

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2004

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

Absent: Ald. Gerst and Yates

Also present: Ald. Danberg and Parker

City personnel present: Nick Parnell (Commissioner of Public Buildings), David Koses (Transportation Planner), Clint Schuckel (Traffic Engineer), Lou Taverna (City Engineer), Robert Rooney (Commissioner of Public Works) and Shawna Sullivan (Committee Clerk)

#178-04(2) ALD. LAPPIN requesting an update on progress and implementation of the construction information database.

ACTION: **HELD 6-0**

NOTE: Commissioner Parnell joined the Committee for discussion of this item. The Commissioner stated that the formation of the informational database has been completed, although it is not populated. He displayed the Excel spreadsheet that will be used. The spreadsheet is categorized by discipline, project and remarks. There is also a key for noting who is reporting the problem, i.e. school department, contractor, public buildings...He expects to populate the spreadsheet with information in the next few weeks.

Several Committee members were disappointed at the progress made on the database. It has been several months since the Board passed the original item approving the database and little has been done to make the database functional. Many Committee members felt that the database should have been set up as an Access database, as it is easier to utilize searches and compare data in the Microsoft Access program. It was suggested that Commissioner Parnell investigate that option with the Information Technology Department.

Ald. Stewart felt that it was better to start small with the database and build upon it once it was determined that the database was useful. Commissioner Parnell stated that he would be adding the Tier 1 and middle school projects to the database shortly.

Ald. Salvucci made a motion to hold the item until the database is populated and there is a better sense of how it will operate. The Committee voted unanimously to hold the item.

CONTINUATION OF PUBLIC HEARING

#246-04 COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC WORKS requesting approval of the 25% design plan submittal for Walnut Street from Homer Street to Centre Street including a small section of Centre Street to Route 9.

ACTION: **HELD 6-0**

NOTE: The Chairman opened the public hearing. Janice Bourque, 238 Lincoln Street, stated that the Newton Highlands Area Council met on October 28, 2004 to discuss the Walnut Street Reconstruction project. Ms. Bourque provided the Committee with minutes of that meeting, which are attached. The Council reviewed the project in the following segments: parking, pedestrian access, changes to the Hope Fountain, increased speed in areas due to loss of parking and widening of the roadway, intersections, environmental impact, bicycle lanes, safety, exploration of alternatives, sidewalk improvements and local and state control. The attached summary provides notes on the discussion and recommendations.

Srojan S. Nedeljkovic, 15 Bemuth Road, gave an overview of the community feeling at the meeting. The Community feels that the City should reject the plan because parking should be maintained on Walnut Street. The area cannot afford to lose spaces in the business area or the residential area. However, the community is willing to investigate alternatives. There should be additional crosswalks and improvements to existing sidewalks to allow safe pedestrian passage on Walnut Street. With the addition of crosswalks, speed will be reduced. A few people were in favor of the bicycle lanes, as they create a safer environment for cyclists. However, there were concerns regarding the safety of cyclists on Walnut Street because of speed and traffic congestion. There was a lot of concern regarding the proposed changes around the Hope Fountain. Many people felt that the road should not be widened and straightened in this area, as it would encourage speeding. The community is strongly in favor of traffic calming measures on Walnut Street but would like to maintain the geometry of the intersections. The council is not in favor of losing mature trees but would like to see additional plantings along Walnut Street. The Council strongly supports doing Walnut Street in sections and keeping local control.

David Koses, Traffic Planner for the City of Newton, reviewed the attached survey and responses of Walnut Street residents. The survey was sent to 85 residents and the Planning Department received 45 responses. The attachment includes survey highlights.

Carol Kotes, 936 Walnut Street, stated that she was one of two people who gathered signatures for a petition urging the City to reject the State funded plans. Ms. Kotes is not in favor of bike lanes, as she feels they are not safe.

Heather Tausig, 120 Garland Road, is proud to live in Newton. She regularly rides a bike with her child. She feels that the bike lanes promote bike riding, which is good for the environment. She also felt that it would be helpful to make Walnut Street more pedestrian and bike friendly.

Haya Mayman Rivkin, 19 Saxon Road, asked if there were any plans to address the speed on Walnut Street. Walnut Street would be much safer if the speed limit were decreased.

Dr. Robert Staulo, 1155 Walnut Street, is a resident and business owner in Newton Highlands. He is very concerned about the loss of parking in the village center, as there is currently not enough parking for patrons of businesses in the center. There must be parking in order to have a vibrant village center. Mr. Staulo is very upset about the loss of trees and feels the plan is unacceptable.

Arthur Patz, 19 Garland Road, asked how the traffic would be managed because he is concerned that Garland Road will become the detour route. Garland Road cannot sustain the amount of vehicles that use Walnut Street on a daily basis.

Joseph Sanroma, 1000 Walnut Street, is an Engineer and has reviewed the plans for the reconstruction. He noted that the outfall at Hyde Street is not addressed. He asked for the plans to address the sewer and drainage. He also noted that the street widening would require land takings in some areas.

L. Georges Shaded, 1058 Beacon Street is concerned about the removal of parking. He is afraid that the loss of parking will create a parking overflow into the surrounding neighborhood.

Peter Murphy, 1115 Boylston St, is a business owner on Walnut Street and a Newton resident. Mr. Murphy is a frequent biker and has never had a problem on a bike. He would like the City to look at alternatives to this reconstruction plan, as it would be a shame to remove parking.

Barbara Balas a, 46 Columbus Street, has seen a dramatic increase in parking on side streets. She believes that the removal of parking is wrong.

Dan Kerman, 135 Lincoln Street, had a relative struck by a car on Walnut Street. He feels that the street should be reconstructed with bike lanes to provide safety.

Keith Hatfield, 29 Allen Avenue, is in favor of bicycle lanes as they create a somewhat safer environment for cyclists. He would like the City to maintain the berms and landscaping.

Penelope Capconegro, 63 Hyde Street, works in the garden at the corner of Fountain Street and Walnut Street. She would like to know if there has been any discussion regarding placing an irrigation system in the garden.

Carol Codes has heard that Walnut Street is on average 32' wide but the street seems much narrower to her.

Commissioner Rooney stated that Walnut Street has a variable width. The proposed lay out of Walnut Street would make it a constant width. He addressed the issue of land takings and explained that there will be no required land taking for any residents but it may be necessary to sacrifice berm to preserve the width and sidewalks. There has been some discussion with the Traffic Engineer about changing parking to residential parking from Beacon Street to approximately half a block from Berwick Road.

Keith Hatfield, 29 Allen Avenue suggested rough pavement at Forest and Walnut Street, as there have been several accidents due to the sharp turn at that intersection.

Ald. Mansfield wanted to make it clear that it is not bike paths but bike lanes that are being proposed. The bike lanes consist of a narrow piece of the roadway, which is delineated by a white stripe. He suggested "Share the Road" bike signs instead of the bike lanes. Mr. Nedeljkovic felt that "Share the Road" signs encourage reduction of speed and make drivers aware of possible encounters with cyclists.

Ald. Parker has a problem with the reconstruction proposal. He feels that if Walnut Street is widened and straightened it will create more of a danger to pedestrians and cyclists. Ald. Salvucci asked the Commissioner if Walnut Street required a total reconstruction. The Commissioner responded that it needs the reconstruction, which includes repairing and inspecting drainage and sewer pipes. Ald. Salvucci then asked if the Commissioner knew if any of that type of infrastructure needed to be replaced. The Commissioner stated that the City should replace the water pipes.

The Commissioner went on to explain that this project pits abutters and the public good against each other. He would support the State's plan with two accommodations. He would like to see no bike lanes in the village and the curbage at Forest Street less than the State requirement. He would also like to see no changes to the village center. The Chairman asked if there were any plans to

reduce the speed on Walnut Street. The Commissioner responded that the State sets the speed limit and it is locally enforced.

Ald. Stewart asked about the construction schedule. The Commissioner explained that it is subject to State approval. The initial project began in 1995 and several stopping points have occurred. Ald. Mansfield asked if the State approved no change to the village center, if that would include the trees located in the center. The Commissioner responded that some trees do need to come down due to poor health but they would be replaced. Ald. Mansfield explained that all of the trees in the center were planted by a Community Development Block Grant to mask utility wires twenty to twenty-five years ago and have just matured. Ald. Mansfield then asked when the State denied the waiver for the exclusion of bicycle lanes. The Commissioner stated that the waiver was denied in 1997. Ald. Mansfield suggested reapplying for a waiver again and including concepts raised by the Newton Highlands Area Council.

Clint Schuckel, City Traffic Engineer, explained that the parking issues are very difficult. There are currently 25 metered spaces in the village and the reconstruction would create a loss of two metered spaces and a loss of three spaces between 7-9 am and 4-6p.m. during peak hours. He also stated that there is still room for change in the plans. He would recommend an alternate bike route signs for bikes at the start of the village center. The proposed plan calls for three land takings in the village center for buses to pull in and out at stops and there is a possibility that it may not be necessary to create the pull-ins. Ald. Mansfield pointed out that the buses run infrequently and it does not make sense to lose parking spaces to accommodate the buses. Mr. Schuckel stated that he would do everything to maintain the parking spaces. It is possible that the State will decide that the cost of taking the land is prohibitive.

Ald. Parker asked if the right, center and left lane at the Walnut Street/Beacon Street intersection would change. Mr. Schuckel responded that there would be a left turn lane but no right turn lane. Ald. Lappin asked if it was possible to implement any of the recommendations contained in the report of the Newton Highlands Area Council. The Commissioner has not seen the report but will review the recommendations. Ald. Albright supports the bike lanes and feels the City should take advantage of the State funds.

Ald. Mansfield felt that the State's concept of roadway design is to move traffic as fast as possible, which is not appropriate for a residential Street. He is not in favor of approving the 25% plan. He proposed a Resolution to His Honor the Mayor and to the Commissioner of Public Works requesting that the City resubmit to the Mass. Highway Department a request for a waiver of dedicated bicycle lanes in the proposed reconstruction of **Walnut St.** (Homer St. to Forest St.) in consideration of alternatives supporting bicycle use; and also that the 25%

plans include additional traffic calming and pedestrian-oriented design. The Chairman felt that it was worth another try at obtaining a waiver for the bike lanes.

The Committee held the item until there was an opportunity to respond to the resolution Ald. Mansfield proposed. The Committee then approved the resolution below.

#246-04(2) PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE proposing Resolution to His Honor the Mayor and to the Commissioner of Public Works requesting that the City resubmit to the Mass. Highway Department a request for a waiver of dedicated bicycle lanes in the proposed reconstruction of **Walnut St.** (Homer St. to Forest St.) in consideration of alternatives supporting bicycle use; and also that the 25% plans include additional traffic calming and pedestrian-oriented design elements.
APPROVED 6-0

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chairman