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DRB Memorandum #2008-13

Memo to: Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
From: Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Public Meeting – October 30, 2008
Pomeroy Village Streetscape Design

On Thursday, October 30, 2008, the Design Review Board held a public meeting to present information about the redesign of the intersection at Route 116 and Pomeroy Lane and to provide an opportunity for public discussion and comment regarding preliminary design ideas for the intersection. The meeting was held in the cafeteria at the Crocker Farm School at 280 West Street, in South Amherst. The meeting began at approximately 7:35 p.m.

Design Review Board members Lynda Faye, Jonathan Salvon and Kathryn Grandonico were present, along with Senior Planner, Christine Brestrup. Ms. Faye chaired the meeting. Also present was Jason Skeels, Town Engineer, and approximately 32 interested citizens. Over 500 notices had been mailed or emailed to residents, business owners, Precinct 7 and 8 Town Meeting members, members of town boards and committees (Select Board, Public Works Committee, Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee, Disability Access Advisory Committee and Planning Board) and others.

Ms. Brestrup presented a slide show on the history and existing conditions of the intersection and the roadways approaching the intersection. Mr. Skeels then gave a presentation on various preliminary design ideas for the roadway reconfiguration, including turning lanes, bike lanes, sidewalks, manually-operated pedestrian crossings and bus stops. Mr. Skeels made the following comments with respect to the proposed redesign of the intersection:

- The first driveway entry at the Hess station is slated to be removed or closed for safety reasons;
- Splitter islands may be installed in the center of West Street, as traffic-calming devices, for traffic approaching the intersection from the north and south;
- The bus stop on the southbound side may be moved south, to the other side of the intersection, to a location in front of Sibie's, in order to avoid problems with traffic queuing at the light;
- On the northbound side, the island where the bus stop is currently located may be extended north to accommodate a bus shelter, if the bus stop remains in its current location;
- An alternative idea for the bus stops involves moving both bus stops to the north, to a position in front of Dancer Computer;
- This northern position would serve both the offices in Amherst Office Park and the Pomeroy Court Coop residences; however, a "mid-block" crosswalk would be necessary to serve this bus stop and people may use private property [the parking lot south of Dancer Computer] to gain access to the Pomeroy Court Coop from this bus stop location;
- The northern location would also provide more room for a bus shelter on the northbound side since the island there is larger;
- A third alternative would be to increase the number of bus stops and place two of them in the northern location and one the southern location, on the southbound side, in front of Sibie's;
- Mr. Skeels prefers the crosswalks to be at the intersection;
- In the current southbound bus stop location, a bus may become "trapped" by traffic backed up at the light;

- The design has not even reached the 25% point yet and this is a good time to obtain public input about what might be proposed;
- There are huge environmental problems involved with installing a sidewalk in the easterly and westerly directions along Pomeroy Lane because of stream crossings and wetlands;
- Installing left turn lanes will involve widening the intersection;
- If the vacant land owned by Slobody (the land behind Valley Transporter) is developed the developer will be asked to install a sidewalk along the north side of West Pomeroy Lane, in front of the new development.

Anne Vexler of 140 West Pomeroy Lane (owner of Hampshire Gymnastics) commented as follows:

- She likes the bus stops on the north side of the intersection;
- Students could use the bus to come to the gym;
- There is a lot of foot traffic on the north side of the intersection.

Ron LaVerdiere owner of the Amherst Office Park commented as follows:

- Traffic backs up to the second (northern) entrance of the Amherst Office Park during the 5:00 p.m. rush hour;
- People who work at Amherst Office Park have trouble getting in and out of the Office Park during the evening rush hour;
- It would be better for people in the Office Park for the southbound bus stop to be located on the south side of the intersection.

Carol Gray of 815 South East Street commented as follows:

- Care should be taken with regard to the aesthetics of the area;
- The Design Review Board should consider parks, landscaping, street trees and benches as part of the design.

John Rankin of 560 West Street commented as follows:

- It would be nice to have more than a bare bones design;
- Crosswalks could be improved if they were more than just painted lines;
- The crosswalks at Amherst College are good examples to follow.

Mr. Skeels noted that raised crosswalks would not be an option at this location, because of problems with emergency vehicles, but use of other materials could be considered. This would cost more but it would look better.

Adrienne Terrizzi of 61 Pond View Drive commented as follows:

- The form of the intersection should come first before the discussion of the details;
- The idea of eliminating the first Hess entrance is a good one.

Lynda Faye commented as follows:

- The Design Review Board is always considering and focused on aesthetics, as well as how things work for people.

Sandra Anderson of 124 Pomeroy Lane commented as follows:

- The sidewalk on the north side of Pomeroy Lane is a good idea;
- The existing sidewalk along Pomeroy Lane [south side?] is hard to walk on;
- There is no sidewalk along West Pomeroy Lane;
- Lots of people from Orchard Valley would like to walk along the road;

- We should encourage people to walk and consider installing a sidewalk in both the easterly and the westerly direction along Pomeroy and West Pomeroy Lanes.

Janet Chevan of Lantern Lane commented as follows:

- She asked about the potential for constructing a fire station in the vicinity of the intersection, perhaps behind the Valley Transporter building; Mr. Skeels noted that this property is being considered for a housing complex;
- The Farmington Road exit from Orchard Valley is dangerous;
- Speeds along West Pomeroy Lane are high in the morning and evening;
- Vegetation blocks people's view; Mr. Skeels offered to look at the sight distance in this location.

Alice Swift of Pond View Drive stated that her primary concern was for walk lights at the intersection. Mr. Skeels stated that we need to figure out where the walk signal posts will be located based on whether there will be turning lanes or not.

Peter Lillya of 23 McIntosh Drive in Upper Orchard made the following comments:

- Members of the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee (PTBC) have looked at the intersection, particularly with respect to where the west-side [southbound] bus stop should be located;
- The PTBC is concerned that if the bus stop moves, the handicapped people in the Abodes (Pomeroy Court Coop) will have a greater distance to travel;
- There is no reason why [northbound and southbound] bus stops need to be across from one another;
- There may be a "de facto" crosswalk across from Dancer Computer already;
- The PTBC shares the concern that the Village Center should be more attractive;
- Left turn lanes will increase the width of the pavement;
- The PTBC also looks after the interests of cyclists;
- The bike lanes can be reduced from 5 feet to 4 feet in width, which is sufficient for cyclists.

Evelyn Bloom of 150 Pomeroy Lane made the following comments:

- She lives across from Hickory Ridge Golf Course;
- Traffic coming from the west has increased as a result of the malls;
- Sidewalks are needed on West Pomeroy Lane;
- Parking lots adjacent to the intersection have too many spaces for the number of cars that actually park in these lots;
- Maybe some of this underused parking can be used to provide for commuter parking.

Mr. Salvon noted that when the intersection is reconstructed, curbing will be installed. The installation of vertical curbing often acts as a traffic-calming device and tends to slow traffic.

Susan Richardson of Farmington Road asked about the pedestrian-crossing devices, if they would stop traffic in both directions. Mr. Skeels stated that the pedestrian phase would stop traffic for all directions at once.

Ms. Anderson asked if the timing of the traffic lights could be adjusted instead of constructing turning lanes. Mr. Skeels stated that there could be a "delayed green" light.

Meredith Troy of 299 West Street stated that the traffic light is hard to see when approaching from the west since the light is hidden behind tree branches. The branches need to be trimmed. She would also like a Bank North ATM to be installed at the intersection.

Mr. LaVerdiere commented that if the bus stop is moved to the location in front of Dancer Computer there will be more opportunity to install landscaping in front of the old apple storage building [now the home of hair salons, restaurants, etc.]

Carol Gray made the following comments and asked the following questions:

- When planning the sidewalks the Design Review Board should consider installing a grassy strip between the sidewalks and the road;
- A park with a swing set and a picnic table might be nice if part of a parking lot can be taken away;
- Is there a connection between the design of this intersection and Atkins Corner?
- She hopes that there is a redesign effort focused on the intersection of College Street and South East Street, too.

Mr. Skeels stated that there will be grass strips between the roadway and the sidewalk wherever there is room. Ms. Faye suggested that planters could be installed where there is no room for grass strips.

Anne Vexler suggested that if the vacant lot behind Valley Transporter is developed, maybe an access way through it could be built, to provide access from the development where Hampshire Gymnastics is located over to West Pomeroy Lane, so that there is another point of ingress and egress for the existing office park and gym.

Ruth Feldberg of 276 West Pomeroy Lane asked about a left turn signal. Mr. Skeels stated that a left turn signal would be incorporated into the design.

Mr. Skeels noted that the road would be widened approximately 11 feet if turning lanes are added. The addition of splitter islands approaching the intersection may require some minor widening at the approach to the intersections. However, the splitter islands are only about 4 feet wide and they would act to narrow the road and to slow traffic. There are already 8 foot wide shoulders at the approaches to the intersections.

Curt Tausky of 40 Applewood Lane stated that the splitter islands may be dangerous in the snow, since the snow cover will hide the islands. Mr. Skeels stated that there have been no accidents at the Amherst College splitter islands, that all of the curbs are sloped and mountable and that vertical markers have been installed to warn drivers of the location of the splitter islands.

Susan Richardson of 87 Farmington Road stated that she likes the idea of signs located north of the intersection, to warn people about the approaching intersection.

Mr. Rankin asked how people will be able to turn around the islands. Mr. Skeels stated that most of the islands will be made up of yellow paint on the pavement and that people can drive over the yellow paint.

Cheryl Wilson of 136 Pomeroy Lane asked about the possibility of building a sidewalk from the Pomeroy Lane intersection to the South Amherst Common.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Cc:	Anita Licis, DRB member	Diana Stein, Select Board
	Janet Winston, DRB member	Peter Lillya, Public Transportation Committee
	Kathryn Grandonico, DRB member	Jane Ashby, Public Transportation Committee
	Jonathan Salvon, DRB member	Rob Crowner, Public Works Committee
	Lynda Faye, DRB member	Larry Shaffer, Town Manager
	Jeffrey Bagg, Senior Planner	Bonnie Weeks, Building Commissioner
	Nate Malloy, Associate Planner	Jason Skeels, Town Engineer
	Jason Skeels, Town Engineer	Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works