Joint Town Council Public Works Committee and Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee Meeting: Summary

June 19, 2017 – 7:00 PM

Town Hall, Administration Building, 149 Main Street, Watertown, MA

Present

State Elected Officials
State Representative Jon Hecht

Town of Watertown Attendees
Matthew Shuman and Dennis Sheehan, Department of Public Works (DPW)
Gideon Schreiber, Community Development & Planning

Town Council Public Works Committee Members
Councilor Aaron Dushku
Councilor Susan Falkoff
Councilor Tony Palomba

Watertown Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee Members
Ethan Davis, Chair
Andy Compagna
Sheila Fay
Jesse Hammond
Tricia Hopkins
Oliver Rick
Maria Saiz
Sam Scoppettone

Project Team Attendees
Kristopher Surette and Michael Pompili, WorldTech Engineering (WTE)
Nancy Farrell and Sarah Paritsky, Regina Villa Associates (RVA)

Public Attendees
A list of public attendees can be found at the end of this document.
**Introductions**

Councilor Aaron Dushku, Chair of the Town Council Public Works Committee, opened the meeting at 7:05 PM. He stated that the meeting is jointly hosted by the Watertown Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee (WBPC). He asked the committee members to introduce themselves. Councilor Dushku said the Mount Auburn Street project started in 2007, and has funding from state and federal agencies. He said the project has a new website (www.mountauburnstreet.com), described how the project follows the Complete Streets methodology, and distributed a handout on MassDOT’s Project Development process (see page 10). Councilor Dushku explained that even though the Project Initiation Form has been submitted, there is still an opportunity to discuss the planning and design. This meeting is intended to focus on bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Councilor Dushku said the project team engaged a consultant for public outreach and communications to report back to the public on a regular basis. Councilor Dushku introduced other Town officials present: State Representative Jon Hecht, Matthew Shuman (Town Engineer), and Councilor Lisa Feltner.

M. Shuman asked how many attendees received an email about this meeting; many raised their hands. He encouraged attendees to visit the website and sign up for email updates. He noted that attendees can speak to issues outside of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations at this meeting. He introduced Nancy Farrell and Sarah Paritsky of RVA, who have been added to the project to work on public participation and involvement. He said notes from this meeting will be posted on the website.

M. Shuman introduced the following individuals: Kristopher Surette and Michael Pompili, WTE; Geraldine Vatan and Courtney Dwyer, MassDOT District 6; Philip Groth, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA); Dave Ferris and Jason Cohen, Watertown Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA); Jeff Brown, Watertown Planning Board; and Gideon Schreiber, Watertown Community Development & Planning.

N. Farrell said the goal of this meeting is to update everyone on the Mount Auburn Street project. She said K. Surette will present the updates, and then committee members will speak, followed by members of the public. She encouraged commenters to speak briefly to allow for as many comments as possible.

N. Farrell said the project team has received approximately 20 comments through the new website and email address. As of June 19, a total of 673 people visited the website, and there are 2,400 page views. The mailing list consists of over 3,000 email addresses. She encouraged everyone to sign up for updates.

K. Surette began the presentation (available on the project website) and reviewed the meeting agenda.

**Purpose of Meeting – Why are we here?**

K. Surette said residents were concerned about the bicycle accommodations proposed at the workshop in December 2016. This presentation will review the team’s recommendations and identify potential conflicts in the alternatives analysis. He said he will identify areas where additional information is needed.

**Project Recap**
K. Surette reviewed the project timeline graphic and said the Project Initiation Form and Project Need Form were submitted in 2009. He also noted that some of the steps on the MassDOT Project Development Process did not capture the non-linear aspects of the Mt. Auburn Street project schedule. Many meetings were held to discuss the project goals and objectives. K. Surette said the project is aiming to receive Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding and begin construction in Fiscal Year 2022. K. Surette noted that the project is the highest ranked Complete Streets project programmed in the TIP and reviewed the scoring categories.

**Public Participation & Outreach**

K. Surette reiterated that RVA was added to the project team and will help involve the public in the project. The project team will track and respond to comments and questions received at this meeting and through the project website. The project website includes existing documentation, conceptual plans, and a way to sign up for the email list or submit comments.

**Project Context**

K. Surette said 5,000 people ride the MBTA bus on Mount Auburn Street each day, making up 30% of all corridor users. He explained that the roadway also serves 17,000 vehicles each day and is a vital route between communities and to local destinations, including Mount Auburn Hospital.

**Bicycle Accommodations**

K. Surette provided an overview of three types of bicycle accommodations Watertown is considering:

1. Buffered bike lanes with parking on the outside (at the curb)
2. Buffered bike lanes with parking on the inside (on left side of cyclist)
3. Raised, separated bike lane, no parking (at sidewalk level)

**Design Overview & Approach**

K. Surette reviewed several resources the team is consulting for design guidelines. He said the project team must fit accommodations for pedestrians and bicycles and traffic operations within a fixed right-of-way. As an urban principal arterial, Mount Auburn Street’s redesign must adhere to certain minimum widths for travel lanes (11’ which is also required for MBTA vehicle passage), turning lanes (10’), and bike lanes (5’ to 6.5’ minimum). He noted that the revised concepts to be discussed later in the meeting incorporated these standards and in some cases represented changes to the original plan (such as reducing lane width from 12’ to 11’). He described possible transit improvements, which may include rehabilitation of stops, installing bus shelters, transit signal priority, and temporary dedicated bus lanes.

K. Surette described how the proximity of utility poles and mature trees close to the curb (and potential construction) can create design challenges. Other design challenges include snow storage and removal, greenspace areas in the streetscape, high number of curb cuts and traffic volume at driveways, sight distance requirements that can impact safety and parking, and grading of driveways. Bearing in mind these restrictions, K. Surette said the project team’s design recommendation is to work within the existing curb-to-curb width of Mount Auburn Street.

**Bicycle Facilities**
K. Surette explained that the corridor has been broken into two segments: (1) Patten Street to Coolidge Square (which he later clarified is at Arlington Street), and (2) Coolidge Square (Arlington Street) to the Cambridge City Line.

K. Surette described the alternatives for bicycle facilities in the Patten Street to Coolidge Square segment:

**Patten Street to Coolidge Square: Alternative 1A**

On the north side of the road (to Watertown Square), there would be a bike lane at the curb with a painted roadside buffer next to a travel lane. This is cost effective and allows for snow removal in the bike lane, but bikes are adjacent to traffic and could conflict with buses that stop in the bike lane.

On the south side of the road (to Cambridge), there would be a parking lane along the curb next to a bike lane with painted buffers on each side. This would make it easier for bikes to make turns and there would be buffer zones on each side, but bikes are riding alongside traffic.

K. Surrette noted that the team will look at specific bus stops and how they would interact with the bike facilities as the design progresses.

**Patten Street to Coolidge Square: Alternative 1B**

The north side of the road is identical to Alternative 1A (see above).

On the south side of the road, there would be a bike lane along the curb, next to a painted buffer and parking lane. While this protects bikes from moving vehicles, there are snow removal challenges and the potential for loss of parking and parking bans (to allow for snow removal and sight distance requirements).

**Patten Street to Coolidge Square: Alternative 2A**

On the north side of the road, there would be a separated bike lane, raised at the sidewalk level. This is considered the safest route for bikes, but there would be potential pedestrian conflicts at bus stops.

On the south side of the road, there would be a painted buffer (for the swing zone of car doors) with the bike lane on the inside of parking (alongside the travel lane). This would make it easier for bikes to make turns and there would be a “door zone” buffer, but bikes would ride alongside traffic.

**Patten Street to Coolidge Square: Alternative 2B**

The north side of the road is identical to Alternative 2A (see above).

On the south side of the road, there would be a bike lane along the curb, next to a painted buffer and parking lane (identical to the south side option in Alternative 1B). The pros/cons are the same as in Alternative 1B.

K. Surette showed a matrix summarizing the options for the north and south sides, with pros and cons of each.
Coolidge Square to Cambridge City Line

K. Surette said the project team is still investigating options in this segment, and additional analysis is required. There is the potential to include separated bicycle facilities in this area. The team is coordinating with the MBTA for enhanced bus operations and the City of Cambridge on the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Mount Auburn Street / Fresh Pond project. He added that the original concept proposed adding parking to the north side of the road, which does not currently exist. Separated facilities would not allow for an increase in parking.

Recommendations

K. Surette shared the team’s recommendations; first, to maintain the existing curb-to-curb width. Between Patten Street and Coolidge Square, the team recommends further investigation of separated facilities on the north side (to Watertown Square), but if they are unsuitable, the team will recommend a buffered bike lane. On the south side (to Cambridge), the team recommends providing buffered bike lanes on the street-side of parking (with parking up against the curb), or if there is no parking, against the curb. The team recommends investigating separated facilities in the Coolidge Square to Cambridge City Line segment.

Next Steps – Where do we go from here?

After gathering public feedback, the team will apply the recommended section to the Patten Street to Coolidge Square corridor and see if there are any issues. Next, the team will look at intersection geometry and driveways. The team will also consider feasible alternatives for the Coolidge Square to Cambridge City Line alternatives and coordinate with the MBTA and City of Cambridge.

K. Surette noted the project team will coordinate with the DCR Fresh Pond / Mount Auburn Street Master Plan.

K. Surette encouraged attendees to visit the project website and sign up for email updates. An attendee asked that the team enlarge the size of the plans on the website or enable pop-up windows of the images.

Questions

N. Farrell invited the Committee Members to comment first.

Ethan Davis, WBPC Chair, asked about the alternatives that have protected bike lanes on one side of the road. K. Surette said there are two alternatives, each with protected (vertically separated) bike lanes on the north side which can be accommodated because there is no existing parking. M. Shuman added that there is more commercial use on the south side of the street. E. Davis asked how the Coolidge Square to Cambridge investigation differs. K. Surette said there is more available right-of-way in that segment, so the team will explore the potential for vertically separated lanes on both sides of the road by coordinating with the City of Cambridge. M. Shuman said the community will decide if parking should be added in the segment near Cambridge and Belmont; if it is not added, there are more opportunities for bicycle facilities.
Oliver Rick, WBPC, said the painted buffer next to the bike lane on the south side along moving traffic is not very helpful as drivers often drive in bike lanes. He prefers a separated, buffered lane.

Sam Scoppettone, WBPC, provided some background on bike lane policy. He said protected bike lanes help encourage people to leave their cars, ride a bike, and ride the bus, all of which helps free up traffic for drivers. He supports physical protection between cars and the bike lane on the south side. Flex posts can be removed in the winter for snow removal. He supports staying within the curb to preserve the flexibility to experiment. He believes adding pedestrian bump outs creates less flexibility in the future to accommodate bicyclists.

Jesse Hammond, WBPC, thanked the team for including bikes. He asked if delivery trucks could park in the turn lanes instead of the bike lanes. K. Surette said the team will look into that idea but questioned if it would be suitable in the Mount Auburn Street corridor. J. Hammond asked who is responsible for shoveling bump outs at a cross walk. M. Shuman reviewed the commercial ordinance for moving snow but there is no requirement for residents. Watertown DPW removes snow from bus stops, ramps, and near schools and municipal properties. He said he will need to confirm this.

Trisha Hawkins, WBPC, agreed with S. Scoppettone’s comment about interim options that leave more flexibility. She noted that the City of Everett is testing out dedicated bus lanes in the morning rush hour.

Councilor Dushku clarified that in the section illustrations, there is not going to be a two-way turn lane – this just shows where the left turn lane would go. K. Surette confirmed this approach. Councilor Dushku said he is concerned about bus stops and supports a shared bus/bike lane. He said he did not realize parking would be added on the north side and generally, he does not think parking should be added anywhere it does not exist. He supports car-protected bike lanes and questioned why concerns about the potential of “dooring” were greater for outside lanes (driver’s side) than they were for inside (passenger’s side) lanes. K. Surette said that is a concern for whichever side of the car is next to a bike lane, but most incidents happen on the driver’s side. M. Shuman added that concerns about driveways and sight distances on the south side of the street are the main reason why car-protected bike-lanes were not being recommended.

Susan Falkoff, Town Council Public Works Committee, asked for clarification about the 40 feet sight distance requirement. K. Surette explained that added distance allows vehicles to recognize a pedestrian or bicyclist before turning or merging. Councilor Falkoff agreed that she does not see a need for additional parking on the north side of the street near residences. She asked if there will be a loss of parking in Coolidge Square. K. Surette said there is a potential loss due to sight distance requirements. Councilor Falkoff advised the project team to do everything it can to preserve parking in the business district.

Maria Saiz, WBPC, said she thinks this is an improved approach, especially the separated bike lane on the north side. She acknowledged that snow removal is an issue regardless of which bike facility is selected. She said the treatment for existing protected bike lanes should be used on Mount Auburn Street and throughout Watertown. She agreed with S. Scoppettone about supporting separated lanes, without which, she said, there would be a 60 to 70% decrease in bike traffic. She encouraged the team to consider raising bike lanes to the curb, instead of street level, on the south side for increased visibility. If that is not possible, she expressed her preference for bollards or another physical barrier. K. Surette said the team
considered separated bike lanes on both sides, but this did not fit within the existing curb width because an additional buffer would be required on the curbside. He explained that the north side of the road has a shoulder that can accommodate the extra buffer. M. Saiz said if any bump outs are needed, the team should make sure the bike lane is to the right of the bump outs (e.g. ‘bump islands’). She added that it would be helpful to discuss how bicyclists, cars, and pedestrians will interact at each intersection.

Andy Compagna, WBPC, said this project should elevate quality of life and encourage safe walking and cycling. He requested additional information about the interactions and conflicts between bikes, pedestrians, cars, and buses. K. Surette said that is the next step for the team after the section is established for the corridor. A. Compagna asked the team to explore a connection to Mount Auburn Street with the greenway to Fresh Pond through Cottage Street.

Sheila Fay, WBPC, reiterated S. Scoppette’s words about buffered bike lanes and the necessity of a physical barrier to ensure safety. She said she understands from an example in Cambridge that a lot of width is necessary to make protected bike lanes safe.

N. Farrell opened the floor to comments from elected officials, followed by members of the public.

Lisa Feltner, Town Councilor, District B, said she lives on Parker Street. She said she did not see her comments in the December meeting presentation. She thinks making changes to on-street parking and changing Parker Street to one-way would be problematic for her neighborhood. She asked the team to look at traffic impacts as access to her neighborhood is challenging. She reiterated J. Hammond’s comments about delivery zones. She’d like to see small businesses thrive while balancing issues with trucks on Mount Auburn Street and side streets.

Jeff Brown, Planning Board, asked if Mount Auburn Street is currently four lanes and will become a three-lane street with bike facilities; K. Surette confirmed. M. Pompili said that with signal improvements throughout the corridor and new protected left-turn phases, the traffic operations will flow efficiently. J. Brown asked if the bike lanes are two-way or one-way; K. Surette said the lanes are one-way.

Dave Farris, ZBA, said he is commenting as a citizen who lives close to Coolidge Square. He said if parking on the north side of Coolidge Square near the hardware store is displaced, it could be made up on the south side. He described his safety concerns, particularly for people on foot, followed by people on bikes, and then people in vehicles. He said pedestrians feel more comfortable when separated from bikes that can travel very quickly. He asked which bike placement is safest for bicyclists to make a left turn. K. Surette said on the traffic side (inside) is the safest in his opinion. D. Farris added that there is a dedicated two-way bike lane in downtown Boston that is not well used.

Jason Cohen, ZBA, said he reviewed intersection diagrams at a previous meeting. He asked where dedicated left turn lanes will be located, and if diagrams can be found on the project website. K. Surette said the team has taken a step back for now, based on comments on bicycles and pedestrians. The left turn lane locations likely will not change, but the configuration around them may. M. Shuman said the original plans will be posted to the website.

Blake Jenssen, a Watertown resident, said he is a multimodal transit user. He asked why the dual-direction separated bike lane was ruled out and if separated lanes could be included on the north side. He emphasized the need for safe crossings. Councilor Palomba later supported B. Jenssen’s idea of a two-way
separated, elevated bike lane. He noted the committee has not discussed pedestrians as much and he hopes the project team carefully considers pedestrian safety. K. Surette said that a bi-directional bike lane and space for pedestrians are not feasible on one side of the road, even on the more spacious north side. The bi-directional lanes would require more space than is available for the layout.

Jon Bockian, Watertown Public Transit Task Force (WPTTF), thanked the committee and DPW for this session. He said without information about efficiency and safety of bus stops it is difficult to choose between the options. K. Surette said this will be part of the next steps, where the team will examine each bus stop, wheelchair ramp, and pedestrian crossing.

An attendee commented that she agrees; bike lanes and bus stops can be very dangerous and need to be closely examined.

An attendee asked if there are any intersections where left turns for residents will be prohibited. K. Surette said no, the original design submission did not include any additional no-left-turns. He said not every intersection will have a turn lane. M. Pompili said a left turn lane is helpful wherever significant traffic is taking a left turn. He added that signals will create gaps in flow in the other direction so a car does not have to block traffic making a left. He later added that the traffic statistics can be found on the project website.

An attendee asked where cyclists are headed during rush hour. K. Surette said part of the design process involves figuring out where bicyclists are coming from and where they are headed. M. Pompili clarified that Patten Street is the project limit, where the Summer Street project (constructed in 2012) ended. The two projects can be connected with striping on the road. G. Schreiber said the WBPC has volunteered in the past to complete bicyclists and pedestrian counts. M. Saiz commented on the Marshall Street/Common Street work.

Deborah Peterson, a resident of Coolidge Square, described an economic development plan conducted prior to this project in 2007. She complained that planners have forgotten about this plan and their promise to incorporate it into this project. Before this project goes further, she encouraged the team to meet with businesses and residents on economic development issues. G. Schreiber later explained that retail parking is important for economic and planning reasons. G. Schreiber said the Comprehensive Plan is a more updated study. Councilor Dushku said the Council will look into the Coolidge Square economic development plan in more detail.

S. Scoppettone described studies that have shown that protected bike lanes can be great for businesses in a neighborhood with tight parking, which was not originally designed for cars; while motorists might not bother trying to find parking, people on bikes will patronize a business.

S. Fay said one of the project benefits will be slowing down traffic. She explained that many drivers travel at 45 miles per hour in Coolidge Square and the noise level is noticeable. Slower traffic and lower noise levels will also help benefit the businesses.

An attendee said her family has owned a flower shop in Coolidge Square for over 75 years and people do not bike to her business. She explained that maintaining parking is vital to independent businesses in Watertown.
Councilor Dushku asked if physical buffers, including removable bollards, would be possible on Mount Auburn Street. M. Shuman said bollards are not possible if bike lanes are on the inside of parking due to access requirements. He said DPW has concerns about bollards and flex posts but they have not been ruled out and will be discussed further as a possibility. He suggested a trial project could be done to evaluate them on Arsenal Street between Irving Street and Taylor Street.

Councilor Dushku asked if any interim measures can be implemented today, perhaps with striping. M. Pompili described the challenges of striping a 2-mile corridor, in particular the high capital cost (between $200,000 and $800,000). He described other project goals: to reduce stormwater runoff, increase pedestrian accommodations, and improve efficiency with new traffic signals. M. Shuman described concerns with removing and adding markings that affect the overall pavement condition. M. Shuman stated that a small, rather than corridor-wide, trial could be considered, given these concerns. Councilor Dushku commented that the WBPC may be able to come up with a list of discrete locations of concern for interim safety solutions.

Councilor Falkoff noted that the CVS parking lot is underutilized and CVS will not share it with residents at night. She mostly drives and does not wish to ride her bike because she is nervous about leaving it (theft).

Councilor Palomba asked how the team can make recommendations for the corridor unless it looks at bus lanes, bump outs, and other issues. K. Surette explained that the recommendations may change if they are deemed unsuitable.

N. Farrell encouraged attendees to write to the team with any further comments. She concluded the meeting at 9:03 PM.

Public Attendees
Jon Bockian, WPTTF
Charlie Breitrose, Watertown News
Elisabeth Cianciola, Charles River Watershed Association
Jason Cohen, ZBA
Courtney Dwyer, MassDOT District 6
Sally Eyring
Dave Ferris
Marian Ferro
John J. Foley
Elliot Friedman
Arcady Goldmints-Orlev, MBTA ROC
Philip Groth, MBTA
Philip Horowitz
Blake Jenssen
Teresa Leonard
Tyke Patriquin, Bus Owner
Deborah Peterson
Susan Potter
Kirk Kaloustian
William Roberts
Ruby Roberts
Tim Roche
Mary Shia
Dawn Slaven
David Stokes
Geraldine Vatan, MassDOT District 6
Abby Yanow
Exhibit 2-1
Overview of Project Development

**PROCESS**

**STEP I** Problem/Need/Opportunity Identification

**STEP II** Planning

**STEP III** Project Initiation

**STEP IV** Environmental/Design/ROW Process

**STEP V** Programming

**STEP VI** Procurement

**STEP VII** Construction

**STEP VIII** Project Assessment

**OUTCOMES**

1. Project Need Form (PNF)
2. Project Planning Report
   (If necessary)
3. Project Initiation Form (PIF)
   3. Identification of Appropriate Funding
   3. Definition of Appropriate Next Steps
   3. Project Review Committee Action
4. Plans, Specs and Estimates (PS&E)
   4. Environmental Studies and Permits
   4. Right-of-Way Plans
   4. Permits
5. Regional and State TIP
   5. Programming of Funds
6. Construction Bids and Contractor Selection
7. Built Project

Source: MassHighway

These eight steps are described in detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter.