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November 10, 2008

DRB Memorandum #2008-12

Memo to: Bonnie Weeks, Building Commissioner
Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
From: Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Recommendations of October 22, 2008

The Wednesday, October 22, 2008, meeting of the Design Review Board began at 7:35 p.m. in the First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall. Members Janet Winston (Chair), Jonathan Salvon and Lynda Faye were present, along with Senior Planner, Christine Brestrup. Also present were Diana Stein, liaison for the Select Board, Roy Rosenblatt, Director of Community Development, Jason Skeels, Town Engineer, and citizen, Walter Wolnik.

The Board turned to **Old Business**.

Old Business

Redesign of Intersection at Route 116 (West Street) and Pomeroy Lane (Pomeroy Village)

Christine Brestrup presented a report on the October 21, 2008, meeting of the Public Transportation Committee, during which the PTBC discussed the Pomeroy Lane intersection. She reported on comments made by members of the PTBC, by the Superintendent of Public Works, Guilford Mooring, and by Glenn Barrington, Operations Manager for UMass Transit Services, as follows:

- The need for left-turn lanes was questioned because of the problems they create in widening the roadway;
- Road widening will push the crosswalks back away from the intersections and lengthen the distance of the crossing and probably cause the removal of some existing trees;
- Crosswalks should be as close as possible to the intersection;
- A study was done in 1999-2000 that showed that the intersection met the state warrants for left-turn lanes;
- People pass on the right, off the pavement, to go around those who are turning; this causes deterioration of the pavement edge and supports the need for turning lanes;
- The road needs to be widened to accommodate bicycles;
- In the future a left-turn lane may be needed on West Pomeroy Lane;
- Perhaps bus stops could be moved to the north, opposite Dancer Computer;
- Left turn lanes might be justified if bicyclists and pedestrians are accommodated;
- The existing roadway has 12 foot wide lanes and 3 foot wide shoulders, for a total width of about 30 feet;
- The roadway as it is proposed will have two 11-foot-wide travel lanes, a 10-foot-wide turning lane and two 5-foot-wide bike lanes, for a total width of 42 feet;
- Ideally curb cuts for universal accessibility should be behind the bus stop pull-off;
- The bike lane could be 4-feet wide instead of 5-feet wide;
- A sidewalk on the north side of Pomeroy Lane would be useful, and it should extend at least to the Pomeroy Court Coop;
- All of the traffic is on the north side of the intersection and the bus stops should also be on the north side;
- A crosswalk could be installed at Dancer Computer;

- A splitter island could be installed, approaching the intersection from the north and the south, to warn drivers that an intersection is approaching; it could have flashing lights with a sign showing a pedestrian;
- The PTBC members asked who would decide all of these issues.

The Board discussed the upcoming public meeting that was scheduled for October 30 to bring the public up to date on progress in redesigning the intersection. Mr. Skeels noted that the design was in an early stage and that there would be a public hearing once the design had reached 75% completion.

Mr. Rosenblatt stated that some of the work in the intersection might be eligible for CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funding, especially the portions having to do with accessibility. The application will be submitted in February.

Mr. Skeels made a presentation of some preliminary design ideas superimposed on aerial photos and made the following comments:

- There are crosswalks in the intersection, but only the southwest corner is handicapped-accessible from the crosswalk;
- There was a more extensive design prepared by MassHighway (begun around 1997), but the town took control of the road after seeing MassHighway's design;
- The town's design will be "smaller" and "less highway-like";
- Left-turn lanes are needed;
- Traffic in the intersection now causes back-ups and may cause accidents without turning lanes;
- Another left-turn lane may be needed on West Pomeroy Lane in the future;
- There is room on West Pomeroy Lane for sidewalks;
- If the bike lanes are only 4 feet wide they can't be called bike lanes; they will be considered "shoulders";
- PVTA generally likes bus stops after the signal [intersection];
- Neither PVTA nor the DPW are completely opposed to moving the bus stops farther to the north;
- Both Orchard Valley and Pomeroy Lane comprise a large population center;
- It's better to put bus stops near the intersection;
- It will be necessary to do a taking at the Sibie's property if a bus stop is constructed there;
- The large 24" maple at the northwest corner will need to be removed; [it is in decline and is also in the way of proposed construction];
- There is a control box for the traffic lights at the northwest corner;
- The town can do eminent domain takings, but usually the town does "amicable" takings and often obtains donations from property owners;
- The Select Board will act as the "judge" for this design project.

Mr. Rosenblatt made the following statements:

- About 40 residential units of housing may be proposed on the Slobody property behind the Valley Transporter building;
- Bus stops should not be too far from the intersection because all of the commerce is located there and there may be more housing at the intersection in the future.

Ms. Faye made the following comments:

- It makes the most sense to have the bus stop near the intersection;
- It is not a good idea to move the bus stop north and install a crosswalk away from the intersection.

Mr. Skeels explained the plan for the Hess gas station frontage and explained how the fuel-delivery truck moves through the Hess property and the intersection. He stated that a 3-foot-wide grass belt and a 5-foot-wide bike lane are proposed on the east side at the Hess station. The southern entry to the Hess station is proposed to be closed

off. The northern entry is proposed to be redesigned. One option is to install clear entrance and exit aisles and a mountable island between them. Arrows can be painted on the ground to indicate “in” and “out”.

Mr. Wolnik noted that wheelchairs should be accommodated across this entry drive.

Mr. Skeels showed where a bus shelter could be positioned at the northbound bus stop, in either of two locations. He also noted that two residents of the 500 West Street Condominiums did not want a sidewalk to their complex from the intersection.

Mr. Salvon and Ms. Winston stated that there should be a sidewalk to 500 West Street and that some small trees could be planted along this sidewalk. [Small trees may be appropriate because there are overhead wires here].

The Board members discussed the upcoming public presentation scheduled for October 30.

Mr. Skeels noted that after the plan has been determined, then the DRB can begin to discuss street furniture, plantings, and other amenities.

Mr. Rosenblatt commented that the CDBG money could pay for curb cuts and pedestrian-operated traffic controls. He noted that the developer of the vacant lot behind Valley Transporter could install a sidewalk in front of that property.

Mr. Skeels noted that there are two “mast arms” for the traffic lights already in place. These are spun aluminum poles relocated from downtown. More traditional poles may be substituted in the future, if the Design Review Board recommends them. Additional posts will be added on the other two corners for pedestrian controls. He agreed that the sidewalk should be extended to the Pomeroy Court Coop.

Ms. Winston suggested installing some plantings at the “Sibie’s” corner. She approved of the bus stops being further north but questioned where people from the Coop would cross through the [private] parking lot.

The Board turned to **New Business**.

New Business

North Amherst School – Repairs

Mr. Rosenblatt stated that repairs were being planned for the North Amherst School. Since the repairs amounted to more than 30% of the value of the building, there is a requirement for a ramp at the front entrance. Mr. Rosenblatt stated that a variance is being sought from the requirement for a ramp. He asked the Design Review Board to send a letter supporting the variance from the requirement for a ramp. Ms. Winston MOVED that the Design Review Board send a letter in support of the variance from the requirement for a ramp. Ms. Faye seconded the motion and the Board voted 3-0 to send a letter of support.

Draft of Revised Design Review Board Handbook

The Board decided to table discussion of the Revised Handbook until the next meeting.

West Cemetery Plantings

Ms. Faye described the Preservation Plan that has been prepared for West Cemetery, which includes recommendations to restore the landscape. She noted that the 1730 section (the “hilly” section or “Knoll”) was the only example of 18th century landscape left in the downtown area. She stated that the Preservation Plan calls for rehabilitating the flora on the “Knoll”, including planting ground covers, meadow grasses and wildflowers. The Historical Committee has funds to do this. Jim Mulcahy, an alumnus and representative of the Stockbridge School fraternity, has approached the Historical Commission and has offered the services of the fraternity

members to install these plantings and maintain them for 10 years. Ms. Stein noted that there needs to be supervision of the installation. Ms. Faye stated that the area should be tastefully naturalized.

Mr. Salvon suggested that the Design Review Board could approve the part of the planting plan that includes bulb planting, but that the remainder of the landscape restoration plan should be presented to the Board at a later date for review and recommendations.

Ms. Winston MOVED to allow the fraternity members to begin the program of planting bulbs. Mr. Salvon seconded the motion. The Board voted 3-0 to approve the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Cc: Anita Licis, DRB member
Janet Winston, DRB member
Kathryn Grandonico, DRB member
Jonathan Salvon, DRB member
Lynda Faye, DRB member
Diana Stein, Select Board
Jeffrey Bagg, Senior Planner
Nate Malloy, Associate Planner
Jason Skeels, Town Engineer
Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works
Roy Rosenblatt, Director of Community Development
Peter Lillya, Public Transportation Committee
Jane Ashby, Public Transportation Committee
Rob Crowner, Public Works Committee