



**CITY OF BURLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

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Chapin Spencer
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS

Champlain Elementary Pedestrian Improvement Project Neighborhood Meeting

Wednesday, August 2, 2017 at 6:00 PM

Burlington Department of Public Works – Front Conference Room

645 Pine Street, Burlington, VT

MEETING MINUTES

Councilors Present: Councilor Chip Mason, Ward 5
Councilor Joan Shannon, South District

City Staff Present: Chapin Spencer, DPW
Norm Baldwin, DPW
Laura Wheelock, DPW
Susan Molzon, DPW

Residents Present: See Attendance Sheet

Chapin Spencer called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

I. Introduction

Chapin Spencer, Director of Public Works, made opening remarks and introduced DPW staff present. Chapin announced that DPW will be receiving comments on this project and presentation for the next two weeks.

II. Presentation

Project Overview

Laura Wheelock presented a PowerPoint presentation. Laura identified the Agenda for the meeting.

A resident asked what prompted this project. Laura responded with the Project overview. This started as a Safe Routes to School study with input from the Champlain Elementary School PTO and school parents. DPW was awarded a grant for bike/pedestrian improvements based on this study. The grant limits these improvements to bike/pedestrian improvements.

Councilor Mason added that the project started in 2010 with the Champlain Elementary School PTO and support from City Council.

Project Goals

Laura stated the project goals of providing a safe route to school for students of Champlain Elementary, connect missing pedestrian infrastructure links, increase pedestrian visibility at key crossing locations, and to improve driver behavior on Birchcliff Parkway.

Meeting Objectives

Laura stated the meeting objectives are to present two designs for Birchcliff Parkway and to get feedback from the neighborhood.

Current Status

Laura provided a status update for the project. Design started in 2014 and we are still at 25% conceptual design plans. Construction is planned for 2018. The VTrans grant expires October 15, 2018 so we must complete design and be in construction prior to this date. If no consensus is achieved, DPW will likely progress with the design and construction of Locust St and Cherry Lane improvements separate from other improvements on Birchcliff Parkway.

A resident asked if the PowerPoint presentation will be posted on the website. Laura responded yes, the presentation will be posted after the meeting.

Laura stated that there is a neighborhood traffic calming request in the queue for Birchcliff Parkway.

Option A – New Sidewalk

Laura presented Option A which includes a new sidewalk on the North side of Birchcliff Parkway between Bittersweet and Cherry. There is a speed table and bumpouts at Cherry Lane. Under this option, there is no parking on the South side of Birchcliff between Pine and Cherry and no parking on both sides of Birchcliff between Cherry and Bittersweet. The road width is narrowed to 22 feet.

A resident stated that this narrowed width is similar to Cliff Street. Laura corrected that Cliff Street is 20 feet wide and Birchcliff would be 22 feet wide. Resident expressed concerns with driving on narrow roads.

A resident questioned if there is an existing no parking sign on Birchcliff between Pine and Cherry. Others believe it may be no parking during certain times of day. Norm reviewed the Ordinance and confirmed there is No Parking 8PM-6AM.

A resident asked why parking would be restricted on Birchcliff between Cherry and Pine. Laura responded that this was due to the bumpouts at the intersection.

A resident asked why Option A was developed. Laura responded that one of the goals of DPW and the City is to improve and increase the sidewalk network, pedestrian connectivity and safety throughout the city. This would provide new pedestrian infrastructure. The resident responded that another option might be better for improving access to school.

Option B – Birchcliff/Bittersweet Intersection

Laura presented Option B which includes crossings at Bittersweet. Under this option, parking would be restricted on the South side of Birchcliff from Pine St through Bittersweet intersection. Parking would be allowed on the North side of Birchcliff.

A resident expressed concern for people who park on the North side who have to cross to the South side because there will be no sidewalk on the North side to get them to the crosswalk.

A resident asked for clarification on the bumpouts and the removal of parking on the south side. Can this be reversed on the bumpouts located on the South side instead? Laura responded that there is limited sight distance on the vertical and horizontal curves at this location. The bumpouts provide better sight lines and the safest alternative is for bumpouts on the north side to improve the line of sight through the curve and hill.

A resident asked for an explanation of what the bumpouts are. Laura responded that bumpouts would extend approximately 8 feet from the existing curb. The line of tape in the roadway is about 8 feet from the curb. Bumpouts are concrete curb extensions with sidewalk and grass.

A resident expressed concern about traffic travelling in both directions on a 22 foot section of road at the bumpouts.

A resident asked if this option includes a pedestrian crossing at Cherry Lane and if it will have a flashing light. Laura responded this option does include the intersection improvements at Cherry Lane. The City has adopted guidelines for the use of Rapid Flashing Beacons and the intersection of Cherry Lane and Birchcliff does not have enough volume to warrant a flashing beacon and does not meet other warrants under those guidelines. A resident asked if a formal traffic study has been done. Laura responded that a formal traffic study has not been completed because this work was started under the Safe Routes to School study, but Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) does collect traffic data.

Laura presented that we have heard concerns about stop signs during winter conditions on the hill, stop and go traffic, and other concerns so we have looked at the option of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB's) at the Bittersweet and Birchcliff crossing. Chapin commented that RRFB's are appropriate here because of the limited sight distance. Laura added that parking will be allowed only on North side.

A resident stated that they had strongly urged DPW to look at an option for crossing at Alder Lane 11 months ago because there are good sight lines and it is the safest place to cross. The resident asked if an Alder crossing was looked at. Laura responded that there are limitations to the VTrans grant. DPW did look at this crossing but it would require pedestrians to backtrack to get to the crossing and crossings may line up with existing driveways.

A resident supported a midblock crossing between Alder and Bittersweet.

A resident stated they observe school kids coming out of Alder and Cherry Lane and not further up the street. Kids are escorted by parents because it is not safe. Another resident stated there are kids who walk to school by themselves.

Laura stated that she appreciates all the observations, but improvements to the road and crossings will change the functionality and affect speed conditions.

Norm stated that a centerline or center median has been discussed to address some concerns of driver behavior. Laura added that this would be addressed during the design phase.

A resident asked if there are other options and if the addition of the RRFB's would be enough that we wouldn't need the bumpout at Bittersweet. Laura responded that the bumpouts are driven by safety and provide better line of sight and shorter pedestrian crossing. Norm added that RRFB's are warning devices and we try to achieve crosswalks where pedestrian and driver can make eye contact to ensure a safe crossing. Bumpouts improve visibility and help facilitate this. There is a higher level of risk if eye contact is not possible.

A resident expressed that as a pedestrian and driver a three-way stop at Bittersweet would be safer for both. Stopping would make turning onto Birchcliff safer. They understand there are parking issues, but feel that safety factors with a three-way stop is beneficial.

A resident expressed that they were initially in support of the stop signs, but are now concerns about stopping on the hill in winter.

A resident expressed concern about additional noise for vehicles stopping at the stop signs.

A resident suggested that parking be eliminated on both side of the curve, or reserved for residents only.

A resident observed a tradeoff of less connectivity for parking with Option B.

A resident expressed concern for bumpouts pinching the lanes at the intersection. Is there an option that doesn't narrow the street? Also expressed concerns with vehicles crossing the centerline of the road. Laura responded that the bumpouts improve pedestrian safety and provide traffic calming. Bumpouts also deter speeding and truck traffic.

A resident expressed that they feel the truck traffic is an issue with GPS navigation devices.

A resident asked what the police department says about the enforcement. Another resident expressed that they had already contacted the police department but they do not have enough staff.

A resident expressed that they do not feel comfortable driving up Cliff Street because it is narrow and narrowing Birchcliff is setting up for someone to get hurt.

A resident asked if the limited visibility is because of the curve or because of mature trees. Laura responded that the limited sight distance is due to the horizontal and vertical curves.

A resident asked what is the rollback plan if the bumpouts do not work. Laura responded that additional measures would be implemented to improve the effectiveness of the bumpouts.

A resident expressed concerns of turning from Bittersweet to Birchcliff with the bumpouts and being forced into the opposite lane. Laura responded that the radius of the bumpouts is designed to accommodate garbage trucks without crossing into the other lane.

Option C

Laura presented Option C as a do nothing option for the Bittersweet intersection/sidewalk. We could table the discussion of Bittersweet for anything beyond improvements at Cherry Lane/Birchcliff. The Locust St improvements and the Cherry Lane intersection improvements would still move forward with design and construction under this project. Parking would be removed from the South side of Birchcliff between Cherry and Pine. Any other Birchcliff Parkway improvements would have to be done under their traffic calming request.

A resident asked if crosswalks would be on the table for traffic calming. Laura responded yes, traffic calming features could be crosswalks, bumpouts, speed humps, signage, gateways and various other techniques. These improvements (under the grant project) would not prevent future improvements on Birchcliff.

A resident requested increased signage for trucks and no parking 50 feet from Pine St.

A resident asked if the bumpouts could be reduced. Laura responded that the bumpouts were set to provide clear lane widths of two 11 foot lanes for residential streets. Norm added that a larger bumpout provides greater connection with pedestrians and drivers.

A resident offered support for the rapid flashing beacons and bumpouts provide cars a better line of sight too.

A resident noted there seems to generally be support for flashing beacons, mixed support for bumpouts, and support for the Cherry Lane improvements.

General Comments

A resident asked if there will be a survey for collecting feedback. Laura responded no, there will not be a survey or formal vote. This is a DPW initiated process and input will be taken into consideration with other factors. This is not the same as the traffic calming initiative which does involve a neighborhood vote under the current process.

A resident expressed concern about knowing what the feedback was since there may be others who did not attend the meeting. Resident also expressed support for flashing beacons and opposition to stop signs. Resident stated that bumpouts are not ideal but desires a safe and reasonable solution. Resident expressed an appreciation and desire to maintain a neighborhood community and feels that cars constantly stopping in front of their house would impact their quality of life. Resident expressed concerns of bumper to bumper traffic during certain times of day as a result of stop signs.

A resident stated that they have lived on Birchcliff for many years and has never seen an accident. Resident expressed concerns with speeding vehicles and that parking is not needed on the North side of Birchcliff. Another resident expressed a need for parking on the North side.

A resident asked how feedback will be shared, if people participating in this meeting need to respond, and if meeting minutes will be documented and released. A resident requested a vote. Chapin responded that meeting minutes are being documented and will be posted on the

DPW website following the meeting. Chapin suggested a poll be taken at the meeting to capture preferences of attendees. Poll will be taken after additional discussion.

A resident asked if the midblock crossing was not a possibility because of VTrans. Laura responded that VTrans would entertain an Alder crossing if no other viable alternatives could be found. From DPW's review, a midblock crossing does not provide adequate line of sight over hill for the design speed of the road so an assisted crossing would still be needed. A midblock crossing doesn't improve the situation so DPW would like to pursue improvements at Bittersweet. Improvements at Alder could still happen later down the road, but not through this current funding source.

A resident expressed concern with losing funding and questioned when we would lose funding, where funding is coming from, and what this would mean for a project. Laura responded that traffic calming is funded through the City's capital funding and is very limited. Chapin clarified that this grant project has adequate funding and has been budgeted. If the Bittersweet portion is removed from this project, the VTrans grant can still be used for the other portions of the project which include Locust St and Cherry Lane.

A resident expressed that they are a PTO parent and support improvements to enable pedestrians to cross Birchcliff. They are attracted to better crossing possibilities.

A resident asked if the Bittersweet crossing was constructed, could Alder still be considered with the neighborhood traffic calming request because of the distance to Bittersweet. Would we be giving up a future crossing at Alder? Norm responded that there are guidelines for the spacing of crosswalks but engineering judgment can overrule these guidelines. Adding crosswalks goes hand in hand with managing speed and truck activity. Pedestrian connectivity should be improved in this neighborhood and there is a need for managing speed to allow the community to be connected from north to south across Birchcliff. This project is the first step, but there needs to be additional measures.

A resident asked about the tube traffic counters in the road which have been removed. Laura responded that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) collected data for volume and speed. The 85% design speed was 29 MPH between Bittersweet and Alder.

A resident expressed opposition to Option A for the sidewalk between Bittersweet and Cherry. They expressed concern with narrowing the road at a blind curve and forcing traffic left as they go uphill. They observe trucks driving down the middle of the road. The resident showed photographs of these conditions and the roadway after snowfall with a roadway width of 19'4". Potential hazards should be avoided. Resident expressed support for flashing beacons and opposed the sidewalk for such little pedestrian usage.

A resident asked if the bumpouts can be smaller as an option. Laura responded we could look into reducing projection during design, but may not recommend reducing them for pedestrian safety and sight line.

A resident asked for locations of other bumpouts around the city. Laura responded there are others on lower Church St and throughout the city. A list will be provided on the project website.

A resident expressed concern for the effectiveness of marked crosswalks on improving pedestrian safety based on references to FHWA studies. Resident mentioned VTrans guidelines

for installing crosswalks. Laura responded that the purpose of this project is to facilitate school crossings. Norm added that there is a desire for connectivity in the neighborhood.

A resident stated that many pedestrians are illegally crossing through private property to access the Birchcliff neighborhood. Another resident stated that several property owners allow kids to cut through their property.

Participant Feedback

Chapin suggested the poll be conducted at this time. Attendees were asked to indicate their preference by raising their hand for the options provided below. Attendees could express support, neutrality, or opposition for each of the polls. Additional option D was suggested by attendees and is reflected below.

		Support	Neutral	Oppose
Poll 1	Option A – sidewalk from Bittersweet to Cherry	0	2	17
Poll 2	Option B1 – Stop Signs at Birchcliff and Bittersweet intersection, no sidewalk	0	2	18
Poll 3	Option B2 – Rapid Flashing Beacons at Birchcliff and Bittersweet intersection, no sidewalk	8	9	5
Poll 4	Option C – Cherry Lane improvements only	16	2	1
Poll 5	Option D – Crossing further east on Birchcliff – either grant or traffic calming	16	2	1

Residents requested that feedback be included in meeting minutes with a heading, and that others who submit additional comments be aware of the options discussed at the meeting.

A resident asked if a decision will be made with the options discussed tonight and what the next steps are. Laura responded that comments will be received until August 18th from the neighborhood and others who were not able to attend. A decision will be made and then design will continue for this project.

A resident asked if there are future grant opportunities and what percentage of the overall project does the Bittersweet/Birchcliff portion constitute? Laura responded that approximately 80% of the grant funding will be used if the Locust and Cherry improvements are completed and this will still be deemed a successful project and the City does not believe it will adversely affect the City’s ability to seek other VTrans grants in the future.

Callahan Park Access

A discussion on the issue of access to/from Callahan Park near Linden Terrace was tabled until the end of the meeting. At this time, a resident provided an overview of this issue. In summary, a strip of land between two properties was deeded from the developer to a homeowner's association. This association was never registered with the state and either was never established or is no longer active. As a result, the owner of this property is not clearly identified. A resident asked what can the City do with this property or what needs to be done to address this. There are concerns about the safety, maintenance, condition, and liabilities associated with this path.

Laura stated that the City does not have legal standing to this property and that it is up to the adjacent neighbors or the neighborhood to determine ownership. Chapin and Norm added that after a clear owner is named, the City would have an interest in working with the owner to improve access to the park and connectivity between the two neighborhoods.

A resident stated that the Plan BTV Walk/Bike plan identifies the objective for every street to have one path to connect major thoroughfares and Birchcliff already has this connection of sidewalk.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00 PM.

Additional comments may be submitted to Laura Wheelock until August 18th by email at LWheelock@burlingtonvt.gov , phone at 802-540-0397, or mail to 645 Pine St, Suite A, Burlington, VT 05402.

