

Public Works Committee of the Town of Amherst

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

Thursday, July 12 2012 at 7:00pm

Large Activities Room, Bangs Center, Amherst

Meeting was called to order at 7pm with Steve Braun in the chair. Also present: Christine Gray-Mullen, Guilford Mooring (Superintendent DPW), Charlie Moran, William Mullin.

Also attending: Nonny Burack, Ronna and Neal Erickson, Nancy Giddings, Richard Minear, Laura Muller, Jessica Plaut, Mary Sayer, Ann and John Martin, Vince O'Connor, Marcy Sala, Chris and Kelly Tarr, Fran Van Treese, and Dave Ziomek (Acting Town Manager).

1. Administrative

a. Motion made, seconded and voted to approve the minutes from the June 7, 2012 meeting. Approved 3-0-1.

b. Next meetings scheduled for September 6, 2012 at 7:00pm. No August meeting required at this time. Location to be determined.

2. Project Updates from Guilford Mooring: work on Main Street to begin soon; Cherry Lane next; Lincoln Avenue to be milled prior to initiation of work to repair damaged sewer lines. Final paving, with installation of previously-approved speed “humps” will likely need to wait until summer 2013.

3. New Business: Pine Street: Public Hearing

Guilford Mooring led the room through the proposed changes to Pine Street. The proposed changes depend upon a Mass Works grant, which the Town will re-apply for this September (a previous application was turned down because of uncertainty related to re-development and re-zoning efforts in North Amherst). The earliest work could begin, should the application for the grant be successful, would be next spring. The proposed work will include replacing the water and sewer lines, so the road will be torn up in any case. What has to be decided: what the top of the road looks like. Some ground rules: the right-of-way is 49' or 3 rods. Sidewalks are proposed at 5' but have to be at least 4' and will be 6" above the roadway. Curbs will be 6", Cape Cod or vertical—either way. They will be asphalt, except for granite curbs at the intersection of Pine and North Pleasant/Rte 63.

Superintendent Mooring put up on a screen the Pine Street “Conceptual Street Layout, Option 1,” which in its print form is a ten-page sequence of street layouts, beginning at the North Amherst/North Pleasant/Rte 63 intersection on the west end of Pine Street and continuing east to the intersection of Pine St. and Henry St. These graphics are available on line at <http://www.amherstma.gov/index.aspx?NID=1672> and at the DPW for inspection in print form. The maps are titled “Pine Street N. Pleasant (RT. 63) to Henry Street, Amherst MA: Conceptual Street Layout, Option 1.” The Conceptual Street Layout is keyed to eight “Typical Street Cross-

Sections” found on page 10 of the packet, and on line at <http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/18974>.

Superintendent Mooring led us through the proposed changes to the existing street: the roadway to be moved north or south within the 49’ right-of-way; street cross-sections as they responded to topography and existing trees and driveways; proposed intersection modifications; and trees recommended for removal or preservation by the Tree Warden.

Mary Sayer and Marcy Sala, among others, described their fears of walking on the existing sidewalk on the north side of Pine Street west of the State Street intersection. The sidewalk here is now crumbling and there is effectively no curb. Under the proposed plan, there would be a substantial curb, the sidewalk would be raised above the roadway, and the proposed width would be greater. Automobiles and walkers would still be close together, but the existing situation would be much improved. Because of topography here (drop-off to Mill River) there seems no alternative. David Ziomek asked that the sidewalk around the access to the trails that lead to the Mill River trail be especially scrutinized for pedestrian safety, given the large amount of foot traffic here.

State Street-Pine Street Intersection

The State Street-Pine Street intersection came in for substantial comment. Mary Sayer asked for a cross-walk between the co-housing complex to the south and the Pine Street sidewalk on the north. Superintendent Mooring said that he could add this to the plan. Several people remarked on the poor sight-lines as one exits State Street. John Martin asked whether the intersection could be made a less acute angle; Mooring responded that this would require the acquisition of land, and the relevant landowner had not seemed willing.

Several speakers, among them Ronna and Neal Erickson, noted the excessive speed of automobile traffic in this area. The posted limit is 40, but cars often seem to be traveling well in excess of this limit. Superintendent Mooring outlined the processes, and the likely impossibility, of getting the State to lower the speed limit on Pine Street. Several speakers, notably John Martin and Ann Martin, called for greater police enforcement on the street. Mooring said that he’d speak to the Chief of Police about this matter.

Vince O’Connor argued that sidewalks close to the roadway, such as those proposed on the north side of Pine east of State, were a poor expenditure of public funds. Ronna Erickson, Laura Muller, and Jessica Plaut countered that sidewalks there were really necessary, regardless of their close proximity to the roadway.

Pine Street-East Pleasant Street Intersection

Superintendent Mooring outlined five options for the intersection of Pine and East Pleasant streets: Options 1, A, B, C, and D, found on pages 5-6 on the printed layouts and at <http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/18969> and <http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/18970> on the DPW web site. Neal Erickson noted that the sight lines at the existing intersection were poor; Mooring responded that these sight-lines would be improved in all of the options, as the existing roadway/sidewalk spaces were widened. John Martin and others noted that in the

existing intersection there was a de facto right turn lane coming north on East Pleasant and turning east on Pine, and that this de facto right turn lane created visibility problems for those wanting to turn left (west).

Laura Muller and Ronna Erickson spoke for the roundabout, Option D. The group voted 6-3 for the roundabout option, Option D. Mr. Mooring noted that this option would involve purchasing land from a landowner and taking down lots of trees. Vince O'Connor objected to Option C, which would formalize a right-turn lane from East Pleasant to Pine Street, because it would impact the homeowners on the southeast corner of the intersection. Mr. Mooring responded that Option C did not involve land-taking, but was squarely within the existing right-of-way.

Laura Muller asked if we could have raised crosswalks at this intersection. Mooring replied that because this was a route for emergency vehicles---fire, ambulance, and police—and that since there were no alternative routes for such vehicles to take (in contrast to, for example, Main Street as an alternative to the raised crosswalks on Rt. 9 in the vicinity of Amherst College), that we could not use raised crosswalks (vertical traffic calming) here.

Pine Street-Bridge Street-Cushman Common

Superintendent Mooring presented three possible layouts for the Pine-Street/Bridge Street/Cushman Common area: Options 1, A, and B. These can be found at <http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/18972> and at <http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/18973>

Option B re-aligned the intersection and brought Bridge Street through the existing common to a 90-degree intersection with Pine Street. This option would create the safest traffic flow. The down side: it would divide the common space and, as John Martin suggested, “compromise” the existing common. Stephen Braun asked if there could be a traffic light at the Option B intersection; Mooring replied that the traffic flow there was not sufficient for the installation of a traffic light.

General Comment Period

Ann Martin asked if the new water main would extend to Henry Street; Mooring responded that the main stopped at the railroad tracks. Mary Sayer asked if Berkshire Gas could be persuaded to extend the gas service along Pine Street. Mooring responded that if enough people called Berkshire Gas it might be possible for the gas company to lay the gas lines when the water and sewer lines were going in. Nonny Burack asked if electric utilities could be buried at the same time as water and sewer lines were being laid. Mooring responded that this would practically double the cost of the project, from 4 to 8 million dollars because the high-voltage lines along Pine Street are much more expensive to bury than the relatively low-voltage lines typical in new residential neighborhoods (where lines are typically buried as part of the development process).

Richard Minear argued, as he had in a comment to the DPW web site, that the widened roadway/bike lane/sidewalk complex will create a vista that might increase the speed of automobile traffic. He would prefer that the road be left as is, without bike lanes. Neal Erikson argued that bike lanes fill with trash and are useless, and that a 2' shoulder is enough. Others, including William Mullin and Jessica Plaut, argued for bike lanes. Mary Sayer and others

responded to Vincent O'Connor's statement that sidewalks were unsafe and a poor use of public funds, arguing that sidewalks that go from one place to another are extremely important. Laura Muller argued for 5' sidewalks for strollers.

David Ziomek, Acting Town Manager, asked the Public Works Committee to lobby for more funding for the maintenance and repair of existing sidewalks. He noted that we are not able to maintain our existing stock of sidewalks, and that adding to this stock without adding maintenance costs to the DPW budget would be shortsighted.

Ronna Erickson thanked the DPW for its careful work, and for balancing the competing needs of pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and homeowners.

Nancy Giddings, who lives on Main Street, noted that she can't walk on sidewalks in winter, but that it was important to have sidewalks for the rest of the year.

Mill Street Bridge

At the end of the meeting, Superintendent Mooring announced that the Mill Street bridge would be closed immediately. The state DOT has determined the bridge to be unsafe, a 2 on the scale of 1-10. It will remain open to pedestrians and bicyclists. The bridge is Town-owned, and is not on the state's bridge replacement program. The closing may trigger a broader assessment of vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns in this neighborhood.

The meeting adjourned at 9:55.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlie Moran, Sec'y pro tem.

Documents Referred to:

Conceptual Street Layout, Option 1, Pine Street (includes pages 1-9 or the printed street layouts)
<http://www.amherstma.gov/index.aspx?NID=1672>

Typical Street Cross-Sections, Pine Street (page 10 of the same print document, above)
<http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/18974>