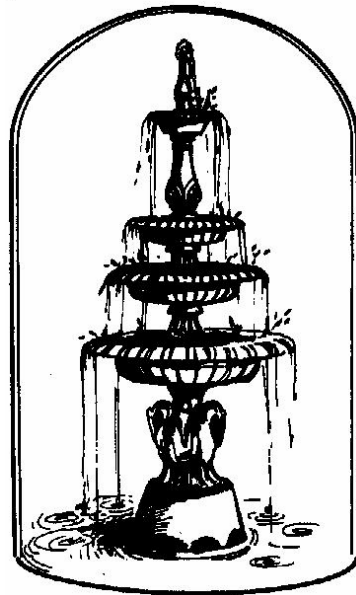


# *Walnut Street Reconstruction*



## **Summary of the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council**

**November 17, 2004**

# Summary of Newton Highlands Neighborhood Council Community Meeting on Walnut Street Reconstruction

The following issues were discussed at the October 28, 2004 community meeting:

## 1) Parking on Walnut Street:

- a) Business district: there should be no loss of parking on Walnut Street in the business district.
- b) Residential area: some people depend on the availability of parking, either for themselves or when guests visit. Others are favorable towards a bicycle lane.

## 2) Pedestrian access on Walnut Street:

- a) Consistent wide sidewalks are necessary to allow for safety and use by strollers, children, and all pedestrians .
- b) Increased number of crosswalks to allow safe crossing and calming of traffic to be added especially in the residential area near Duncklee Street and Hyde Street.
- c) A slow speed should be maintained on Walnut Street throughout.
- d) Existing crosswalks at the intersection at Lincoln and Walnut are heavily utilized by pedestrians and transit users and should not be eliminated.
- e) Improvements for crosswalks at Four Corners would be welcomed, as they currently do not allow for safe crossing for strollers, children and walking to businesses.

## 3) Changes at the Hope Fountain:

- a) Speeding cars at the Fountain cause great concern and fear for safety of children who board school buses, and significant property damage has occurred during the years.
- b) Concern was expressed whether widening the road will increase car speeds as drivers descend the hill and do not anticipate they are entering a vibrant, pedestrian-filled village center.
- c) Current signage does not indicate that slower speeds are necessary as one approaches the Village.
- d) Further traffic calming measures are desirable, such as a crosswalk just north of the Fountain, and consideration should be made to protect persons on the sidewalk from fast moving vehicles.

#### 4) Intersections:

- a) Better delineation of turning lanes and improvements in traffic flow are favored.
- b) However, intersections must not be “improved” such that they encourage faster or increased traffic. Intersections must remain “pedestrian-friendly.”
- c) Improved signage or signaling for right hand turning would improve flow of turning lanes.
- d) The bus stop in front of Fleet Bank (at the intersection of Walnut and Station Ave.) should be improved for pedestrian boarding and access.
- e) The intersection of Walnut and Route 9 is wide and it encourages cars to exit Route 9 and speed up Walnut to the light at Centre Street, causing real safety concerns.

#### 5) Issues of financing and local vs. state control:

- a) There are questions on the overall cost of the project.
- b) However, most people support local control rather than a state-run project.

#### 6) Environment:

- a) Maintenance and additions of trees were welcomed.
- b) Proper trees should be added at intersections, not removed, to increase beauty and pedestrian friendliness while still allowing for clarity for drivers.

#### 7) Bicycle lane:

- a) Some individuals spoke in favor of a bicycle lane citing ability to commute to work, to schools and store access.
- b) Concern was shared regarding safety of bicycles moving along Walnut due to vehicle speed and busy intersections.
- c) Requests for an “alternate” bike path (for example, on adjacent streets) was requested to allow for safe movement within the city.

#### 8) Sidewalks:

- a) Most people favored more well-defined sidewalks, especially approaching Four Corners
- b) In the residential area, a berm between the sidewalk and street is favored.

## Recommendations for the Public Facilities Committee

The Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council recommends that the Public Facilities committee **REJECT** the Walnut Street reconstruction project in its current form.

Instead, the following alternatives are recommended:

### 1) Parking:

- a) Should be maintained in both the commercial and business areas of the road.
- b) No parking spaces should be lost in the business district on Walnut Street. Specifically, parking should be maintained near Centre Street and near Lincoln Street, as it currently exists.
- c) The NHNAC is not opposed to studying options to improve pedestrian access at Station Street if parking loss is limited to 2 spaces in order to widen sidewalks to improve safety and access for pedestrians at the bus/rail stop.
- d) No parking restrictions should be placed in the residential area.
- e) Newly designated parking should be created on one side of Walnut from Carthay Circle to the Aqueduct (about 500 feet in length) where it is currently not permitted.

### 2) Bicycles:

- a) Safe bicycle use should be promoted on Walnut Street using “Share the Road” signage and through other efforts that increase awareness of bicyclists on City streets. Safe bicycle facilities should be provided in Village centers and near MBTA stops.
- b) However, no separate bicycle lanes should be designated on Walnut Street.
- c) Alternative bicycle paths should be explored to encourage access to schools and stores that are safe and does not cause the loss of parking.
- d) No parking should be lost on expense of a “bicycle lane,” whether it be marked as such or not.

### 3) Pedestrians:

- a) Pedestrian access must be maintained and improved with consistent, level sidewalks.
- b) New crosswalks that traverse Walnut Street should be considered in the residential area, near Four Corners, Dunklee/Hyde, and prior to the Hope Fountain both for purposes of traffic calming and safety. All crosswalks should be maintained in the Village at the Lincoln & Walnut intersection.
- c) Traffic calming measures should be explored for the section of Walnut Street near Boylston Street (Route 9). Specifically, a “bulb-out” curb or a narrowed roadway geometry at the Walnut Street entrance from Route 9 should be considered.
- d) Curb cuts at driveways or onto residential streets should not be widened, except where absolutely necessary, as this makes it more difficult for pedestrians to cross.

4) The Hope Fountain, and the curve at the Fountain:

- a) The roadway geometry at the Hope Fountain should be re-evaluated to improve safety without increasing vehicle speed.
- b) No widening or straitening of the road should be implemented.
- c) Measures to improve pedestrian safety should be undertaken in this area. Specifically, a crosswalk (perhaps raised) should be placed before the curve in the road for southbound travelers, encouraging slow speeds.

5) Intersections:

- a) Current intersection geometry should be maintained as much as possible. No widening of intersections is desired.
- b) Specifically, the intersection of Walnut and Beacon (Four Corners) should not be reconfigured as proposed by the EarthTech/MassHighway plans. An alternate design which improves traffic flow while enhancing pedestrian safety and overall aesthetics should be created.
- c) The intersection of Walnut and Lincoln Streets should not be widened. The length of the turning lane from Walnut southbound onto Lincoln should not be increased, as it eliminates parking and allows for increased speed. The widened intersection proposed by EarthTech reduces safety and degrades the pedestrian environment in the Village center, and has thereby has the potential to adversely affect businesses in the area.
- d) The length of the left hand turning lane from Centre Street northbound onto Walnut Street should not be increased. This roadway widening has the potential to induce higher traffic volumes and will further degrade the residential environment of that portion of Centre Street. No property takings should be imposed.
- e) To save cost, new traffic signals may not be necessary along the entire project.

6) Issues of aesthetics, streetscape, and historical context:

- a) Mature street trees should be maintained, as much as possible, and no mature healthy trees should be removed. Trees in the Village Center are especially at risk.
- b) The NHNAC supports the planting of many new trees. However, the City must maintain and rejuvenate these plantings, as there is a fairly high rate of tree loss in this type of environment.
- c) Where possible, curb cut consolidation should be considered. This applies primarily in the Four Corners and the Village segments.
- d) The NHNAC strongly supports efforts to bury utilities as part of this project. This can be done at relatively low cost, and it will result in improved safety, a more pleasing environment, an increased residential and business property values.

- 7) Historical Context and Streetscape example (in the setting of future development):
  - a) Curb cut consolidation at the Highland Station and Liquor store could be integrated with potential future development, thereby re-establishing the historic streetscape. Future development could include moving the buildings frontage close to the sidewalk, reducing curb cuts to provide new on-street parking with business off-street parking in the rear.
  - b) The historical context of Walnut Street and the Newton Highlands Village should be maintained by avoiding roadway widening and other measures that would enhance cut-through traffic, speeding cars, and degradation of the pedestrian and walkable streetscape environment.
  
- 8) Local control
  - a) The NHNAC supports local control over the Walnut Street reconstruction project. The Council, most residential neighbors, and many business owners believe that the City would be more responsive and respectful towards the needs of the community than any state entity in reconstructing Walnut Street.
  - b) If necessary, the NHNAC supports the possibility that this project be done in sections, such that financing the project would be more feasible.
  - c) The NHNAC supports the creation of a “Citizen’s Task Force” to serve in an advisory role for the City in the Walnut Street reconstruction project.

Because the currently modeled Walnut Street Reconstruction Project fails to meet the above goals, the Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council advises the Public Facilities Committee, and subsequently the Board of Aldermen, to **REJECT** the EarthTech plans at its November 17, 2004 meeting.