

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
WESTERN AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE #7, October 5, 2010
MEETING NOTES**

Date, Time & Place: October 5, 2010, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Cambridge City Hall Annex, 344 Broadway, 4th floor conference room

Present

Committee Members

Lawrence Adkins	Mertin Betts	Velmer Brooks
Kathy Cannon	Abdullah Daoud	Reuben Dottin
Caitlin Gallagher	David Gibbs	Marvin Gilmore
Erin Gullage	Megan Krey	Marc Leuchner
Bob Nesson	Eran Segev	Anne Shuhler
Andrea Spears, Esq. (for Artis Spears)		Rev. Lawrence Ward

City of Cambridge

Jeff Rosenblum (CDD)	Bill Deignan (CDD)	Kelly Dunn (DPW)
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CDD = Community Development Department DPW = Department of Public Works

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (HDR Engineering, Inc.)	Cynthia Smith (Halvorson Partnership)
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Public (signed in)

none

*****SEE ALSO POWERPOINT SLIDES OF PRESENTATION*****

Note: Q=Question A=Answer C= Comment

1. WELCOME (Jeff Rosenblum)

Jeff welcomed the attendees, reviewed the agenda, and introduced City and Consultant staff.

2. STATUS UPDATE ON CONCEPTUAL DESIGN SELECTION (Jeff Rosenblum/ Jerry Friedman)

Jeff reviewed the five concepts that were developed, with the input of the Advisory Committee and other public outreach, to identify the full range of potential options for Western Avenue between Pleasant Street and Memorial Drive:

- Concept 1: Two travel lanes, bicycle lane, parking on both sides
- Concept 2: Two travel lanes, street level cycle track, parking on both sides
- Concept 3: Two travel lanes, raised cycle track, parking on both sides
- Concept 4: One travel lane, bicycle lane, parking on both sides
- Concept 5: One travel lane, bicycle lane, back-in angle parking on the left side (same number of parking spaces as the other concepts, just that all the parking would be on one side)

For all of the five concepts above, the concept for the section from Mass. Ave. to Pleasant Street is to have one travel lane, a bicycle lane, and the expansion of the green space at James Cronin Park. Though this project only includes construction funds from Franklin Street to Memorial Drive, an Upper Western Avenue Landscape Design Study Area has been developed to ensure that this project fits within a larger vision for this area.

A 30-page project booklet was developed and made available online, and has been viewed by over 800 people. Our email and postal mail outreach distribution list contains over 350 people. All received a PDF copy by email, and those who requested a preference for postal mailings received a printed copy by mail.

Over the past 3 months, city staff from various departments reviewed the concepts in greater depth to better understand the pros and cons of each and have taken into account the extensive community feedback received.

A **DRAFT** conceptual design has been developed for review by the Advisory Committee. Jerry walked the Advisory Committee through the draft conceptual plan. It has the following major features (see accompanying plan for details):

- Addition of a bicycle lane from Mass. Ave. to Green Street where one does not exist today; formalize this block as 1 vehicle travel lane
- Relocation of a bus stop at Green Street to in front of the former Police Station
- Change to one travel lane from Mass. Ave. to Pleasant Street, when it then turns into two lanes
- Widening of the sidewalk on Franklin Street in front of Enterprise [indicated in dark orange]
- Expansion of green space at Cronin Park [existing green space indicated in light green, expansion of green space indicated in dark green]
- From Pleasant Street to Memorial Drive, the draft conceptual plan utilizes Concept 3 with two travel lanes, a separated bicycle facility (raised cycle track) [indicated in blue], and parking on both sides
- Addition of a bicycle facility from Blackstone Street to Memorial Drive where none exists today (the right turn lane is removed)
- Addition and relocation of crosswalks [indicated in light orange], addition of curb extensions [indicated in dark orange]
- Improvements to Pleasant Street, Howard Street, Putnam Street, and Memorial Drive intersections
- All bus stops will include a curb extension [see page 24 of the project booklet for a photograph of a bus stop on Cambridge Street of similar design]

Q: How will the changes at Pleasant Street impact the ability for trucks to make the right turn onto Western Ave.?

A: The purpose of the changes at this intersection is to improve conditions for pedestrians. The intersection of Pleasant Street and Western Avenue has been squared off, but designed such that full-size tractor-trailer trucks will still be able to make the turn without significant impact on traffic and queuing. It may not look like it by looking at the plans in front of you at that scale. The turning templates have been used to verify the appropriate engineering design of this intersection for trucks.

Q: The intersection of Pleasant and Western Ave. is problematic for pedestrians, and that this design will improve the situation by making vehicles come to a full stop. My observation is that there are plenty of opportunities for gaps on Western to allow cars from Pleasant Street to turn onto Western Ave. Do you agree with this?

A: Yes, the signal at Green Street creates gaps and opportunities for cars on Pleasant to turn onto Western.

Q: Wouldn't it be better to have the 2 lanes start again a little sooner such that the Pleasant Street traffic can turn into it's own lane? Will the current design create traffic backup?

A: There are enough gaps in traffic because of the Green Street light to prevent traffic backups. The traffic on Western is caused by bottleneck at Memorial Drive and then at Putnam Street. The traffic light at Howard Street does not create any bottleneck for Western Ave. because it has so much green time.

Q: Bus stops where the bus comes to a halt in front of a street is a problem (like at Howard Street), what can be done about that?

A: Unfortunately, the locations of driveways in the vicinity of bus stops makes it difficult to design good bus stops. At Howard, we will look to see if the front door can open at the front curb extension, and the rear door at the rear curb extension, such that the bus will no longer block Howard Street.

Q: You mentioned the possibility of consolidating the two bus stops on the block between Dodge and Howard, what's the status of that?

A: We still plan to meet with the MBTA and the neighborhood to discuss this possibility. Originally, we thought that consolidation would free up some parking spaces, but it turns out that because of the current locations of the bus stops, consolidation would not result in the creation of additional parking spaces.

Q: Can the bus stop at Putnam be moved down the block a little?

A: We can look into that possibility.

Q: If you make it one lane (or 1 and a half lanes) from Putnam onto Western, I believe that will discourage illegal bus traffic on Putnam.

Comment from another committee member: But being one who drives down Putnam to get to my house, the two lanes really help the situation for cars because it allows for some cars to queue waiting to turn onto Western while allowing other cars to go straight through. I think it would be a bad idea to not have this.

C: I like the widened sidewalk on Putnam in front of Western Front.

Q: Are you going to change the signal at Putnam to be concurrent walk signal for pedestrians when the light is green?

A: This will be considered as part of the overall traffic signal retiming recommendation in collaboration with MassDOT and the DCR. The community requested this to be exclusive because of a perception that it will improve safety. But approximately 80% of pedestrians cross anyways when the light is green but the ped. signal says "don't walk". Cambridge policy recommends concurrent at intersections like this one.

Comment from another committee member: This change was requested because of community perception that exclusive signal would be safer, after a bad incident happened with a pedestrian.

Q: My observation is that employees at several Harvard-owned buildings on Blackstone Street cross Western Avenue at the existing crosswalk on their way to the parking garage across the street. If you move the crosswalk, admittedly to a better location, many of those people will cross at the old location.

A: We will contact Harvard to further investigate this issue.

Q: Drivers often don't know that Howard Street is 2-way, what can you do about that?

A: Additional signage and pavement markings will be added as part of this project.

Parking. [see accompanying graphic indicating locations where parking spots will be lost. Each black dot is one parking space lost, the green dot indicates a parking space added. The numbers associated with the parking study are unchanged, and reflect existing conditions.] The current draft conceptual design plan requires the loss of 15 parking spaces on Western Avenue. Even if we chose Concept 1 with the bicycle lane instead of the cycle track, there would be a loss of 9 parking spaces. The reason for this loss is the addition of additional pedestrian safety measures, such as additional cross walks and curb extensions. The 6 additional spaces lost in the design of the cycle track involve needing a little additional space at some of the intersections. We recognize community concern regarding any loss of parking and are trying to balance this with creating a safe and accessible design for Western Ave. The parking study that was conducted indicated that there is additional parking capacity in the middle section of Western Ave., so we feel confident that there will still be ample parking available the lost spaces on Howard Street are a result of the community desire to improve the functioning of that intersection for vehicles.

3. UPPER WESTERN AVENUE LANDSCAPE DESIGN STUDY (Cynthia Smith)

Cynthia presented a plan view of the study area, and walked through the key elements of the plan. The goal of the Upper Western Avenue Landscape Design Study is to develop some concepts to ensure that what is built as part of this reconstruction project, which only includes roadway and sidewalks from Franklin Street down to Memorial Drive, is compatible with desirable future changes in the upper section between Mass. Ave. and Franklin Street. that could happen at a future date.

[see accompanying visual containing some concepts in plan view, as well as some cross section before/after sketches.]

4. CURRENT STATUS / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT (Jeff Rosenblum)

The conceptual design presented to the Advisory Committee today is currently in draft form. The past several months were spent confirming that the City will be able to conduct adequate snow removal of a separated bicycle facility (cycle track) prior to presenting this as a potentially viable concept to the Advisory Committee.. The plan now needs to undergo continued engineering feasibility to ensure its constructability given certain constraints. This will occur over the next month. Some of the challenges with the current draft conceptual design: potential drainage design constraints with raised crosswalks/cycle tracks at intersections; operational issues with recycling and trash removal program; refining more detailed expectations for snow clearance of the cycle track.

Q: We should definitely know exactly what the expectations are for the community regarding snow clearance and the cycle track. An abutter will be very upset if they receive a ticket for not clearing the sidewalk in front of their house if at the same time the cycle track remains uncleared. And what are residents going to do with the snow from their cars?

A: More detailed snow clearance operational expectations for this project will be refined and presented at the next Advisory Committee meeting and the next Community-wide public meeting.

We expect to be prepared to present a recommended conceptual design at the Community-wide Public Meeting #3 on November 3, 2010 from 7pm – 9pm at the Citywide Senior Center, 806 Mass. Ave, across from City Hall.

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