



# TOWN OF ARLINGTON

## Massachusetts Ave. Corridor Project

### Phase 1

Public Information Meeting - Wednesday, October 1, 2008

#### Meeting Summary

On Wednesday October 1, 2008, about 70 people attended a public information meeting on the *Massachusetts Ave. Corridor* project.

The goal of this meeting was to provide residents with information regarding the design objectives and design process. It would also allow the community an opportunity to ask questions about the project and submit comments and concerns.

During the presentation, Jack Hurd, Board of Selectmen, Brian Sullivan, Town Manager, Kevin O'Brien, Planning and Community Development, Scott Smith, Transportation Advisory Committee, John Michalak, P.E., Project Manager, from Fay, Spofford & Thorndike (FST), and Christine Scypinski, Waterfield Design Group provided an overview of the project development process, discussed project design goals, and outlined the proposed design issues and improvements that this project is striving to achieve. A copy of the presentation can be viewed on the Town of Arlington webpage.

Fay, Spofford & Thorndike compiled the following summary which is intended to outline the comments made by participants attending the October 1<sup>st</sup> meeting and is not intended to be a transcript. Similar comments have been grouped together and organized by topic.

The following is a summary of the comments and questions received at the meeting.

#### Project Duration & Sequence

- State Representative William Brownsberger expressed his concern for achieving the aggressive project timeline presented to the community. Having been involved in a similar project (ex. Trapelo Road in Belmont, MA) with similar goals, town and community support, and funding available from the town; he has been able to see how long submissions take to turn around, and he wants the community to know that not meeting the schedule is a possibility from his experience.
  - Jack Hurd stated that it has been about a 2 year process to get to this point and he is hopeful the process will become smoother in the future because much of the preliminary research has been done previously, thanks to Scott Smith and the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).
  - Kevin O'Brien stated that the town is on a strict schedule to get this project done within the timeline in order to receive construction funding. It's a difficult process and we will need to stay on top of each step. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) distributes state funds and to keep this project funded, they need to be convinced in May/June 2009 that we are on target for construction bidding in 2010.

- A resident stated that they take the “Trapelo Rd. Project” to heart, but what happens if the Summer 2010 bid gets delayed?
  - Kevin O’Brien stated that we don’t know what will happen. At the end of each fiscal year, MPO reallocations money that is not ready to be spent, so if our project isn’t ready, they might give it to a project that is ready.
- A resident questioned what could slow down the project design process and is there anything the community can do to move the process along (ex. Write to MHD)?
  - Jack Hurd stated that we want to hit the 25% milestone.
  - John Michalak (FST) stated that something that may slow down the design and submission process to MassHighway is when MHD hosts the 25% Design Public Hearing, if the public doesn’t agree with the design. This is the reason we are meeting with the community prior to beginning our design, so we may gather information and apply it and make sure everyone is on the same page.
- A resident commented that before submitting 25% design plans to MHD, that we meet with each of the different Arlington committees/groups involved and review with them to make sure everyone is in agreement.
  - Kevin O’Brien stated that all committees will have an opportunity to comment and give input prior to the submission.
- A resident asked about the process and what to expect for the Interactive Workshop Meeting on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, as well as how tonight’s meeting will help?
  - John Michalak (FST) stated that we are still in the stage of compiling information in order to address the major issues. We are in the process of taking traffic counts along the corridor and the survey will be conducted throughout the fall. At the October 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting we will bring plans and photos of the existing conditions and break into groups to discuss the community’s main concerns and specific issues within the corridor. After this meeting we’ll collect the information and plan to have preliminary design (25%) complete by January 2009.

#### FST and Waterfield Experience

- A resident asked if enhancement projects in other towns have been looked at to see what works and what doesn’t when doing this sort of project? (ex. Lexington Center - the north side had wide sidewalks, whereas the south side had hardly any.)
  - Christine Scypinski (WDG) stated that some more recent enhancement projects she has seen have not “balanced” very well, and we are hoping to find that “healthy balance” between all users of the corridor.
- A resident asked what FST and Waterfield’s biggest successes were, as well as, what were the biggest obstacles and what have they learned?
  - John Michalak (FST) said that the biggest hurdles can be dealing with moving utility poles and dealing with the utility companies. MHD is now trying to make this part of the process a requirement earlier in the design phases.
  - Christine Scypinski (WDG) stated that usually the design team is not part of the construction team because the construction process is run by MHD, so we don’t always have a huge amount of say during the actual construction, which can sometimes present a problem.

### Vehicular Traffic

- A resident asked how closely constrained are the limits of this project, can it go back to the Minuteman Trail? Will other congested area's near the corridor be looked at?
  - John Michalak (FST) stated that FST is strictly looking at the Mass. Ave. Corridor and the traffic actually on this section of the road [between the Cambridge line and Pond Lane]. If the traffic flow becomes more orderly through this area, hopefully it will better the condition of nearby areas. There will be studies conducted to determine where traffic is coming from and going to.
  - Jack Hurd stated that other projects in the area have been postponed to make way for this project. This project will most likely generate other projects and the Town will look into other projects that may tie into Mass. Ave. on the side streets.
- A resident commented that not having square intersections causes people to make turns prior to the traffic light/intersection. Can we get a solution for this?
- A resident commented on the intersection at the Cambridge line, that the left/right turn lanes can be confusing, especially coming from the Cambridge side.
- A resident asked what level of detail the traffic counts will include and if this information will be available at the Interactive Workshop on October 23<sup>rd</sup>? Without this information available, it will be hard for the community to come to a consensus.
  - John Michalak (FST) stated that if the traffic counts are completed by the October 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, then they will be shared with the public, but he isn't positive that they will be completed and analyzed by then. For now we'll be studying the previous counts taken by the TAC and apply the appropriate growth factor to get an accurate idea of the projected volumes. Counts will also be taken for all types of users of the corridor, including cyclists, pedestrians and transit users. For example, these counts will help us determine if certain crosswalks the addition of a flashing light. At this point we are still compiling all of our information and it is premature in the project development to get into specifics of lane arrangements, crosswalks, etc.
  - Scott Smith (TAC) noted that the traffic, cycle, and pedestrian counts are from about 6 years ago and need to be done again to ensure accuracy.

### Transit Traffic

- A resident inquired about the current budget troubles the MBTA has been dealing with and if Arlington assumes that the current rates will continue?

Laura Wiener stated that the town is still encouraging people to use their automobiles less and use public transportation, bicycles, or walk instead. If we show that there has been an increase in transit usage, then we can ask the MBTA for more service

- A resident expressed his concern about enhancements made to Arlington Heights that seem to not work as planned, one being that "bump outs" don't seem to accommodate the bus turning radius which causes buses to drive up on the curb and sidewalk.
- A resident asked bus shelters be wheelchair accessible. Also for them to be sheltering to rain, snow, wind, etc. For example, the Silver Line bus shelters are too high and open. We are more interested in function than style and aesthetics, although both would be great.

### Cyclist Traffic

- A resident expressed concern for some of the crossings for cyclists. Route 16 is difficult to cross.
  - John Michalak (FST), Jack Hurd, and Kevin O'Brien stated that one of the main goals of this project is to make all of these crossings safer for all users.
- A resident commented that designers should be wary of surfaces that are bumpy and not smooth for bicyclists.

### Pedestrian Traffic

- A resident asked if there will be solution to the snow piling up at crosswalk locations come the winter months, and if there will be a plan for plows to remove the snow?
  - John Michalak (FST) stated that we will look into some solutions to this.
- A resident also commented that larger sidewalks means more shoveling for abutters, and feels that they aren't even shoveling now.
- A resident commented that in Arlington Heights it appears an inlayed granite was used for crosswalks, and in the winter it becomes invisible because of the conditions, and since then lines have been painted next to the crosswalks in order to be clearly seen. He wants to avoid this type of application for the Mass. Ave. Project.
- A resident commented that the current location of crosswalks seems to work well with the bus stops and there doesn't appear to be a need for additional crosswalks or the relocation of crosswalks. She does not support curb extensions and feels flashing lights should be added and all push buttons working at the intersections.
- A resident asked if there will be any plan in place from now until construction to help minimize the dangers out there now?

Jack Hurd stated that there is no funding available right now for improvements to Mass Ave., but if there are immediate concerns that can be addressed, such as signage, they can be looked at by TAC.
- A resident asked that thermoplastic sidewalks be used instead of brick pavers in crosswalks because the vibrations can be intense for those in a baby carriage and those that are handicapped.
- A resident asked who is on the Mass. Ave. Review Committee representing the Disabilities Commission?
  - Kevin O'Brien stated that he is representing this group and he will keep in close contact with them throughout the process.
- A resident commented on numerous points referring to pedestrian traffic:
  - Make sure crosswalks are logically placed.
  - At Lake Street only one light has a push button for the crosswalk.
  - Does not favor curb extensions because it doesn't completely protect the pedestrian crossing. She would prefer flashing lights at the crosswalks.

### Parking

- A resident stated that she is concerned about handicapped parking. Her car has a side ramp and usually needs at least 8 feet of clear space to maneuver and get out of the vehicle. Requested that there is nothing beside the handicap parking spaces (for ex. Trees, planter base, bricks, utility poles, etc.). She referenced two spaces in particular; one located in front of *Coldwell Banker* and the other in front of *Fox Library*.
  - Jack Hurd stated he would personally take care of moving the two handicapped spaces that have obstacles.

### Drainage Issues

- A resident stressed the concern for drainage along the corridor and if there were ways to reduce stormwater runoff through innovative landscaping techniques such as porous pavement and rain gardens. Also, expressed concern for the waterway at the Cambridge line and keeping it safe.
  - John Michalak (FST) stated that we have LEC as a sub consultant to us who will be investigating the permitting process for this waterway.
  - Christine Scypinski (WDG) stated that we will look into opportunities to reduce the stormwater runoff through landscaping.

### Utility Coordination

- A resident asked if it is really necessary to have multiple poles along the corridor for each utility? He said he would like to see us contact utilities and convert this over to single poles.
  - Jack Hurd stated this is a town-wide problem and the Board of Selectmen are currently working on it.
- A resident also inquired about when the utility companies will be notified of these plans?
  - John Michalak (FST) noted that the 25% Design plans are also mailed to each utility provider.

### Amenities

- A resident commented on enhancements to Arlington Heights that didn't seem to work:
  - He stated that the bollard height pedestrian lights are very low and produce a glare to drivers.
  - He also requested that Mass. Ave. reduce the density of streetlights and make them more cut-off to reduce light pollution.
  - The planters are full of weeds and are not maintained.
  - A directory was installed but has not been kept up to date with the businesses.
  - Also does not feel the large clock is useful.
  - If amenities cannot be maintained by the town, are they really worth installing?
- A resident commented that there should be all new traffic signage informing users of what to do.

### Community Cooperation and Involvement

- A resident stated that the enhancement job done in Cambridge on Mass. Ave. at Main St. (Central Square) was done very well, and they would very much like to see this project done to the same standard.
- A resident said that it is great to see residents here from East Arlington, but there are not a lot of businesses represented. It would be a good idea to encourage more business owners from that area to have additional input. Are the current businesses located within the project area supporting this job or will this present problems in the future if they are against it?  
Kevin O'Brien stated that there are some business owners within the committee and all seem very supportive so far in the process.
- A resident asked that everyone present at this meeting tonight spread the word to the community and encourage more people to attend the workshop on the 23<sup>rd</sup> in order to avoid having people angry about the project due to being uninformed throughout the process.
- A resident asked how to get questions and comments to the Mass. Ave. Review Committee?
  - Laura Wiener stated that you can contact her about anything. Her information is listed on the town's website as well as on the handouts given out at tonight's meeting.
  - Kevin O'Brien stated that if you have signed in on the attendance sheet with your email, then the town will keep you posted.
- At a conclusion, Jack Hurd stated that many lessons were learned throughout the Arlington Heights Project, and that the town needs to do a better job keeping the businesses informed about construction, maybe with weekly briefings. He still encourages input from the community. He also asked that people look around Mass. Ave. bring ideas to the Interactive Workshop meeting on October 23, 2008.

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