



**Town Of Amherst
Town Services and Outreach Committee and Meeting of the Whole Town Council
Special Meeting – Public Forum on Pomeroy Village Intersection
Saturday, March 27, 2021
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this meeting of the Town Services and Outreach Committee and the Whole Town Council was conducted via remote participation.

VIRTUAL MEETING: <https://amherstma.zoom.us/j/83619760794>

MINUTES

TSO Members Participating Remotely and Present by Roll Call:

Brewer, DuMont – Chair, Ross, Ryan, Steinberg

TSO Members Absent: None

Town Council Members Participating Remotely and Present by Roll Call:

Lynn Griesemer – Chair, Schoen, Schreiber

Town Council Members Absent:

Bahl-Milne, De Angelis, Hanneke, Pam, Swartz

Staff Participating Remotely:

Paul Bockelman, Town Manager
Christine Brestrup, Planning Director
Ben Breger, Planner
Pamela Field-Sadler, Planning Administrative Assistant
Guilford Mooring, DPW Superintendent

1. Call to Order

2:00 p.m. - Town Services and Outreach Committee (TSO) Chair DuMont declared the presence of a quorum and called the TSO portion of the special meeting to order. TSO Chair DuMont confirmed all members could hear and be heard.

2:01 p.m. – Town Council (Council) Chair Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the Council portion of the special meeting to order. Chair Griesemer confirmed that the additional Council members could hear and be heard.

2. Presentation and Discussion Items

a. Massworks/Pomeroy Village Intersection Project

Chair DuMont explained that the public forum on the Pomeroy Village Intersection Project is the sole agenda item for this meeting. Chair DuMont reviewed the schedule

for the meeting, and noted that the TSO and Council members are here to listen to comments, questions and concerns of the public.

Chair DuMont explained that the Pomeroy Village Intersection Project has been referred to the TSO by Town Council (Council) to review and provide a recommendation as to if the project should include a roundabout or a signalized intersection. The TSO report is due to the Council by May 3, 2021, and ultimately the Council is responsible for making a decision about the project work.

Town Manager (TM) Bockelman thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. TM Bockelman said this is an important topic and a great opportunity for the town, the neighborhood and everyone who travels through Pomeroy Village. Pomeroy Village is an economic business center that we think will grow as improvements to the area occur.

TM Bockelman explained this forum is one opportunity for the public to learn about the project and share comments. There has also been an opportunity at the recent TSO meeting and a Community Chat with Town Engineer Jason Skeels and DPW Superintendent Guilford Mooring. Another way to learn about the project and provide comments is through the new Engage Amherst webpage.

TM Bockelman reiterated that TSO and Council members as well as staff are here to listen; meeting minutes are being taken and will include the public's comments.

1) Presentation

Planning Director Chris Brestrup began her presentation pointing out that Pomeroy Village Center lies in South Amherst at the intersection of Pomeroy Lane, West Pomeroy Lane and Route 116 (West Street). It has a mix of single-family neighborhoods, apartments, condominiums, schools, businesses and office uses.

Pomeroy Village Center includes a high traffic intersection, especially during rush hours. Ms. Brestrup described the intersection challenges including:

- a car oriented design
- lack of safe pedestrian access - poor sidewalks, no curb ramps and no crosswalks
- no bike lanes
- the existing traffic signals don't have pedestrian operated signals
- vehicle queuing during afternoon rush hour

Ms. Brestrup said the town received a \$1.5 million grant from a State MassWorks program to make improvements to this intersection. The project is a collaboration between the DPW and the Planning Department with review and approval by the Council which has jurisdiction over the public ways. The improvements will focus on traffic safety and efficiency, pedestrian and bicycle safety, and will provide well-designed bus stops for transit riders.

Ms. Brestrup provided an historical summary of the project noting:

- In the 1990's, Mass DOT developed a design to widen the road and improve the intersection that was deemed inappropriate by town residents. Ultimately, the town asked to take over the road from the state.
- In the early 2000's, the town installed traffic signals; the lights were intended to be placeholders until intersection improvements could be designed.
- In the mid 2000's, the DPW and Planning Department with the assistance of the Design Review Board (DRB) began a design process to redesign the intersection. The process provided many opportunities for public input including public meetings and a public surveys. However, there wasn't money to build the improvements at that time.
- In 2013, the town applied for a MassWorks grant, but was unsuccessful.
- In 2020, the town applied again for a MassWorks grant and successfully received an award.

Ms. Brestrup explained the Council needs to make a decision by June on what type of intersection, a signalized intersection or a roundabout, to develop. Ms. Brestrup described and showed photos of a signalized intersection and a roundabout.

Ms. Brestrup said that town staff would be contacting abutting property owners, meeting with business operators and contacting people who live in the area for input. She reiterated the use of the Engage Amherst platform as a way to learn about the project and submit public comments, and noted the TSO and Council are expected to continue discussions of this item during their meetings. The public can also submit written comments to the Planning Department.

Ms. Brestrup described what would be helpful for the public to share in their comments today including:

- How do you use the intersection? Are you a business owner, a resident or mainly pass through?
- Do you mainly walk, drive or bike through Pomeroy Village Center?
- What improvements would you like to see in Pomeroy Village?
- What features are most important to you?
- How can the area be made more welcoming?
- How can we help support the local businesses in the Pomeroy Village Center?

2) Public Comments and Questions on Pomeroy Village Intersection Project and staff answers

Chair DuMont said that the public is welcome to speak for 3 minutes each. Chair DuMont noted that there are currently 15 Attendees in the meeting and that due to technical and security issues the Attendee list is unavailable for viewing by Attendees.

Public Comments and Questions

Felice DiMartino

Upon request, TSO Chair DuMont granted Ms. DiMartino two additional minutes to speak. Ms. DiMartino shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. DiMartino said her understanding is that in the 1990's, the state offered funds to fix the intersection and the town declined the help. She said she does not understand why it is taking so long to fix the intersection.
- Ms. DiMartino had been a teacher at the Amherst Montessori School for 20 years.
- Ms. DiMartino shared her experience of being hit by a large truck while crossing the street, east to west, at the Pomeroy Village intersection in December of 2015. Ms. DiMartino suffered a traumatic brain injury, and because of the accident, her career ended.
- Ms. DiMartino suggested two items could be fixed now to provide greater safety immediately:
 1. Address the glare from the light of an adjacent business which blinds traffic visibility.
 2. Add a delay to the traffic light to provide pedestrians time to cross.

Ms. Brestrup said she was very sorry Ms. DiMartino experienced an accident. Ms. Brestrup said we are working as quickly as we can to correct the challenges of the intersection and make it safer.

DPW Superintendent Guilford Mooring said he was also sorry this accident happened. Mr. Mooring said there is very few things that could be done in the short term, and the DPW has no control of light intrusion into the public way from a neighboring business. The best thing to do now is move forward and fix the intersection.

Megan St. Marie, Orchard Valley, shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. St. Marie lives in Orchard Valley and is the co-owner of Modern Memoirs, Inc. located at 495 West Street; Ms. St. Marie walks to work
- Ms. St. Maria has witnessed mishaps and accidents at the intersection.
- As schools reopen, Ms. St. Marie would like to walk her two sons to the neighborhood schools, however, she is concerned. She encouraged safety improvements for the intersection and a bike lane or bike path.
- Ms. St. Marie would like to add a retail component to her business on West Street and would like to see improvements that promote greater foot traffic and easier site access.
- Ms. St. Maria is of the opinion that roundabouts are not very pedestrian friendly; roundabouts provide yield signs, but not stoplights and stop signs.

Alice Swift, formerly a resident of Orchard Valley for more than 50 years and now lives at Applewood, shared the following in her comments:

- The addition of a pedestrian walk light would be an important safety upgrade.
- Ms. Swift said she primarily drives through the intersection at this time to visit an area hair salon and a medical office.
- Ms. Swift favors a signalized intersection versus a roundabout.

Michael Childs, business owner with office space at the Amherst Office Park (AOP) at 441 West Street, shared the following in his comments:

- Mr. Childs emphasized the need for improved pedestrian safety in the area. He is concerned that there is not a crosswalk at either entrance to the AOP which is a large group of offices with some residential units. It is inconvenient for someone in the AOP to walk down to the intersection to cross at a light especially if you are on a lunch break.
- Mr. Childs chooses to cross West Street by the AOP near the northern driveway; this part of the road provides a straight shot from the Crocker Farm School, encouraging people pick up speed as they approach the intersection; Mr. Childs' experience is that the traffic moves very fast. Mr. Childs encouraged traffic calming and crosswalks near the area of the AOP.
- Mr. Childs encouraged the addition of turning lanes to create a more efficient traffic flow through the intersection.
- Mr. Childs suggested electric car charging stations and enhanced pedestrian features near the restaurants would be a benefit.
- Mr. Childs noted that on Friday nights the traffic is particularly busy and the Mission Cantina restaurant parking overflows. This is a dangerous time to walk across the intersection.
- Mr. Childs is of the opinion that either a roundabout or a signalized intersection would be a large improvement for the area.

Thomas Johnson, South East Street, shared the following in his comments:

- Mr. Johnson travels through the intersection several times per day primarily by car, but sometimes on a bike.
- Mr. Johnson noted if the plans for the golf course happen there would be potential for greater bike and pedestrian traffic through the intersection.
- Directional signage would be an added safety feature because the intersection is a crossroads as well as part of a village center.
- Mr. Johnson said pedestrian safety is paramount. If the town chooses to install a signalized intersection, consider installing rumble strips on Rt. 116 north and south of the intersection to serve as a warning to the upcoming intersection. He said this strategy is utilized on Rt. 9 for an upcoming traffic signal.
- Installing flashing lights on the crosswalk of a roundabout may increase pedestrian safety.
- Areas to eat outside would create a welcoming atmosphere.

Tamson Ely, a 35-year resident at the intersection of Middle St. and Pomeroy Lane, shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. Ely uses many businesses in the area.
- Ms. Ely doesn't walk in this area because there are no consistent sidewalks. She expressed concern for people who walk along the road without sidewalks or cross without a crosswalk at night.
- Ms. Ely agrees that pedestrian safety is paramount; however, she is unsure a roundabout is the right choice for this area where traffic moves very fast.
- Ms. Ely supports including turning lanes in the design.
- Ms. Ely likes the idea of including more landscaping and making the area more pedestrian friendly and supportive of local businesses.

Phyllis Lehrer, Orchard Valley, shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. Lehrer primarily drives through the intersection and supports businesses in the area.
- Ms. Lehrer does not support a roundabout. Ms. Lehrer has seen the roundabouts in Europe and said they are in exceedingly rural areas without houses or businesses. Ms. Lehrer referenced the roundabout photo from the presentation and pointed out a pedestrian would need to double cross sections to get from one point to another.
- A signalized intersection would make vehicles stop and give pedestrians the opportunity to cross.
- Ms. Lehrer supports including turning lanes in the design.
- Additional outdoor seating would be beneficial to pedestrians and supportive of businesses.

Heath Atchley, Pomeroy Lane business owner and West Street resident, shared the following in his comments:

- Mr. Atchley reiterated that the best improvement for the area is anything that improves both pedestrian safety and make the area more attractive to pedestrians.
- Mr. Atchley supports the signalized intersection concept. Mr. Atchley is concerned that a roundabout could encroach on the corner properties, lessen parking in the area or bring the road closer to the properties that cater to children.
- Mr. Atchley agrees that turning lanes would be a beneficial inclusion.

In response to several Council members raising their hand, TM Bockelman reiterated that the role of the staff, TSO and Council members participating in the public forum is to listen to the public comments being shared.

Julie Tanguay, Orchard Valley, shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. Tanguay said she works at the Amherst Montessori School and can attest to the impact that Ms. DiMartino's accident had on the school. The school has experienced a tremendous loss and the feeling of security for the

school community and navigating that intersection with children has been greatly impacted.

- There are no other areas to cross Rt. 116 safely from the Orchard Valley neighborhood. The intersection is challenging for parents and children to use when walking or biking to school.
- Ms. Tanguay is of the opinion that a pedestrian controlled crossing would bring more families out frequenting the local businesses.
- Ms. Tanguay pointed out that the speed limit coming toward the intersection from the Atkins roundabout is approximately 40-50 miles/hr. When people are traveling toward the intersection from downtown, cars are accelerating as they go up the slope from Crocker.
- Slowing and narrowing the way for traffic before the intersection is imperative in this project.

Susan Lewendowski, 40-year Pomeroy Lane resident, shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. Lewendowski said she walks and drives through the intersection and frequents the local businesses in the area.
- Ms. Lewendowski said she is opposed to the roundabout concept for this area. There is a need to slow down traffic.
- Ms. Lewendowski supports including turning lanes in the design.
- Ms. Lewendowski would like to see sidewalks along Pomeroy Lane.
- The current light at the intersection does not provide enough crossing time.
- Ms. Lewendowski is of the opinion that the roundabout near Atkins works; however, the north Amherst roundabout that leads to the University is dangerous.

Michael Childs, business owner with office space at the Amherst Office Park (AOP) at 441 West Street, added to his comments:

- Mr. Childs said he supports the comments regarding the need for traffic calming and sidewalks on Pomeroy Lane.
- Mr. Childs suggested if you want to create an attractive area to draw people from the surrounding neighborhoods into Pomeroy Village Center, access to pedestrians from the South Amherst common needs to be improved.

Chair DuMont asked if the MassWorks grant would cover the cost of sidewalks in that area. Ms. Brestrup said she did not think so. The town has been aware of the lack of sidewalks in that area; however, the road crosses a stream, which causes wetlands issues. The town will continue to seek funding opportunities to tie the South Amherst Village common at the Munson Library to the Pomeroy Village intersection. Mr. Mooring said he expects that the \$1.5 million would be used entirely on the intersection.

In responding to questions from Ms. DiMartino, Mr. Mooring said \$1.5 million is what Mass Highway uses when they budget for intersection improvement. Whether we construct a roundabout or a signalized intersection, the starting estimated cost is

\$1.5 million and we expect to use all the money regardless of which way we go. Mr. Mooring added that pedestrian lights that meet ADA requirements would need to be installed in order to have a light delay. Currently the traffic light controls the crossing light; the pedestrian controlled lights will be part of the project.

Michele Barale, West Street, shared the following in her comments:

- Ms. Barale lives in a condominium and frequents the local businesses and services a lot.
- Would the funding include adding the entries and exits for AOP?
- If the town chooses the roundabout concept, would a pedestrian initiated stoplight be included?

Mr. Mooring said there would probably not be money available to do work farther north of the intersection, but they will try. Mr. Mooring explained that with either design concept, there would be pedestrian activated buttons for crossing.

In answering a question from Mr. Childs, Mr. Mooring said that funding for crosswalks at AOP could come from anywhere. Ms. Brestrup added that the Planning Department is always looking for sources of money to help the town. The Planning staff are very good at writing grants and now that we are aware of this concern, we will be thinking about it as opportunities become available. The Planning Department was recently awarded grant money for enhanced crosswalks in the downtown area.

Seeing no additional public questions or comments, TM Bockelman reminded everyone of additional ways to submit comments. TM Bockelman thanked everyone for joining the meeting and sharing good comments.

3. Adjourn

TSO Adjournment – TSO Chair DuMont adjourned the TSO meeting at 3:02 p.m.

Town Council Adjournment - Council Chair Griesemer adjourned the Town Council meeting at 3:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Pamela Field-Sadler
Administrative Asst.

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented:

1. Town Services and Outreach Committee and Meeting of the Whole Town Council
Agenda March 27, 2021
2. MassWorks Pomeroy Village Center Intersection Improvements Presentation

March 25 & 27, 2021

3. Pomeroy Village Center Intersection Public Outreach Forums
March 25 & 27, 2021 (Dumont, Darcy A.) (3)