

Halls Road Improvements Committee Minutes
Old Lyme Town Hall
April 7, 2016

Present: BJ Bernblum, Diane Birdsall, Michael Lech, Frank Morelli, Michael Perks, Mike D'Occhio, Lindsay Eisensmith, Jim Graybill, and Bud Canady. First Selectwoman Bonnie Reemsnyder, and Dominick Celtruda of BL Companies.

Absent: None.

Chairman BJ Bernblum convened the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

Approval of minutes of March 3, 2016

A motion to approve minutes as presented was made by Lindsay Eisensmith, seconded by Michael Lech. **So voted.**

Preliminary Scope.

Jim Graybill voiced concerns over the proposed geographic scope of project, running from Sill Lane, across Halls Road, including Davis Road East and West, and down Rt. 156 to the I95 off-ramp:

- if the scope is too broad, financing for entire project could hold up the high priority areas and may not get done in a timely manner;
- bridge over lieutenant river is huge undertaking, height, needs to be supported by columns- no permanent pilings allowed in water, and require safety measures needed to prevent kids jumping, etc.;
- the dock at Morning Glory took 6 years and \$10,000 in engineering; and
- The historical commission would never allow sidewalks on Rt 1 to Sill Lane.

First Selectwoman Bonnie Reemsnyder explained that the idea is to consider a preliminary concept plan that takes into consideration the entire area, for a project that will likely be implemented in multiple phases over 10-12 years. We should think/dream big at the outset and then come down to a reality that we can handle as the planning process proceeds.

Dominick Celtruda from the BL Companies concurred and explained that the initially -identified geographic area doesn't necessarily indicate that substantial improvements will be implemented in all zones.

BJ Bernblum noted that the Harbor Commission was talking about constructing a bridge over the Lieutenant River. They've abandoned the bridge idea, but are contemplating a dock on the western shore. He will stay in touch and coordinate with them.

Received 7/27/16
Allen H. Offutt

Preliminary Concept Plan.

The meeting was then turned over to Dominic Celtruda to present a preliminary Halls Road District Improvements "Concept Plan," developed pro bono by BL Companies for our discussion.

Dominic addressed the concerns presented and explained that the concept plan is a living document, a roadmap, but can change throughout the process up until construction phase. He recommended setting broad parameters so that we don't get pigeonholed during the creative phase.

He stated that the DEP will likely be on board for pedestrian bridge, and he said we should not worry about the structural criteria needed for approval as it is very common to create bridge of this nature.

He also suggested that it is possible to concede more soft shoulder for safety in lieu of sidewalks on Rt. 1 to Sill Lane if that becomes an issue.

Document Presentation.

Dominick then proceeded with an explanation of the document package he distributed, page by page. For ease of communication/reference, the improvement zones are identified as SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4, SP5, SP6 in order beginning at the intersection of Halls Rd and Rt. 1.

Page 1 is overview to give context and tells you what the other sheets behind will look like. It is likely that the I95 Highway on & off ramps will be changed in the not-too-distant future, so he recommended we should not address that zone at this time, or only in regard to aesthetics vs. geometry for improvements to the highway ramp area (welcome signage, a garden club landscape project, etc.).

SP1: Prime development zone: Rt 156/Halls Rd intersection to Big Y traffic light (the "L Intersection"). Bike lanes, mixed use, center median, identifying or linked lighting options, farmers' market, pavilions, community events (opportunity zones), housing, shops, along Rt 1. A comfortable median is 6-8 feet, which requires substantial widening in some areas and constricting in others; right of ways are very wide in this area.

SP02: "The L Intersection" at Big Y Traffic Light: This is an investigation section, 1 way road (Davis East/ West).

-Diane Birdsall asked about wetlands (L&M property) on Huntley Rd. and mentioned traffic back -up from Essex Savings Bank drive-thru windows. She suggested reversing the direction of flow. A Halls Rd. median would affect individual business entrances.

- Jim Graybill added that Truck U-Turns at Shell Station not possible.
- Lindsay Eisensmith inquired about Potential to create access within north side commercial properties (Davis Rd. thru to Hideaway parking lot) to limit traffic returning to Rt. 1.

SP3: Hideaway / Post Office intersection thru to Morning Glory/ Webster Bank. Is the "park triangle" at Lieutenant River viable? There is a significant grade drop-off. The Lt. River Park would have public access (car top) boat /canoe launch. The Bridge is shown as 14' (clear span 10-12' in reality) including girders, etc. The path continuing along the river to the Flo Gris Museum and the Bee & Thistle is depicted as gravel.

Dominick explained that there are federal regulations for bike lanes (4' shoulder on the road) vs. the proposed 10' multi-use path, which would allow separate lanes for concurrent bike & pedestrian use.

Dominick stated that long term it is important that our Master Plan show sidewalks & bike paths on both north & south of Rt. 1 in this zone, consistent with the width needed when the DOT eventually widens the road bridge.

SP4: Morning Glory to Rt. 1/ Lyme St. 195 will eventually be widened to the south at the Lyme St. intersection. There are drainage issues and grade changes that would need to be addressed for sidewalks to continue on Rt.1/Lyme Street to Sill Lane. Dominic addressed landscaping for our master plan--native species, more stately trees (oak, elms, maple) rather than cookie cutter mono culture, visual color/variation throughout the seasons. Smaller areas will get more detailed plantings, salt tolerant plants, etc., filling in areas with garden club-maintained plantings so there are no open spaces to store equipment.

SP5 & 6: Lyme Street intersection to Sill Lane Triangle. A 6' meandering foot path for nature walk with sculptures, etc. The plan contemplates a very limited amount of work on the Sill Lane Park, primarily landscaping.

Discussion of Next Steps.

We must now decide how we would like to modify the plans distributed by Dominick. Then BL Companies will revise them for, among other purposes, issuing our RFQ and public review. Dominick offered to provide examples of good RFQ for our use.

Project Scope

Dominick stated that zoning requirements are a key component of a Master Plan, so it would not be sensible to go through the process without considering them.

Regarding sewers, DEP regulations are getting more and more stringent, so it is advisable to look at our current and possible future needs. It may be that the town should look at purchasing a parcel "for the public good". The infrastructure has to go in first (utility poles, sewers, storm drainage, etc.), so this future visioning needs to be taken into consideration before we spend money on the aesthetics of the streetscape. BL Companies does have people in the office that work on Sewer Packaging Stations for communities, but can recommend another firm that specializes in that field.

Costs

Dominick estimated that the cost of developing a master plan may run from \$60-80,000, or up to \$120,000 if we include waste water planning. His off-the-cuff guess at a constructability budget for streetscape only (not waste water) is \$3.5-4 million.

It is possible that Tax Incremental Financing can be used for the project. This is a new mechanism whereby the state can issue Revenue Bonds and the proceeds used by the town or loaned to property owners, and repaid by the increase in tax revenues generated by increased commercial property values. Mike Andreana, an attorney from Pullman & Comley with expertise in Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts, is expected to will make a presentation at our May meeting.

Timeline

Dominic told us that Mystic Downtown was a 12 Year Process, and the minimum with DOT is 4-5 year process. When Bonnie Reemsnyder convened this commission, the members were advised that the project could extend 10-15 years.

Discussion of Mixed Use Development / Zoning Ordinances.

The group was divided on the advisability of including mixed-use projects in the master plan, pursuant to amended zoning regulations.

Arguments In Favor:

- Goal is that mixed-use-zoning would potentially incentivize land owners to help us beautify the district by redeveloping their properties in a way that's more economically friendly AND remains in keeping with our vision.
- Mixed-use-zoning would help individual land owners collaborate to create inter-connectedness amongst properties, which might relieve some of the traffic burden on Halls Rd. and provide standards for unifying/beautify the existing, as well as future development, in the district.
- This supports our mission/vision of creating a dynamic, vibrant & economically -sustainable district.
- Residents living in the district could walk to services, enjoy a return to Small Town America feel.

- This supports multimodal transportation and community connection by reducing our dependency on cars.
- A symbiotic, interactive interplay would support businesses on Halls Rd.
- If we want to invite the right type of development, then there is a real need for future commercial planning.
- There is a need for commercial/retail space as people don't want to rent the existing units on Halls Rd. because they're not "charming."
- There is a need for residential rental properties and/or condominiums for young people and for the retired community who love this area and want to stay in Old Lyme, but need to downsize or have second home elsewhere.

Arguments Against:

- There is no demand for more residential/commercial/retail space.
- Residents rely on Old Saybrook for our retail needs.
- A wall of buildings along Halls Rd crowds the area and spoils the vision of open space.
- Too much congestion already.
- We would need a water supply & sewers/waste water disposal.
- A waste water packaging plant is never going to happen, or could delay getting any improvements done.
- We should focus on beautification of Halls Rd and leave development in the hands of individual landowners.

Ultimately, the fundamental issue is what is in the best interests of the Town of Old Lyme. Critical questions include:

- Is there a demand for residential rental/condominium space and, if so, is Halls Rd a good place for it?
- Is there actually a demand for additional retail/commercial space, and would the public actually benefit from it?

The Committee will discuss further these issues and consider, among other things, whether to incorporate elements of mixed-use-development in the master plan or, alternatively, focus on Halls Rd. aesthetics and defer consideration of additional development, including mixed-use, for a later time.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Lindsay Eisensmith at 8:56 PM, seconded Michael Lech. **So voted.**

Respectfully Submitted

Lindsay Eisensmith
Secretary