

Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
August 8, 2017
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Walter F. Alterisio, chair, Leah D. Basbanes, vice chair; Eric Carlson, BSC Group; Mike Martin, Paul Dalida, Roads Commission; Susan Psaledakis, Robert Irzyk, Catherine Dalida, John Callahan, Safe Pathways

Update on Comments from MassDOT on the Rt. 113 Minor Reconstruction Project with BSC Group

Mr. Carlson started off by introducing himself. He is a senior project manager at BSC Group. BSC Group is a consulting group of engineers for the Rt. 113 Project. From there he gave a brief re-cap of the project from its early conception to current. Beginning in spring 2015, a series of design and planning work was done which provided a number of alternatives for the project. This including variables such as shoulders, sidewalks, and various other elements of the project. All of this was in the context of MassDOT's standards, in particular MassDOT's "healthy transportation" policy. Following that process, a number of meetings were held leading up to generating a preferred concept. The next step for the project then was to prepare a design exception report, since exceptions would need to be included for the project considering the roads unique characteristics. Needs unique to the roadway were considered, as well as the context of the setting of the roadway. The preferred design was to be 11 feet each travel lane, 3 feet shoulders, and a sidewalk on the south side of the road extending from the Cemetery to about the Town Hall. The sidewalk including the curb would be 5 and a half feet. Design exceptions were requested for bicycle accommodation, waiver for sidewalks (one side instead of both sides), and a few other geometric exceptions. This was submitted to MassDOT in September of 2016. At that time, MassDOT reviewed it and made requests for expansion to include another section of information and additional waivers because the road was reclassified as a minor reconstruction project rather than merely a repair, rehabilitate and resurface project.

A revision was then submitted in February 2017. MassDOT reviewed that and responded with general favor in requests for most of the waivers. However, MassDOT requested approval be obtained from a complete streets engineer. MassDOT further clarified on some considerations regarding the total length of the proposed sidewalk among other commentary. Mr. Carlson then explained the results of the complete streets engineer and read his report to the Board. This report considered alternatives such as recommending 4 foot shoulders, and if necessary to obtain this, use of 10 foot lanes in each direction. Mr. Carlson noted that he is not generally in favor of 10 foot lanes as they are tight for traffic. The Board noted that the way the road is currently is likely not far from 10 feet each direction. There was then discussion about how the project aims to help improve the intersection with Westford Street and how the shoulders will help towards that improvement. Discussion returned to the report from the complete streets engineer and MassDOT's recommendations. Mr. Carlson reported subsequently about meetings held with MassDOT. MassDOT has expressed concern with some of the alternatives, in particular one that proposed no sidewalks. Additionally, Mr. Carlson noted he was warned that there is a strong element at the Commonwealth level that is pro bicycle which may oppose exceptions that do not accommodate bicyclists. From there he reported on some of the eligibility for funding from the Commonwealth and the process that has occurred in regards to MassDOT so far as to submission of the project for approval. Mr. Carlson suggested that MassDOT appears unlikely to support 3 foot shoulders. He then went over some other related considerations. From there he noted that the town can still move forward with the original plans preferred by the town, but this would be taking the chance that the exceptions are not approved.

The alternative is to reconsider and submit the design with 4 foot shoulders. This would still have to be approved, but it is Mr. Carlson's sense that it would be more likely to be accepted. He expressed confidence this can be done within the remaining budget the town has, whereas any redesign and re-submission would likely cost more. So the choice is the towns at this point. The Board had a few questions. First off being what 10 foot lanes and 4 foot shoulders would mean. Noting in particular some concerns about wetlands, the impact to the Cemetery, and the lines on the road. Mr. Carlson elaborated on what it would mean. He noted that there are some considerations on 10 foot lanes, as well as some "flattening" on curves that would be necessitated as a result to allow for trucks to have over swing. 10 foot lanes are usually auxiliary lanes and mostly found at

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intersections where there is a short left turn lane or right turn lane. Standards for arterial lanes are 12 feet. The Board asked what the current lane sizes. Mr. Carlson responded that the average overall roadway width is on the order of 25 feet. It gets a little tight going down to about 22 feet in total length in some areas like near the Cemetery. On average, considering what shoulders do exist, it means that most travel lanes are about 10 to 11 feet currently. Mr. Martin responded that the lanes would mostly stay the same, just with shoulders. Mr. Carlson agreed noting that there are not currently 3 foot shoulders, so that would mean expansion of the road in that sense. The Board suggested that the first consideration is the fact that the road is compromised. After all, the whole reason to do this is to replace the culvert which allows Flat Brook to pass under the road.

If the repair is not done, the road risks collapse when the culvert collapses. There are no easy alternative routes around the area and the cost is far greater than what the town could afford to do itself. Since the road is a state highway, the Commonwealth will assist in the cost, but that requires meeting standards which are imposed by the Commonwealth. The balancing act is to not lose sight of the communities needs while meeting these standards, but realizing that the standards have to be met because the town must have the funding from the Commonwealth. Therefore, compromise is what this all comes down to. As a result, we have to put forth a plan that MassDOT will accept. If success is more likely achieved with 4 foot shoulders, then it is likely that the town has to accept that. Mr. Carlson suggested that he can attempt to feel out MassDOT further on the issue of the lanes. The charge of complete streets is roadway use for everyone, and the 10 foot lanes are the recommendation of the complete streets engineer. MassDOT may be more flexible, and there may be a way to accommodate the shoulder issue as well as keep the lanes wider. The Board noted that a lot of the town's roadway issues are not created by the town, but rather come down to traffic volume and budget constraints. Still, the town must accommodate for safe passage through the town. Mr. Carlson noted that context is everything, but it is hard to convey when the reviewers don't make a trip out to see the actual road. As part of the process, it is important to attempt to convey the context. Mr. Carlson then elaborated further on that context and how it would be presented. The absolute widest portion of Main Street, for example is 24 feet from one side to the other. It appears based on the information available that 4 feet shoulders are more likely to be approved than the 3 feet shoulders. Mr. Dalida responded by discussing the context and compromises that have been provided. He explained that people are not going to love 4 foot shoulders, but they are doable.

Mr. Carlson suggested that the abutters appear willing and have expressed willingness to support the project, especially in attempting to swing the roadway away from the Cemetery. Additionally, the plans would substantially improve and move the road away from several properties providing some relief to houses close to the existing road. But one of the biggest improvements would be for the intersection with Westford Street. There was some brief discussion of sidewalks and some concepts such as patterns, coloring, and curbing. Part of the goal is to enhance and reinforce the character. Mr. Martin and Mr. Dalida both expressed support for the project and BSC Groups proposals at this point. Mr. Martin noted that the total project cost is around \$2.5 million. Mr. Carlson responded he would consider that number pretty close. The final number could be closer to \$3 million. Mr. Martin responded that if it's going to cost \$2.5 million, or more, paid for by the Commonwealth, he can live with 10 foot lanes and 4 foot shoulders. Mr. Callahan had some concerns about the 10 foot lanes and expressed fear that there could be traffic accidents and maintenance issues. Mr. Martin noted the plows on Highway trucks are about 10 feet. So it is tight. And those trucks are moving pretty fast because snow can't realistically be plowed at 10 mph. Mr. Callahan returned to the issue of having 10 foot lanes versus 11 foot lanes. He noted that 4 foot lanes aren't really going to help bicyclists that much, especially concerning the issues of having tighter lanes. Mr. Carlson expressed the feeling that the original design with the 11 foot lanes and 3 foot shoulders and the 5-and-a-half-foot sidewalk on the south side was a good plan that reflected the desires and compromises of the community.

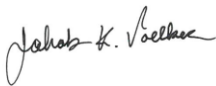
Mr. Dalida inquired about the possibility of a future reconstruction project, or extending this project, to the intersection of Main and Pleasant. Doing so could bring in an additional 300 feet of sidewalk. Mr. Carlson noted that MassDOT has suggested possibly extending the sidewalk to a logical conclusion at an intersection. This might mean extending as far as High Street. Further, extending to Pleasant and Main could allow for improvement for West Street. The only issue is the possibility of roundabouts as MassDOT favors them. Mr. Dalida suggested that extending the project has upsides for enhancement. Some discussion was prompted around the issue of sidewalks and why the efforts for extending sidewalk from High Street to the Library have so far failed. Mr. Callahan suggested that roundabouts are becoming more popular, and help "calm" traffic. Mr. Dalida explained that the attractiveness for the Roads Commission is the fact that the town could get more

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roadway work done by the Commonwealth, even if it means having to accept something like a roundabout. The Board then turned discussion to what the next step is. Mr. Carlson responded that it is to prepare the submission with an aim for September or October 2017. From there, the town should continue to work with regional planning to advance the project. After submission, it will then go through a review process. He then went over how that project would work. His expectation is that after submission this fall, it would be late winter before the town would hear back from MassDOT. Following that, MassDOT, assuming approval, a public hearing would occur in the spring. The goal will be to keep the project moving throughout the process from start to finish. Once MassDOT commits to pay, they commit to 110 percent of the cost. The Board then reached consensus to allow for submission with 10 foot travel lanes, 4 foot shoulders, and a 5 and a half foot sidewalk on the south side should Mr. Carlson and BSC Group find MassDOT to be of a similar opinion as the complete streets engineer. Discussion ended there.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Basbanes at 7:40 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed by majority vote.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Voelker
Admin. Assistant to the Selectboard & Town Administrator

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