TC VSSC October 15, 2023 Site Walk Minutes FINAL

Tracie Adams welcomed everyone to the Site Walk and thanked them for attending at 11:06AM. She introduced the Village Streets Study Committee (VSSC) members present to begin the site walk and confirmed a quorum of 4 members (Tom Grella, Will Ludt, Chris Buchanan, Tracie Adams). She stated the current streetscape design ideas are a first draft only and are likely to change.

Tracie Adams discussed safety of the group as the top priority and reviewed the plan to visit the 5 roads up for resurfacing in FY2025. The group was welcomed to join the committee at any or all of the sites.

Tracie Adams reviewed the purpose of the site walk. She stated the VSSC wanted to evaluate the 5 streets in person and discuss possible streetscape designs. The other priority for the site walk is to hear from citizens about their insights, concerns, and preferences.

Tracie Adams stated that things to consider during the site walk might include how the road currently functions, issues we are trying to address, and how suggested changes would address these concerns.

The group met on the Common in front of the Congregational Church to look at Church Street and discuss streetscape design ideas and concerns. The group walked over to the Congregational Church side of the road and looked at the sidewalk which is several feet from the street. There was discussion about keeping the sidewalk. Many citizens noted it was too far away from the street for adult walkers to use but that it might be of benefit for the safety of children, especially those attending the preschool at the church. Rolf Biggers and Kyle Coffey, VSSC members joined the group. The group then walked toward Town Hall to look at the other end of Church Street and noted the sidewalk was no longer continuous. Drainage concerns were mentioned. It was noted that the preschool vehicle drop-off enters on Jailhouse and goes around to the church.

Chris Buchanan explained traffic calming techniques including the reason that narrower streets are effective. Being narrower and removing center lane striping ensures streets do not look like a highway thus encouraging highway driving behavior. He also discussed optical narrowing which makes the street feel and appear narrower, so cars slow down. This can be accomplished by changing the color of the street edges to a different color/material than the vehicle driving surface. This space on the side of a street also doubles as an informal space for pedestrians to walk.

The group discussed the importance of using materials that are plowable and all agreed that any recommendations be discussed with DPW Director Eric Slosek. It was stated that he has been attending the VSSC meetings and providing valuable input. The group discussed draft streetscape design options with alternate paving material on both sides for optical narrowing versus having it on one side only. Some residents expressed preference for a defined sidewalk and others stated that traffic on Church Street is low and they prefer walking in the street. Their experience was that cars move over and share the street. Citizens who walk and ride a bike on Church Street stated they feel safe.

The group walked across the Common to look at the portion of Main Street from Middle Street to Manchester Road. The group agreed with a citizen’s suggestion to go around the group and share names and addresses. All who were comfortable with this idea participated. It was noted that most attendees of the site walk lived in the Village.

It was stated that Main Street at this end of the road is 27 feet wide. The current streetscape draft plan is to narrow the road to 20 feet and remove the center line. The 7 feet could be reclaimed and added back to the green. Rolf Biggers stated that the end of Pierce Lane has a large asphalt are that could be reduced. It is visually confusing and there is far more asphalt area than needed. There was a discussion with citizens and there seemed to be agreement with these ideas. There was a group discussion about parking concerns, especially toward Moulton’s if the road is narrowed. It was explained that the VSSC recognizes parking is an issue and there are no plans to reduce parking. The suggested road narrowing for vehicles would not reduce parking.

At 11:57AM the group moved on to Carriage Road in front of the library to discuss Main Street from Amherst Street to the library and Carriage Road. Tracie Adams discussed safety as a priority and reviewed the goals for the site walk for anyone joining the group.

She explained that the draft streetscape idea for Carriage Road is to keep its current width of 18-feet and use an alternate surface material on the entire road surface. It currently functions as a pedestrian priority street.

Tom Grella explained that we walked by a driveway on Carriage Road that was recently done using chip seal. He explained that it is 1/3 the cost of asphalt. Over time the chipseal evens out and becomes smooth like asphalt. There was concern raised about it being noisy for a street and the roughness and loose stones being a safety concern especially for bikes.

A resident of Carriage Road felt that 50% of cars on Carriage Road were cutting through and driving too fast. He suggested making it undesirable to cut through. Another 40-year resident of Carriage Road stated that the amount of traffic seems about the same. A resident brought up the idea of changing where Carriage Road currently connects to Davis Lane into a connection with Main Street instead. There was discussion about rumble strips, speed bumps, and dips/reverse speed bumps to address speeding.

Rolf Biggers shared that granite is optimal for an alternate surface material on a pedestrian priority street like Carriage Road. He stated that granite is native, locally sourced, looks good and is durable. There is a greater cost up front, but granite lasts far longer than asphalt. Kyle Coffey explained that there would be no added taxpayer costs if we can get funding through a federal grant. Tom Grella encouraged the group to consider that the budget must be passed in order to have funds for our portion.

Citizens were concerned with materials being smooth for bikes and walkers, plowable and also installed so drainage issues improved and not worsened. Others suggested that placing conduits for electrical wires underground is a citizen priority and would improve the Village. A citizen stated that decreasing speed and calming traffic and improving safety should include use of signage also. An example was given of a home on Manchester Road placing a sign that says “SLOW DOWN - We are a neighborhood not a racetrack” as an effective reminder.

Rolf Biggers discussed the draft streetscape design for Main Street from Amherst Street to the library. He stated that this is a heavy pedestrian use area and that there are 32 units across Amherst Street in Country Mansion with many people walking into the Village. The current path from Amherst Street to the library can become a sidewalk that is 5 feet wide and ADA compliant. The roadway is 25 feet wide and can be narrowed to 20 feet. Rolf discussed how changing paving material can indicate you have entered a pedestrian zone and that cars are encroaching on that space and this could be effective near Moulton’s. Rumble strips were mentioned again. Other citizens expressed wanting the sidewalk extended.

The owner of the Carriage Road home with new chip seal driveway shared that it has been installed a few weeks. He stated he likes it and that noise is minimal. He has had only a few loose stones and knows it evens out over time. He also noted that chip seal is used throughout New England and that various color options are available.

At 12:20PM the group moved to the tennis court parking area on Davis Lane. Tracie Adams discussed safety as a priority and reviewed the goals for the site walk for anyone joining the group. It was noted that Davis Lane is only 20 feet wide. A resident of Davis Lane shared concerns about extension into the ROW and talked about his experience with the road caving in and why stones have been placed to drive drainage down. Drainage at low points is an issue on Davis Lane. Another Davis Lane resident confirmed that drainage is a massive issue here. A citizen expressed concerns about resurfacing roads but not grinding them down. If the roads are above the driveways, then drainage is an issue. Many Davis Lane residents raised their hands when asked if they had drainage issues too. One resident stated that drainage is an issue despite having drainage basins on both sides of the road. Kyle Coffey noted that the drainage issues will be shared so that the Board of Selectmen (BOS) is fully aware of this ongoing problem.

The draft streetscape design options were discussed and included options for a pedestrian edge on both sides, pedestrian edge on 1 side/school side, and considering Davis Lane a pedestrian priority space like Carriage Road but with more traffic. These options were discussed at length.

Kyle Coffey summarized the options discussed as 1. Keep asphalt, mill down the surface, consider speed bumps or dips to decrease speeding 2. Keep current 20 feet width, have 4 feet strip for pedestrians (less than ADA 5 feet minimum) and 16 feet for vehicles (not 18 feet required to be considered 2-lane road). Citizens expressed they did not prefer this option. 3. Keep Davis Lane 20 feet width and treat it the same as Carriage Road with the whole street an alternate surface material (ex: granite). It was noted that Davis Lane is used like Carriage Road but has more vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Citizens expressed favoring this option. 4. Use the streetscape design calling for 10 feet vehicle space in middle then flanked by 5 feet alternate surface material (ex: granite) on both sides (5-10-5 design) which would be half the cost of alternate surface materials as the Carriage Road design option.

The result of discussion was that Davis Lane is better as a shared space/pedestrian priority streetscape design. Rolf Biggers suggested using the same material as Carriage Lane. Chris Buchanan summarized that residents of Davis Lane confirmed that they feel speed and drainage are the big issues here and that safety has not been an issue.

Road noise was also expressed as a concern depending on the surface materials chosen. It was suggested that 25 mph speed limit signs should be placed on Davis Lane. Placing yellow flashing lights at school zones was also suggested.

Chris Buchanan stated that Davis Lane functions as a shared space and that the road itself is used as a sidewalk. Keeping speeds down is a priority. He felt the alternate surface material should run end to end on Davis Lane to define the street as a pedestrian priority area. He liked the 5-10-5 for a cost savings option from the whole street done in alternate material. He was not in favor of the narrower 4 feet pedestrian area on one side of the road and the remaining 16 feet for vehicles.

A citizen pointed out that while the group was meeting, we could observe cars and pedestrian traffic on the road yielding to one another consistently and safely. This further demonstrated there is no need for a sidewalk.

Citizens also discussed placing stop sign at Christian Hill/Foundry due to current speeding as enter Village. Also note likely increased traffic if development moves forward.

At 1:06PM Tracie Adams welcomed the group and began discussion at the Jones Road location at the upper Wilkins ball field parking lot. The group totaled 15 people and included a few new citizens. Tracie Adams discussed safety as a priority and reviewed the goals for the site walk for anyone joining the group.

Tracie Adams reviewed the purpose of the site walk. She stated the VSSC wanted to evaluate the 5 streets in person and discuss possible streetscape designs. The other priority for the site walk is to hear from citizens about their insights, concerns, and preferences.

Kyle Coffey shared the draft streetscape design option for Jones Road. He stated the road width is 25 feet. The draft design option would have a separate pedestrian facility. The vehicle space would be decreased to 20 feet wide. A 5-feet wide, ADA compliant sidewalk would have a curb flush with the roadway. There would be no center line stripes. Drainage was mentioned as a potential issue.

Rolf Biggers stated that the sidewalk would be on the school side of the road. A resident shared concerns that there are lots of children in and out of cars in this parking area.

A resident of Jones Road stated that drainage creates erosion and that it is an expensive issue for him to manage. Kyle Coffey stated that the engineering phase of the project would address drainage in detail.

Another resident stated that a big concern is speeding traffic. Placing dips to slow traffic was suggested. It was noted that there are many blind spots along the road. Another resident reported that in the past, speed and stop signs were discussed and two public hearings were held. The Board of Selectmen voted to involve the Highway Safety Committee. It was noted that there are no speed limit signs posted and that the current speed limit is 30 mph on Jones Road.

Further discussion confirmed that removing yellow lines is suggested and that rumble strips would be too loud and increase any noise concerns. Speed bumps were also mentioned and concerns for DPW plowing over them discussed. Rolf Biggers suggested that any speed table or speed control device might be appropriate only at the Wilkins School crosswalk. Another suggestion was to increase enforcement efforts. Rotating police presence or even parking an unmanned patrol car were suggested as options.

A resident identified two times each day were terrible for traffic. The times were 7:30-8:15AM and when school lets out in the afternoon. Both were associated with the Wilkins School and the morning traffic was also due to people going to work. Using the road as part of a cut-through was identified. Traffic from Mont Vernon and areas north of Amherst run down Old Mont Vernon Road to Jones Road then down Lower Mack Hill to Manchester Road and then to Narragansett Road to get to 101.

A citizen identified cars parking along both sides of Jones Road for sporting events/practices and activities at the school create safety concerns. No Parking signs across from the Wilkins parking area on Jones Road are routinely ignored and not enforced. It was identified that there really are limited options for parking and that people driving in from other communities do not know where else to park. A citizen suggested pulling enforcement/patrol cars from Corduroy Road and moving them to Jones Road.

Tom Grella mentioned that we were sitting on blocks of granite taken from the old jailhouse. Will Ludt stated that the cut-through was closed in the 1960’s. Tom Grella said at that time it was called Pleasant Run.

Tracie Adams summarized issues for Jones Road as speeding, parking, and drainage problems. Swales were mentioned as way to address drainage.

It was suggested that shifting the road north 1-2 feet would give an added 1-2 feet to the 25 feet width we have now. Eminent Domain concerns were raised.

Rolf Biggers mentioned the issue at the termination of the road would be what to do with the large rock at the corner. A few possible options were discussed and would involve discussion with the homeowner. It was a preference to get more width if possible.

A citizen stated that the parking issue is occurring every weekend. Cars ignoring the No Parking signs and parking on both sides of the road present safety concerns. There is little room for vehicles to pass and there is real concern about emergency vehicles getting through on the road narrowed by vehicles on both sides. Big events at the ball fields create these parking issues. It was stated that ticketing vehicles parking illegally would help. Another citizen suggested creating additional parking on the school property at the tree line. This could serve as convenient overflow parking so cars would not need to park along the roads.

The VSSC Site Walk was adjourned by the committee (Tom Grella, Will Ludt, Rolf Biggers, Kyle Coffey, Chris Buchanan, Tracie Adams) at 1:41PM.

The Minutes for the VSSC Site Walk on October 15, 2023 are respectfully created and submitted by Tracie Adams. Corrected and approved October 24, 2023.