

Safe Routes to School Project: Champlain Elementary School Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning and Feasibility Study

Local Concerns Meeting Notes

October 13, 2011

Attendees: Matt Bushey
Ellen Andersen, Project Steering Committee
Mike Fisher
Patrick Halladay, Ward 5 School Board
Jason Van Drieche, Local Motion
Bryan Davis, CCRPC
Nicole Losche, Burlington Public Work Department
Gail Henderson-King, Lamoureux & Dickinson (L&D)

Discussion

1. Introductions

Ms. Henderson-King welcomed everyone and introduced herself. She gave a quick overview of the Champlain Elementary School Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning and Feasibility Study project. She described the study area which includes:

- Birchcliff Parkway and how it intersects with the Birchcliff Parkway Neighborhood, Callahan Park and the Five Sisters Neighborhood,
- Locust Street and how it intersects with the Five Sisters Neighborhood and Callahan Park,
- Pine Street from Locust Street to the School, and
- Shelburne Street / Prospect Parkway intersection to the School.

2. Overview of Project Goals and Objectives for Study, Review Draft Project Purpose and Needs Statement

Ms. Henderson-King presented the overall goal of the study, which is to determine the feasibility of creating safer pedestrian and bicycle routes to the Champlain Elementary School, located on Pine Street, from several surrounding South End neighborhoods and Shelburne Street (Route 7). The project objectives are to create safe, continuous bicycle route and pedestrian path connections from Five Sisters, Birchcliff Parkway and Prospect Parkway neighborhoods to the Champlain Elementary School; provide traffic calming measures to help slow vehicular traffic; and to provide improved pedestrian and bicycle routes and facilities on the Champlain Elementary School campus.

The Purpose of this Project is to:

- Determine the feasibility of creating safer pedestrian and bicycle routes to the Champlain Elementary School from several surrounding South End neighborhoods: the Five Sisters, Birchcliff Parkway and Shelburne Street;
- Analyze current and proposed pedestrian and bicycle routes that can link existing sidewalks and trails;
- Study and analyze potential traffic calming measures to create safer pedestrian and bicycle networks; and



- Analyze existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities at the Champlain Elementary School and recommend improvements that will eliminate conflicts with vehicles, increase safety, and encourage greater use.

The Need for this project is based on:

- Unsafe roadway / intersection crossings within the study area as a result of vehicle driver behavior. Vehicle drivers often fail to stop for crossing guards or traffic lights, or for pedestrians in crosswalks, making it unsafe for pedestrians to cross roadways.
- Perceived speeding traffic that creates unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists to safely cross and use local roadways. Recent traffic counts indicate there is speeding traffic using cut through roads: Locust Street and Birchcliff Parkway between Shelburne Street and Pine Street.
- Lack of continuous sidewalks on one or both sides of neighborhood streets. Several roadways: Locust Street and Birchcliff Parkway do not have continuous sidewalks on the south side of the streets.
- Lack of crosswalks at some intersections where pedestrians are crossing.
- Limited or lack of facilities for students to safely secure scooters and bicycles when arriving at school. There is no scooter rack or storage area. The existing bike racks are often full on sunny days, causing bicycles to be left in other areas.

It was noted that there now is a scooter rack at the school. The last bullet under “needs” of the project is adjusted as follows:

- Limited or lack of facilities for students to safely secure bicycles when arriving at school. The existing bike racks are often full on sunny days, causing bicycles to be left in other areas.

3. Review Existing Conditions / Site Analysis Documentation

Ms. Henderson-King reviewed the existing conditions of the project area. For discussion purposes, the project area is broken down by street. The following physical limitations are noted.

Locust Street

- Excessive pavement width exists on Locust Terrace between Shelburne Street and Caroline Street, which results in increased vehicle speeds in this area.
- The sidewalk on the south side of the road ends at the gravel driveway in Callahan Park across from Caroline Street. This forces students walking to school to walk on the north side of Locust Street and cross at the Pine Street intersection.
- The Locust Street / Pine Street intersection has limited sight distances, which is problematic for pedestrians trying to cross.
- When vehicles turn on and off of Pine Street onto Locust Street, they are often in a hurry and are not always aware of pedestrians and bicyclists wanting to cross.
- There is on-street parallel parking on both sides of Locust Street between Shelburne Street and Caroline Street. There is on-street unmarked perpendicular parking and parallel parking spaces on the south side of the street between Caroline Street and Pine Street. There are no protected curb extensions for the crosswalks at the Caroline Street and Charlotte Street intersections. As a result, pedestrians end up crossing at some of the widest roadway widths and end up in large undefined and unprotected areas that conflict with parked vehicles.



- Several of the side road intersections have sidewalks with ramps but no crosswalks, forcing pedestrians to cross unprotected.
- Steep grades exist on Locust Street between the Charlotte Street intersection and Pine Street.
- Traffic conflicts often occur as a result of vehicles cutting through neighborhood from Shelburne Street to Pine Street. These vehicles are often not paying attention to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Birchcliff Parkway

- Pedestrian path connections exist on private property from Callahan Park to Birchcliff Parkway. There is a concern about safety.
- There are sight distance limitations at mid block crossing at Cherry Lane and Bittersweet Lane.
- Crosswalk markings at the Pine Street intersection appear to be worn off.
- There are conflicts between vehicles cutting through neighborhood and pedestrians / bicyclists trying to cross at the Pine Street intersection.
- Can visually see Champlain Elementary School from Birchcliff Parkway, but access is cross-lots through private parking areas to the school parking area.
- Undefined streetscape through industrial area near Pine Street with no sidewalk on the north side of Birchcliff Parkway between Cherry Lane and Pine Street.

Champlain Elementary School and Shelburne Street

- There are no pedestrian signals or push buttons at the Pine Street/Lakeside Avenue intersection, making it difficult to cross Pine Street.
- There are quite a few commercial driveways that must be crossed between Lakeside Avenue and the School, which is problematic for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- There is no sidewalk from the Shelburne Street/Prospect Parkway crossing. There is a very narrow pedestrian path on the south side of the school maintenance driveway behind an existing chain link fence that links to the school property. There are safety concerns, especially in the winter.
- The existing sidewalk bordering the school parking area along Pine Street is narrow and only separated by a bumper curb stop. This sidewalk ends at the north end of the parking area and a path exists to Lake Champlain Chocolates parking area that students use to walk and bike to and from Birchcliff Parkway.
- Bike racks on the north side of the school are often full. They are in an unpaved lawn area and are far from the school entrances.
- There are conflicts between the parent drop off area and students walking and bicycling to school.

Vehicular Traffic Data

Locust Street - East of Pine Street

Speed: 85% at 30 mph (Data from September 2006)

Birchcliff Parkway

Speed: 85% at 30 mph (Data from August 2004)



Pine Street – Between Flynn Avenue and Birchcliff Parkway
Speed: 85% at 33 and 35 mph (Data from August 2010)
AADT: 14,968 (Data from August 2010)

Shelburne Street – South of Ledge Street
AADT: 20,000 (Data from 2010)

4. *Relevant Studies/Projects for Creating Safe Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities in Study Area*

Several relevant studies and projects that are either underway or are long term include the following.

- Safe Routes to School Project for Improved Pedestrian Signage along Shelburne Street. This project should be installed next year.
- Roundabout Design Project for Shelburne Street/Locust Street area includes new sidewalks and crossings. It is in Preliminary Design at the VT Agency of Transportation.
- Champlain Parkway Plans include improvements to Locust Street/Pine Street intersection. This project is in Act 250 permitting.
- City Transportation Plan recommends a Complete Streets approach to Shelburne Street, which could possibly include a road diet to shrink vehicular lanes and increase other forms of alternative transportation.
- The Public Works Department is considering a citywide bicycle/pedestrian master plan, which will expand on the 2002 Burlington North/South Bicycle & Pedestrian Route Study.
- Local Motion's Pedestrian and Bike Mapping Project completed several years ago include suggestions for improvements for bicycle and pedestrian facilities to the school.

5. *Open Discussion / Public Comments of Initial Issues or Concerns*

The meeting shifted to a discussion of some thoughts on existing issues and ideas for consideration during the project. Initial comments were directed to understand what types of users are anticipated; where people are currently walking and biking to access the School; what limitations, problem spots and opportunities exist, and potential maintenance needs and concerns. Below is a summation of the comments provided during the meeting.

Locust Street and Callahan Park

- A suggestion for making a continuous sidewalk on the south side of Locust Street is to eliminate two parking spaces at the western end of the road to make a sidewalk connection to Pine Street.
- Having a walkway on the south side of Locust Street to Pine Street will eliminate the need to cross at Pine Street.
- There should be traffic calming along Locust Street from Shelburne Street to Caroline Street to help slow down traffic.
- Suggest installing pavement markings to define parking spaces at Callahan Park.
- The path through Callahan Park that accesses Cherry Lane supposedly has a legal right-of-way. This path could be formalized and winter maintained, which currently is not done.
- Callahan Park is maintained by the City Parks and Recreation department, not the Public Works department. Public Works can't maintain a sidewalk or path through a city park. The Public Works department (DPW) would let the Parks and Recreation department use DPW equipment for plowing city park sidewalks. However, the Parks and Recreation department has not done this.



- Is there any way for the Public Works department to maintain a more formal path through Callahan Park if it is really serving the public in other capacities other than recreation? While it seems unlikely, it would be worth checking into further.

Birchcliff Parkway

- The Birchcliff Parkway/Pine Street intersection is very sharp for bicyclists to maneuver.
- The trees bordering the sidewalk on the south side of Birchcliff Parkway bordering Lake Champlain Chocolates have low branches that often conflict with bicyclists.
- There was a suggestion for a pedestrian activated light at the Cherry Lane/Birchcliff Parkway intersection. This would make it safer for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross.
- The Lake Champlain Chocolates parking area is safer to cross from Birchcliff Parkway than Pine Street.

School Campus and Pine Street

- Along Pine Street between Lakeside Avenue and Birchcliff Parkway, there is little or no green space. There is no separation between fast moving traffic and pedestrians and bicyclists, which can be very dangerous if someone falls or slips.
- There are lots of commercial driveways that must be crossed on Pine Street to access the school.
- There is no pedestrian signal or push buttons at the Lakeside Avenue intersection.
- The proposed Champlain Parkway improvements will add more traffic heading north from the Lakeside Avenue along Pine Street. There are proposed pedestrian and bicycle improvements as part of this plan, which is scheduled to be constructed in 2013.
- There is no margin of safety with the green space between the sidewalk and Pine Street heading south from Locust Street. This green space slopes towards the road and if a bicyclist falls or veers off, they could fall into oncoming traffic.
- What is the ROW width of Pine Street? Could the existing sidewalk be shifted to include a green space?
- There are pedestrian and bicyclist conflicts at the school parking areas. Vehicles accessing the parking area on the north side of the school building often conflict with pedestrians and bicyclists using the sidewalk from the northern parking area.
- The Lake Champlain Chocolates parking lot on the east side of the building, which is very wide, could be adjusted to accommodate a sidewalk.
- The drop off area at the north parking lot has some conflicts. Vehicles leaving this parking lot at the north end are either turning left or right and are often not paying attention to bicyclists and pedestrians. Children are not aware of the vehicle driver movement here, which creates a dangerous situation.
- Maybe there could be a walking path from the northern school property line that could include a bridge and cross on the back side of the sports fields to the school. This could connect with a path connection to Birchcliff Parkway.
- Children enter the school on three sides: south, west or east, depending upon where their classrooms are located. This is done to prevent a bottleneck of students all entering in one location.
- The parking area on the north side of the school is for teachers, but is often used by parents for drop off.
- There needs to be more bike racks at the school! Right now, the bike racks are located on the south side of the school in a low, wet spot. It would be great to relocate them where it is not so wet. One suggestion is to relocate the bike racks to the southwest corner of



the school near the community gardens. Another suggestion is to locate them in the paved area on the south side of the school, where the 4 squares markings exist. This area is not used very often and could work well for the bike racks.

- One suggestion is to make a crescent drop off area in front of the school for separating buses and parent drop off areas from bicyclists and pedestrians.
- There are crossing guards in front of the school and at Flynn Avenue intersection to help students cross Pine Street safely.

Prospect Parkway

- There is a crossing guard at the Prospect Parkway/Shelburne Street intersection, but it is still unsafe. Vehicles will try to speed through the intersection before the light turns from the south.
- The traffic signals at the Prospect Parkway/Shelburne Street intersection are pedestal pole mounted offset on the sides of the street. Mostly all of the other traffic signals on Shelburne Street (and citywide) are overhead mounted. These existing traffic signals don't appear to be as visible as overhead mounted signals. Is there any evidence that these existing traffic signals are not as safe as the overhead mounted signals?
- Maybe the Prospect Parkway/Shelburne Street intersection is a good place for a white strobe light (in the red signal) to get vehicle drivers' attention better.
- Shelburne Street is a Class I city maintained highway.
- Could this study recommend improvements to the Prospect Parkway/Shelburne Street intersection?
- The path along the school property from Prospect Parkway is not maintained in the winter. It gets packed down and often becomes icy and treacherous to walk.

6. Next Steps

Ms. Henderson-King wrapped up the discussion with an explanation of the next steps in the process. L&D will be stopping work on this project at the end of October. VTrans has requested all their SRTS consultants to stop working on these projects because they can't extend contracts. A new request for qualifications process is underway and consultants should be selected in the next month or two. Whether L&D or another consultant, the next step is the development of alternatives for bicycle and sidewalk network improvements, and traffic calming measures for the project area with an alternatives presentation to follow.

The above is my summation of the Champlain Elementary School SRTS Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning and Feasibility Study Local Concerns Meeting. If you have any additions and/or corrections, please contact me for incorporation into these notes.

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