Town Council Committee on Public Works Meeting: Summary

*Patten Street to School Street*

October 16, 2018 – Open House at 6:00 PM; Meeting at 7:00 PM

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

**Present**

*Town of Watertown Attendees*
Superintendent Gerald Mee, Matthew Shuman, Department of Public Works (DPW)
Gideon Schreiber and Laura Wiener, Community Development & Planning
Sergeant David Sampson, Watertown Police Department

*Town Council Public Works Committee Members*
Councilor Vincent Piccirilli
Councilor Tony Palomba
Councilor Ken Woodland

*Additional Town Councilors*
Council President Mark Sideris
Councilor Caroline Bays
Councilor Anthony Donato
Councilor Susan Falkoff
Councilor Lisa Feltner
Councilor Angeline Kounelis

*Project Team Attendees*
Rich Benevento, Bill Mertz, and Kristopher Surette, WorldTech Engineering (WTE)
Sarah Paritsky, Regina Villa Associates (RVA)

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

**Materials (available on project website)**
Introductions

Councilor Vincent Piccirilli, Chair of the Town Council Committee on Public Works, initiated the meeting. He introduced Committee members and said the Council is tasked with a detailed review of the Mount Auburn Street project. This meeting is focused on Mount Auburn Street from Patten Street to approximately School Street.

Kris Surette, WorldTech Engineering, introduced representatives from the Town, MassDOT, and MBTA. He described what came out of the July 10 Town Council meeting and the goals of the meeting. K. Surette delivered a presentation which can be found on the project website (www.MountAuburnStreet.com/documents). K. Surette summarized public input received since the July 10 Town Council meeting. He described the existing bus network, including the spacing of the stops and number of passengers boarding or departing the bus in the Parker Street Business District. Responding to the community’s request, the team prepared a graphic showing illegal parking areas and referred to page 4 of the handout. The Town recently installed a new hydrant at the corner of Philips Street located within a proposed bump-out location to maximize parking on this block.

K. Surette reviewed three Parker Street intersection alternatives, including the proposed parking spaces, bus stop relocations, and pedestrian impacts. He said Concept 1 corresponds closely to the July 2018 concept, though one parking space was removed based on MBTA feedback. K. Surette reviewed the pros and cons of Concept 1 (see slide 9). He noted that the team would like pedestrians to use the newly-constructed Common Street as the preferable pedestrian network, so the design properly aligns pedestrian crossings with the Common Street sidewalk. K. Surette described some renderings of Concept 1 that respond to previous requests to illustrate the concepts.

K. Surette provided an overview of Concept 2 (see slides 12-13), detailing the pros and cons for pedestrians, transit riders, and drivers. Councilor Palomba confirmed with K. Surette that the Franklin Street bus stop is removed in Concepts 1 and 2.

K. Surette described Concept 3 as similar to what exists today. He noted the crossing at Franklin Street would be signalized via Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB), so he anticipates most students would use the back entrance to the High School. He reviewed other pros and cons of Concept 3 (see slide 15). K. Surette provided a summary of the three concepts and stated the team’s recommendation is for Concept 1 (consolidated bus stops eastbound).

K. Surette noted that a subsequent Public Works Committee meeting is scheduled on October 30 to review the eastern half of the corridor, with a focus on the Coolidge Square Business District. The next step is to submit the 25% Design to MassDOT, which is on a critical path to move forward with a FY2022 advertisement. He noted the loading zone on Chestnut Street will be taken into consideration.

Discussion – Common/Parker Street Intersection
Councilor Piccirilli invited the Committee members to speak first. Councilor Piccirilli asked about the Bates Road crossing and the bus stop across from Russell Avenue; K. Surette described the changes in those locations. The design does not include a matching bus stop near Russell Avenue due to potential encroachments onto private property and parking impacts, but the stops are still within the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA's) guidelines for stop spacing.

Councilor Palomba asked K. Surette to provide additional information about the walking routes for High School students between the three concepts.

Councilor Woodland asked for information about the issue of bus queueing. K. Surette said there is high bus turnover at these stops, and queuing could result in a bus blocking the road. Wes Edwards, MBTA, explained that queuing happens when a bus starts late and the bus behind it starts on time. Councilor Piccirilli asked what is optimal for transit operations. W. Edwards said the MBTA standards recommend bus stop spacing between 600 and 1,350 feet. He said a big step in providing more frequent and reliable service is to reduce the number of the bus stops. Councilor Palomba thinks Concept 3 does not provide enough transit benefits and therefore should not be considered. Councilor Woodland agreed the Committee should choose between Concepts 1 and 2.

In July, there was interest in making the Common Street and Parker Street offset intersection function as a single signalized intersection, with one lane per leg. The team confirmed with an engineering and traffic analysis that this is feasible.

Councilor Piccirilli invited members of the public to provide their preferences on the concepts. The below individuals raised various concerns, opinions, and questions:

- Gael Williams commented on the lack of public outreach to the Town beyond abutters and businesses, uncertainty of the road diet, and comparison to the road diet on Cambridge Street which angered businesses, residents and drivers.
- A resident of Adams Ave said he is very supportive of the road diet and Complete Streets, and he prefers Concept 1. He asked about space for bikes traveling westbound between Irving and Chester. K. Surette said there is a pinch point in the intersection, so the team has proposed “sharrows.”
- Stephen Stedman, who rides Bus 71, believes the bump-outs will help pedestrians cross the street. He said several elderly parishioners at the Church of the Good Shepherd have had close calls with drivers. He believes several hundred people use the bus stop at his church every day and it is a major community center. He expressed his preference for Concept 1 due to the location of the new bus stop (closer to the church if the Franklin bus stop is removed). He referred to right turns on red from Mt Auburn to Common Street.
- Carol Tierney said she prefers Concept 1. As a bike rider on Mount Auburn Street, she described the state of disrepair on that street, especially westbound between School Street and Common Street. She said she looks forward to 2022, but it would be nice to have routine maintenance like street sweeping in the meantime. Councilor Piccirilli asked DPW to follow up about street sweeping.
• Councilor Susan Falkoff asked if handouts could be printed single-sided so she could compare Concepts 1 and 2. She reminded the Councilors of the previous conversation about Pet Haven Animal Hospital.

• Deb Campbell, the owner of Pet Haven Animal Hospital, expressed concern about the removal of parking on her block under Concept 1. She said she would need to close because she cannot operate with a bus stop directly in front of her office and no parking. She said the additional parking would be supplied across the street by the cemetery. She said some of her clients are carrying cats or are elderly. She said she prefers the three spaces offered by Concepts 2 and 3. She said the loading area doesn’t benefit the businesses because patrons need to stay for a longer period of time. Councilor Piccirilli said parking serves businesses on both sides of the street. He said the Councilors asked the team to add more parking to the business district. He said there are 21 existing legal spots, but under Concept 1 there would be 31 spots. K. Surette said the parking within the intersection itself, shaded in red, are areas that are within an intersection or adjacent to a hydrant that are unsafe. He said the spaces across the street would use a safe crossing at a signalized intersection. Dr. Campbell said it is too far to walk with a cat carrier. Councilor Piccirilli asked about the loading zone. K. Surette said the loading zone could be used for deliveries.

• Councilor Angie Kounelis shared concerns about eliminating the bus stop at Franklin Street. She said this has been used by the High School students. She said the agenda for this meeting should also address Boylston Street and the rest of the corridor.

• Maureen Foley said she is concerned about traffic entering Mt Auburn Street and asked how long it will take to get from Watertown Square to the Cambridge city line during morning and evening rush hour. She is worried about trying to park in front of the cemetery during rush hour.

• Ron Trial said he is concerned about the net gain of spaces adjacent to the cemetery. He thinks the people attending church would benefit, but believes the three spaces on the other side of the street should be prioritized.

• Ann Marie Cloonan asked if the high school design modifications and projected growth at the high school have been factored into the design for Mount Auburn Street.

• Mohammed Tahmili, owner of Tabrizi Bakery, said he counted two bicycles per day on Mount Auburn Street. He believes traffic that has gotten worse on Mount Auburn Street and Arsenal Street. Councilor Piccirilli noted that the street in front of his bakery would not be modified.

• Councilor Lisa Feltner said she is a resident of Parker Street. She spoke to some of the businesses between Phillips Street and Franklin Street who couldn’t attend the meeting. She asked about the difference in parking between Concepts 2 and 3, confirmed the two lights at Parker Street and Common Street would operate as one signal, and confirmed the same would apply at Palfrey/Irving Street. Councilor Feltner said Concept 3 still shows a net gain in parking spots. She believes bus stops work well adjacent to businesses that receive frequent customers. She noted the Methodist Church and Redeemer Church also have visitors everyday and a quarter-mile is too far to walk. She encouraged considerations for pedestrian safety, transit users, and business owners. She appreciates that there are three spots in front of Pet Haven. She noted the neighborhood has borne the brunt of the growth and related traffic.

• Maria Saiz, Watertown Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee (WBPC), said Concept 1 offers the best and most direct pedestrian access to the bus stop, high school, and senior center with the safest
crossing possible. As someone who uses all four modes of transportation, she thinks pedestrians are often not prioritized. She described the challenges of the existing crossings and believes pedestrians will take the shortest route. She thinks signalizing Parker Street makes it more manageable. M. Saiz added that cyclists will have trouble stopping at the intersection in Concept 2 due to conflicts with the bus. She asked that the crossing at Russell Avenue be pedestrian activated with flashing lights. She said she assumes that all lights in the intersection would be bike-activated as well. She asked if lights could turn red if cars are speeding. Councilor Piccirilli said the existing signals on Mount Auburn Street are from the 1980s and all new signals would use vehicle sensors and have the capability to use adaptive control to manage the traffic flow.

- Andy Compagna said he likes the focus on transit and pedestrians, as well as positive impacts to health and safety. He said eastbound bicyclists stopped at the Common Street intersection in Concepts 2 or 3 would be forced to take a lane quickly while cars accelerate, which he thinks would create a safety hazard. He said in Concept 1, cyclists can use the bus lane.
- Dennis Duff said he likes to access bus stops at the end of his street but understands that some bus stops are being eliminated. He likes the idea of moving crosswalks behind the buses instead of in front, so drivers can see pedestrians at crossings.
- David said he bikes, drives and rollerblades down Mount Auburn Street. He said grass planting strips should not be prioritized over the safety of road users.

Councilor Piccirilli said the Councilors need to weigh the parking in front of Pet Haven and prioritizing safety for pedestrians, cyclists and transit users. He noted that Dr. Campbell said sometimes parking is taken in front of her business. He proposed selecting Concept 1 with a loading zone or drop-off space that would allow customers to bring a pet into the hospital. He explained that when Mt Auburn Street was built in 1980, parking in a signalized intersection was acceptable. Councilor Palomba said he prefers Concept 1 due to the benefits for transit, including transit signal priority (TSP). He acknowledged that Concept 2 has three spots in front of the businesses, but he thinks adding parking on the north side is a great idea. He agreed a drop-off spot, if possible, would be helpful.

Councilor Palomba clarified that the Council has already approved the concept of the road diet in July 10, 2018. He thinks there needs to be more communication to let people know there will be a significant change on Mount Auburn Street. He suggested putting a notice in the tax bill.¹

Councilor Woodland described his concerns with two buses in the road for Concepts 2 or 3. He said no one wants to remove parking in front of the businesses, even if they are illegal. He said the Town needs to mitigate the impact on those businesses, but Concept 1 is best for the Town. He commended DPW for hosting meetings and publicizing them.

All members of the Committee recommended Concept 1 to the full Town Council.

K. Surette said it might not be possible to fit a loading zone on the same block. He noted the existing design proposes a loading zone on Chester Street, which may result in the loss of one parking space.

¹ The Town included a description of the project and link to the website in the Town’s Spring 2018 newsletter.
All members of the Committee asked DPW and the consultants to clarify the addition of a drop-off/loading zone, or the functional equivalent, at Chester Street and Mount Auburn Street. DPW agreed to provide another plan that shows the area in more detail.

**Discussion – Patten Street to Phillips Street**

Councilor Feltner said Marshall Street and Palfrey Street are very wide and are currently one-way. She asked if DPW could look at making them two-way. Councilor Piccirilli said there was a concept to include a reverse bike lane. G. Mee said DPW will look into this further.

A. Cloonan said the design should account for changes to the Phillips School and new traffic flow related to the high school. Councilor Piccirilli said he is aware that the high school feasibility study will begin next year. He said the 25% Design needs to be submitted to MassDOT, so there will be time before 100% Design to incorporate the high school plans. K. Surette said the Design Public Hearing would be a formal meeting run by MassDOT and that would be the next milestone after the 25% design submittal. Rich Benevento, WTE, said the 25% Design Public Hearing establishes the horizontal and vertical geometry.

**Discussion – Bates Road to Walnut Street**

Councilor Piccirilli noted the right-turn-on-red from Walnut Street has helped improve the intersection. The traffic light at Walnut Street will remain and be upgraded.

**Discussion – West Boylston Street Intersection**

Councilor Piccirilli said this intersection would be squared up and signalized to allow better flow to the school. It is currently operating very poorly, especially during the morning rush hour. K. Surette noted the team has added “do not block the box” markings at Spruce Street and moved the bus stop to the near side of the intersection. A far side stop in front of the Hosmer School field would impact existing shade trees.

David asked about the green marking and said the grass would be an eyesore, would get in the way, and requires maintenance. He thinks sidewalks should be prioritized over plantings. He said he doesn’t see anyone turn left on Boylston Street or Walnut Street. K. Surette said the green areas on the plans represent existing trees, utility poles, and catenary poles, or possible benches. They will be defined as the design continues.

A. Cloonan confirmed with K. Surette that no trees would be removed at the park field. She supports the signal at Boylston Street and expressed concern about drop-off at a preschool at Winthrop Street. There was a discussion of the flow of traffic to the school and the location of the entrances. Councilor Piccirilli said as the school design matures, it will be incorporated into this project. He agreed that the traffic and parking will need to be incorporated.

Councilor Feltner suggested adding a bike box wherever feasible and giving as much space as possible to bikes at pinch points.

D. Duff said greenspace should be kept. He suggested putting a light at School Street and routing cars there instead of Boylston Street. He doesn’t think the “don’t block the box” markings will work. He suggested getting rid of the signal at Boylston Street.
Discussion – Winthrop Street to School Street

M. Saiz commented on the relocated bus stop. There was a discussion of moving the crosswalk from one side of Winthrop Street to the other or relocating the bus stop. Councilor Piccirilli said there are challenges with sight lines on the curve. K. Surette confirmed that sight distance, mature trees, driveways, and the proximity of other bus stops dictated the location of the crosswalk.

Councilor Piccirilli said there are not many proposed changes to the School Street intersection excluding the two new left turn lanes. He confirmed there is a right-turn-on-red and the bus stop will remain where it is. Sheila Fay thanked the designers for adding a bike lane at this intersection.

Councilor Piccirilli concluded the meeting at 9:35 PM.

Public Attendees on October 16, 2018
Charlie Breitrose - Watertown News
Deb Campbell - Pet Haven Animal Hospital
Chris Chiotasso
Anthony Christakis - MassDOT
Fred Cloonan
Ann Marie Cloonan
Michelle Cokonougher
Andy Compagna – WBPC
David
Dennis J. Duff
Jean Dunoyer
Wes Edwards - MBTA
Sheila Fay – WBPC
Maureen F. Foley
Sophia Galimore - Watertown TMA
Brian MacDonald
Linda Marsoubian
Maria Saiz – WBPC
Marilyn
Kathy Siranosian
Ed Siranosian
Stephen Stedman
Mohammed Tahmili, Tabrizi Bakery
Carol Tierney
Ron Trial
Geraldine Vatan - MassDOT
Gael Williams