

**Department of Transportation
Project No. 32-130
Safety Improvements to Route 31
Coventry, CT**

**Public Information Meeting
January 21, 2009, 7:00 PM
Coventry High School**

Minutes

Present:

Connecticut Department of Transportation:

Richard Armstrong
Bob Reilly
Derrick Ireland

BSC Group:

Peter Briere
Gregory Sommer

Town of Coventry:

John Elsesser
Todd Penny
Tim Webb

Approximately 40 members of the public

Presentation:

John Elsesser, Town Manager-Coventry:

Introduction:

- Opened Meeting and explained the purpose of the meeting

Bob Reilly, ConnDOT Project Engineer:

Project Status:

- Mr. Reilly provided a brief history of the project and discussed the status of the project.
- Mr. Reilly noted that the Semi-Final Design submission occurred in February of 2008, and the Final Design was moving forward.
- The draft environmental permits were under review and soon to be submitted to the Department for final review and then forwarded to DEP for their review.
- Mr. Reilly also noted that this was the third public meeting held for this project. A Public Hearing was held in June of 2006 and a Public Information Meeting was held in September of 2006.

Peter Briere, Project Manager-BSC Group:

Presentation of Project

- Mr. Briere presented the project using a power point format to outline his major points, to show the details of the streetscape amenities, and to show views of section of the roadway that highlighted the landscape design and sidewalk treatments. His presentation went as follows:
- Existing Conditions:
 - Mr. Briere presented the existing conditions and explained some of the deficiencies and areas needing improvement. A plan of the existing roadway configuration was displayed to illustrate the issues. These items included: sharp curve, excessive speeds, poor sight distance, intermittent sidewalks, lack of access control, and a poor drainage system.
- Roadway Improvements
 - Mr. Briere explained how the proposed roadway improvements would address these issues. A plan of the proposed roadway improvements was displayed to illustrate the changes.
- Streetscape Features
 - Mr. Briere then discussed some of the various streetscape features that would be incorporated into the project. He explained that design includes many new trees and shrubs. Much of this however may not be implemented as part of the initial construction due to funding issues. The advantage of having these features already designed is that they can be easily planted when the Town identifies additional funding sources. Mr. Briere then presented the details of the streetscape features. These included:
 - Concrete Sidewalk patterns – The concrete sidewalk will have a special scoring pattern from Lake Street to Mason Street. The scoring pattern will be standard east of Mason Street.
 - Paver Buffer Strip – This is the variable width strip between the scored concrete sidewalk and the curb line.
 - Crosswalks – The decorative stamped crosswalk will consist of a decorative colored pattern bordered by two 12 inch wide white lines (standard crosswalk lines).
 - Lighting – The detail of the light pole and fixtures was presented.
 - Banner Poles – These are the same poles as the light poles but without the luminaries.
 - Trees and shrubs.
 - Other site amenities include: Benches, Trash Receptacles, and Bicycle Racks.
 - Town Construction Cost
 - Mr. Briere reviewed the tentative construction costs that would be shared by the Town. Mr. Briere noted that the Town was responsible for 20% of the site features (lighting, sidewalks,

benches, banner poles, etc.) and 100% of the landscaping cost. The approximate Town costs were \$360,000.

- John Elsesser noted that the Town presently had \$250,000 but may be able to find additional funding between now and the time the project was advertised.
- Proposed Rendering
 - Mr. Briere then proceeded to present rendered plan views of the project that showed the locations of the streetscape features as well as the landscape plantings.

•Derrick Ireland, ConnDOT Rights of Way Property Agent:

Rights of Way:

- Derrick Ireland provided a brief overview of the process for land acquisitions and other property rights

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Bob Reilly, ConnDOT Project Engineer:

Conclusion:

- Mr. Reilly concluded the presentation with an overview of the project's design schedule.
- Mr. Reilly noted that the permit process is now dictating the project's schedule. Another task that could affect the schedule is the completion of the Right of Way work being done by the Town of Coventry.
- Mr. Reilly also discussed the proposed construction schedule. Construction is anticipated to begin in the Spring of 2010. Mr. Reilly noted that this project is considered a priority project by the Department, however at this time there is no funding set aside. Mr. Reilly did note that ConnDOT is hopeful that there will be opportunities for funding to become available.

Public Comments and Questions:

Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the proposed design. Questions were as follows:

Who is on the advisory committee and how does one become a member?

The advisory committee is made up of several stakeholders, including the Town Manager, Town Planner, and Residents/Business Owners. The names of the Advisory Committee members were shown during the slide presentation.

How much land is being taken near the curve?

The largest acquisition on this project are the two total takes located on the inside of the curve. The State has already acquired both of these properties.

Has there been any consideration to install a traffic signal at the intersection of Rte 31 and Rte 275?

The installation of a traffic signal at this intersection has been evaluated by the Department, however due to the steep grade, creating a stop condition at the bottom of the hill is not desirable. The proposed design is to leave the existing flashing beacon. It was noted that the site line from Monument Hill road, looking east will be increased due to the softening of the curve. The Department has also looked into installing a round-about at this location. However the Department determined that it did not meet the appropriate requirements. Currently there is a sedimentation problem in the channel along Rte. 275, has anything been done as part of this project to correct this condition?

Currently there is a sedimentation problem in the channel along Rte. 275, has anything been done as part of this project to correct this condition.

The area where the sedimentation problem is occurring is located outside of the project limits. Some of the downstream drainage improvements may help to alleviate this problem. This problem may be more of a maintenance issue. John Elsesser has asked DOT to make improvements as part of the project. DOT's position was that the scope of the project needs to have limits, and the Manning Hill drainage should be a separate project. There needs to be follow up with the DOT District Maintenance office

The proposed plans indicate that some of the existing parking for the pizza parlor and Chinese restaurant is going to be removed, where will patrons be able to park?

The existing parking lots around the building will be expanded. The intent is for these lots to be shared amongst the various property owners. Shared parking agreements will need to be established as part of this effort. John Elsesser added that currently motorists are parking in front of the buildings and backing out onto Rte. 31 which is very dangerous.

The plans also indicate that two existing parking spaces in front of the salon near the Bidwell Tavern are going to be removed. Where will customers park?

The two existing spaces are not legal parking spaces. A proposed lot will be constructed across the street with a shared parking agreement. Mr. Elsesser noted that current zoning does not allow for parking in front of the building.

Will the sidewalk in front of the church be raised above the street level or will this be a flush condition? Having a raised curb in this area may be an issue. This area is used during funeral processions and the casket is rolled over this area. Additionally the on-street parking has been removed in this area.

Additional parking is proposed to be provided for the church at the rear of the building, but providing on-street parking in front of the church will need to be re-visited. The design team will discuss this issue with the owner.

How will the realignment of the roadway improve the sight distance near the intersection of Rte. 31 and Rte. 275? Will speeds increase as a result of the new alignment?

The overall roadway width has been narrowed, and various site amenities will be incorporated into the project. Collectively these features will serve as traffic calming measures and should help to control the speed through the area. Additionally a traffic signal was evaluated, but the stop condition at the bottom of the hill was not desirable. The sight distances will be improved at the intersection.

Will the town have an opportunity to vote on this project or will there be a referendum?

Mr. Elsesser noted that this is a State project and therefore Town approval is not required. The Town plans to use grant funding to cover the costs of lighting, site amenities, and landscaping costs. John Elsesser also suggested the use of volunteer groups to install some of the landscaping to help reduce costs. At this time the Town does not plan to use tax dollars to cover this work.

What is the timeframe for the negotiations with Right-of Way Acquisition?

The negotiation process takes approximately three months.

How will traffic move through the village during construction? Will there be any detours?

No, at this time there are no detours proposed for this project. The State generally does not detour traffic from a State Route onto a local road. During construction a temporary one lane alternating traffic pattern will be set-up. Night work may also be considered.

Is there anything that can be done to protect the business during this construction period? Several business were impacted a number of years ago during a utility project, and it has taken years for this area to rebound.

The State is very concerned about the businesses in this area. It was recommended that a meeting be held with the town prior to construction with DOT's construction personnel. Temporary signage will be installed to alert motorists that businesses remain open during construction. The contractor will be responsible to provide access to all businesses.

Who will be responsible for maintaining the new sidewalks?

Mr. Elsesser noted that the Town ordinance requires that the property owner maintain the sidewalk in front of their property.

How are property owners expected to remove snow from the sidewalk in areas where there is a stone wall along the back of the sidewalk? Also who will be responsible for removing snow from the gateway areas?

The abutters will be responsible for the removal of the snow from the sidewalks in front of their homes or businesses, as is presently required in Town. Hardships can be addressed on a case by case basis. In public off street areas within the roadway layout, such as the sign at the corner of 275/Lake, the Town will put the on its list for day after the storm clean-up.

The project proposes to eliminate some parking in front of businesses. Parking behind buildings will be inconvenient. Will this affect businesses? What about handicap parking?

The intent to move parking from on-street to behind the business is not only to make it safer, it also will promote a more pedestrian friendly village. Handicap parking is included in the off-street parking lots.

Are the costs shown in the presentation based on current costs?

The cost estimate has been escalated to reflect estimated costs for 2010 when the project is scheduled to be released for bid.

Why are bike racks being installed when there are no bike lanes being installed? There is concern about bicyclist-safety along Rt. 31.

Unfortunately there wasn't enough right-of-way to include an exclusive bike lane. Also, it's hopeful that the relatively narrowness of Route 31 will encourage slower traffic through the village. John Elsesser explained that the bike racks have been included to create an atmosphere and support traffic calming.

How will the decorative crosswalks help to calm traffic?

The decorative crosswalks will look and feel different than a traditional crosswalk. This should help to reduce speeds as drivers react to the different surface. It also serves as a visible cue to the driver.

Have individual maps been prepared to show what is being done on each property?

Individual maps have not been created for this meeting, but the DOT will be available to meet with business owners to discuss the improvements in greater detail.

Can this presentation be posted on the Town website?

The PowerPoint presentation along with all of the rendered plans will be uploaded to the Town's website. A disc was given to Mr. Elsesser after the meeting.

Will re-aligning the road cause speeds to increase?

The main purpose of re-aligning the roadway is to improve safety. The realignment should reduce the frequency of accidents and also the severity. The site amenities and a narrower roadway will promote traffic calming and create a village atmosphere.

Adjournment:

The Public Information Meeting was adjourned at 9:40pm. A number of residents remained in the hall and some additional discussion ensued.

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