

MEETING SUMMARY

SUBJECT: Willard Street Drainage Improvements Project
Community Meeting #1 Summary

DATE: Thursday March 30, 2017; 6:30 – 8:30 PM

LOCATION: Friends Meeting at Cambridge, 5 Longfellow Park, Cambridge MA 02138

1. Presentation Overview

The first Willard Street Drainage Improvements Project Community Meeting introduced the project location and background, goals and objectives, current conditions, and included discussion of community concerns. Items for follow-up are included in **bold text**. A PowerPoint presentation was given (available for viewing at www.cambridgema.gov/theworks/willardstreet). Diane Stokes, Project Manager for Cambridge Department of Public Works, kicked off the meeting with a discussion of the project location's background and history, including a series of historic maps on the development of the sewer and drainage system in the neighborhood. The main reason for the project is to address flooding during large storm events due to insufficient hydraulic capacity, and aging subsurface infrastructure. The goals of the project are to:

- a) Reduce Periodic Flooding
 - b) Upgrade utilities
 - c) Consider surface transportation and safety improvement opportunities
- Rich Claytor of Horsley Witten Group then reviewed current conditions of the subsurface infrastructure along Willard Street. He displayed storm drain inspection photos collected during cleaning and inspection operations of the storm drain pipes, sanitary sewer pipes, man holes, and catch basins.
 - Rich explained that all drainage was inspected to determine condition and to determine what can be reused or replaced. He emphasized the need to separate the storm drain from the sewer pipes and make necessary changes to the system to improve capacity in the system, reduce the potential for flooding, and to prevent groundwater from entering the drainage and sewer system through infiltration and inflow which is typical of older systems.
 - Questions were asked about where sewer pipes discharge, which is currently the Deer Island Wastewater Treatment Plant in Boston.

- Roch Larochelle, Project Manager for HDR, next discussed current conditions and opportunities for surface transportation and accessibility improvements. He described the existing roadway cross section and issues such as sidewalks obstructed by trees and utilities, limiting compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for access. Sidewalks need to be at least three feet wide, but preferably four to five feet wide.
- Roch Larochelle also presented information on some of the preliminary traffic and parking inventory data that had been collected as well as a summary of the number and condition of existing street trees along Willard Street.
- A question was asked regarding an opportunity to widen the travel lanes. He noted widening travel lanes would likely mean sacrificing other uses of the street such as parking, possible bicycle uses and sidewalks as there is limited available right of way. It was discussed that the community needs to think about how it wants to program the available space whether through parking, bicycle lanes, sidewalks and landscaping.
- Concern was also expressed over the recent loss of trees in front of the Cambridge Skating Club. A representative from the Skating Club indicated trees were removed due to a fungus infecting White Pines, forcing their removal, and the removal of Douglas Firs. Though new trees will be planted next spring, the some members of the community are concerned about the replacement of street trees and would like to have trees on both sides of the street.

2. Schedule and Next Steps

Roch Larochelle reviewed tasks that the team has completed to date and then reviewed next steps for the project. He also noted that the next community meeting is planned for mid-June and construction is expected to begin in 2018. He also noted that the gas company (Eversource), will likely start replacement work for their lines in advance of the City project. Additionally, the following items were discussed and should be noted:

- A resident asked how long the project would last. It was noted that this depends on the chosen surface improvements but the project is likely to entail a season and a half of construction, potentially ending mid-2019. It is a significant project due to the extents of the subsurface work involved, with significant permitting requirements part of which results from possible impacts to DCR parklands in the area between Mt. Auburn Street and Memorial Drive.
- The community was also concerned about whether or not the street would remain accessible during construction. It was noted that there will likely be partial restrictions during work hours, and the project team will work with contractors to make sure residents have access to their property. It was also noted that limitations will be provided for the contractor for impacts to parking and travel on the roadway during construction.

- Another question was raised concerning when or if the City would remove the large tree stump in the middle of the sidewalk (#11-#15 Willard). **The project team will follow up with DPW to inquire if the tree stump can be removed and sidewalk patched.**
- The City of Cambridge will keep the community informed throughout the project. Participants were encouraged to sign up for the project notification email list, and check the project website.

3. Community Discussion

Juan Avendano, Traffic Calming Project Manager for the City of Cambridge Community Development Department, led a discussion of community concerns for the surface roadway. After an introduction, he explained that the final design will try to address concerns presented at this meeting. The following concerns were raised by community members in attendance:

Left Turn Traffic from Mt Auburn Street to Willard Street

- The first concern raised was that Willard Street is the only street between Fresh Pond Parkway and Harvard Square that cars are able to turn left on from Mt. Auburn Street. This makes northbound peak hour traffic volume an issue.
- Another resident asked if a left turn restriction could be put in place from Mt. Auburn Street. The City will look into putting up a sign, but would need to evaluate this as part of a larger project in a system of restricted left turns, as the change will have subsequent impacts.

Sidewalk Conditions

- Constraints to walking in the neighborhood were presented as an issue due to narrow sidewalks and poor sidewalk condition. One resident commented that only one person can fit in the width of the sidewalk. Wider sidewalks are needed on both sides of the road. The City agreed that wider sidewalks are needed to provide ADA accessibility.

Conversion to One-way Traffic

- A community member asked if widening sidewalks means narrowing the roadway. Several community members responded that the street is too narrow for two-way traffic. Converting Willard Street to one-way, like Sparks Street, was suggested to accommodate the large northbound traffic volumes turning from Mt. Auburn Street onto Willard to access Brattle Street.
- Several community members were concerned that converting Willard Street to one-way traffic would increase speeds on the roadway. Speed was cited as a problem by some residents, particularly at night.

Mt. Auburn Street Crossing Island

- Several concerns were raised about the small traffic island at the Mt. Auburn Street and Willard Street intersection. Some members of the community believe it leads to crashes, with vehicles driving into and over it. The Cambridge Skating Club has photos of pedestrian and car conflicts, attached. Participants noted there is a large volume of pedestrian traffic and bicycle traffic to the skating club by school aged children. There are also two bus stops at this intersection. The City has found that over the past two years, since the island was changed from all concrete, there have been no pedestrian-related crashes at this intersection. The City suggested improving safety at the island through enhanced landscaping and reflectors to improve visibility.
- The City provided the example of another crossing island at Brewer Street; however, that is a one-way street. Mt. Auburn's intersection with Willard Street is more complex, as Willard Street is a narrow two-way street with a tight turning radius. One resident suggested moving the crossing island to the other side of the intersection to slow left turning traffic. **The City will need to look into this more because the crossing island is also located to provide a crossing for pedestrians accessing the bus stop.**

Safety at the Corner of Mt. Auburn Street and Willard Street

- Some members of the community expressed concern that vehicles turning from Mt. Auburn Street to Willard Street were driving over the corner of Willard Street onto the sidewalk, cracking the sidewalk, due to a low curb. It was noted that this poses a safety issue especially for school aged children walking and biking to the skating club. Some participants agreed this is an issue at many intersections with Mt. Auburn Street. The City responded that a 6" curb reveal is needed to improve safety and prevent drivers from running over the sidewalk. This would also lower speeds onto Willard Street because drivers are forced to slow down at the turn.

Parking

- A community member asked if on-street parking is required or if it could be eliminated. Residents expressed mixed opinions about this. The City responded that parking can be removed if it addresses a community concern, and supports other objectives for surface improvements.

Bicycling

- Residents noted that there are large volumes of northbound bicycles on Willard Street in the evenings. Bicyclists use Sparks Street to travel southbound, which has a bike lane to the Charles River. Other residents noted that they or their children have to bike on the sidewalk due to safety concerns.

Need for Crosswalk at Foster Street

- A crosswalk was said to be needed across Willard Street at Foster Street. Some participants indicated pedestrian visibility at Foster Street is poor due to a bend in the road. Additionally, turning from Foster Street onto Willard Street is difficult for vehicles due to parking on both sides of Foster Street, parking on one side of Willard Street, and two-way traffic on Willard Street.
- The project team suggested limiting parking at the intersection with Foster Street to improve visibility. One resident suggested installing mirrors on trees/signs to help with driveway visibility. The City will look into different alternatives before mirrors, as there are specific engineering guidelines to follow for visibility, such as providing 20 feet of clearance around an intersection. Parking near driveways was also presented as a visibility concern. Clearance can be provided on either side of driveways to improve visibility, or curb lines could be altered to change parking to improve visibility.

Loss of Street Trees

- Loss of street trees is a concern of multiple residents. Nine trees were lost at the skating club due to disease, with two of the biggest trees lost. Residents would like to see more trees added in the new design.
- Residents were concerned about overhead utility wires interfering with tree branches. One resident asked about having underground utilities. The City responded that this is very expensive with the cost of necessary in-home conversions of older electrical systems up to the homeowner. Age of the property also affects the cost. All of the residents would need to agree to have utilities placed underground. A community member then asked if the skating club wires could be placed underground, from the corner of Willard Street and Mt. Auburn to Foster Street. This is unlikely as the utility poles on the east side of the street carry utility wires across the street to service homes, again requiring all abutters to agree to this improvement and paying for the change to service their properties under current building and electrical codes. Additionally, a resident commented that vehicle exhaust from cars waiting at Brattle Street could be reason trees are dying. The City affirmed that it would like to add trees to the neighborhood.

Raised Crossings

- A resident expressed concern that it is difficult to walk from Foster Street to Brattle Street, and asked if the City would install speed bumps. The City provided an example of using raised crossings, rather than a speed bump, at Buckingham Street.

- Residents expressed mixed opinions on if speed is an issue on Willard Street. Speed data collected during traffic counts indicate the average daily speed is about 26 mph. **The City will review traffic data to determine the extent speed fluctuates throughout the day.**
- One attendee cautioned that when parking on Brattle Street was modified, the street became like a parkway and less safe, with increased crashes. The loss of parking or a one-way Willard Street may increase driver security. The City responded that their data may show a different trend on Brattle Street.

Pedestrian Lighting

- A resident commented that there may be too little lighting for walking at night, but at the same time the existing lighting shines directly into houses. The type of lighting may be an issue. The City responded that lighting may not be included in the scope of this project, but could be improved separately from the project.
- **Another resident asked if motion activated lighted crosswalks could be used. The City will look into this option.**
- Several meeting participants indicated support for more pedestrian scale lighting to designate Willard Street as a neighborhood and not a place for cut through traffic. Lighting on Coolidge Hill was cited as an example of neighborhood lighting.

Drainage at 25 and 27 Willard Street

- Residents of 25 and 27 Willard Street stated that a drain in their yard regularly backs up and overflows, creating flooding. The drain may be shared with Bradbury Court and go to Foster Street, but it is unclear. The residents have lost cars due to flooding. **The City responded that the drain is owned by Riverview and they will survey the area to find where drain connects.**

Inconsistent Signage

- A community member commented that all of the signs on the street are different styles and asked if they would be replaced. The City indicated replacing the signage to make it consistent and up to current standards would likely be included as part of the project.

Pedestrian Path on Willard Street Court

- A resident noted that Willard Street Court provides a pedestrian path that is a short cut to Harvard Square. It was asked if any consideration will be given to Willard Street Court. The City commented that if it is private there will not be any changes. **The City will confirm the ownership of Willard Street Court and Dinsmore Court and look into the “private way” sign on Dinsmore Court.**

Water Management at Willard Street Court

- A resident commented that there is pooling at Willard Court, which leads to splashing in the winter from speeding cars. The City responded that the whole area will be designed in a way to have water flow into catch basins to prevent pooling.

4. Conclusion

The meeting concluded at approximately 8:30 p.m. Participants were reminded to include their information on the sign-in sheets in order to receive project updates.

Attachments

Cc: Project Team



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Meeting Attendees

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6. Valentin Ruano
7. Amanda Rodriguez
8. Martin Miller
9. Susan Epstein
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11. Ann Wyman
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Project Team

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9. Christi Apicella, McMahon Associates
10. Natalie Raffol, McMahon Associates







Willard Street
Community Meeting
Cambridge, Massachusetts

- Need trees

Speed

Quality of life

Bikes *

Narrow sidewalks

Turnover for 2 way traffic

Safety

Dark

Drain
Pipe

Water

Narrow

Difficult to walk

Vol *

Need new sidewalks

Need crosswalks

* Concern about parking

Water management

Walk path

