic light and pedestrian crossing at Avalon Bay, as referred to in the attached letter. It was not his intent to slow down progress of the item but he just wanted to get everything out front.

Ald. Parker asked what Mr. Steffens' reaction was to the attached letter from Srdjan Nedeljkovic, M.D and proceeded to review each of the concerns raised in the letter. Mr. Steffens' responded to each point as follows:

- 1) Pedestrian Safety Islands along the street- The heaviest pedestrian movement is along Winchester Street and there will be new sidewalks and crosswalks allowing pedestrians to move to any side of the street. There are no islands along the Needham Street Corridor, as there is no room to accommodate islands. Crosswalks are located at the intersections, which go corner to corner.
- 2) 10' Sidewalks- Most of the sidewalks will be 8' across throughout the reconstruction but at some locations the sidewalk is 7' wide, as that is the only way to have sidewalks on both sides of the street.

- 3) Street trees – The landscape plan is not part of the 25% plan. However, there is only so much space in the right of way and it will be difficult to landscape with trees.
- 4) Submerging utilities – The Mayor has appointed a special taskforce to look at undergrounding and the reconstruction is the first item on the agenda.
- 5) Transit improvements – Implementing a light rail connection is not part of the plan. The MBTA does own a right of way behind Needham Street, which they could use to extend the railway.
- 6) Rear roadway connections between adjacent parcels – The plan does not include the connections but it is the hope to provide an alternative to traveling on Needham Street during construction by use of right of ways that exist behind both sides of Needham Street.
- 7) Parking in the frontage – Eliminating parking in the frontage is not relevant to the plan and would put the plan in jeopardy.
- 8) Bicyclists – The side lanes accommodate bicyclists but Mr. Steffens is unaware of any signs to be placed along the road.

Ald. Parker then reviewed the specific recommendations contained in Dr. Nedeljkovic's letter. Mr. Steffens explained that the project needs to be done to State standard and the City is not trying to get many exceptions to the standard. The plan greatly improves pedestrian safety at all locations. Ald. Parker asked if the curb cut from Winchester Street to Tedeschi's would be eliminated. Mr. Steffens responded that the property owner would not agree to any curb cut closings. Tedeschi's is land locked and there is very limited space on the site. The letter also suggests a crosswalk across Needham Street at Dedham Street in front of the Tweeter store. The necessary crosswalks for pedestrians to move in that direction are already included in the plan. The next recommendation is to consolidate the curb cut between National Lumber and Easy Street so that vehicle access to National Lumber is from Easy Street. Mr. Steffens responded that the consolidation was rejected by National Lumber because they felt it would create a loss of identity if there were no access from Needham Street. Point #6 is that shared parking should be explored for the businesses on the other side of Needham Street from the Avalon Bay Complex. Mr. Steffens agreed with this point but the owners did not agree, therefore, it was not implemented.

Ald. Baker asked if the City owned the curb cuts why not close them whether or not the property owners agree. The business owners are losing parking and the Mayor felt it was important to have the support of all of the owners. All of the driveways will be much safer, as they will be an apron style access. The driveway access will be far different than what is seen today and it will force people to make more conscience decisions about pulling into and out of driveways. Ald. Baker

asked if once the Board approves the 25% plan any change to the curb cuts disappears as an option.

Ald. Albright asked what type of landscaping could Needham Street have after the reconstruction. Some of the properties have a redesigned parking layout that gives an opportunity to do some landscaping behind the sidewalks. The Polaroid site will lose three curb cuts and the frontage will be landscaped. Ald. Sangiolo asked if the sidewalk abuts the granite curb. Mr. Steffens responded that the granite curb does meet the sidewalk.

Ald. Samuelson feels that the plan is a huge improvement and the three-lane design is the perfect design for Needham Street. She is not in favor of the light at Avalon Bay. The light does not need to be there as there is no cueing of cars leaving Avalon Bay and the light will just delay traffic on Needham Street. It will be criminal if the State approves the light.

Ald. Coletti asked if reconstruction would begin after the new ramp for Route 128 was constructed. It is possible that the reconstruction could be completed before the ramp. The ramp is not going to have a huge impact on the Needham Street reconstruction. Ald. Yates moved approval of the item, which carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chairman