



Mass Ave/Appleton Design Review Committee

Date: Thursday, April 15, 2021

Time: 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM

Location: Conducted via Remote Participation

Members In attendance: Kim Cayer, Jeff Maxtutis, Phil Goff, Anne DiNoto, Christopher Tonkin, Daniel Amstutz, Mike Rademacher, Wayne Chouinard, Lt. Rick Pedrini, Linda Epstein, S. Nicholas Kriketos, Abbi Holt.

Others in Attendance: Alison Piasecki, Petru Sofio, Thomas Proctor, Galen Mook, Christian Klein, Jayson Gauvin, Wing Wong, Leah Grodstein, Joe Solomon, Tom Tierney, Timothy Buckley, Tom DeVito, Jonathan Lee, Ann LeRoy, Mariah Contreras, Judith Proctor.

Minutes

1. Welcome and Opening of Remote Meeting, including Ground Rules.

Daniel Amstutz read a set of prepared remarks explaining the procedures that the Committee would follow to hold a virtual meeting. Governor Baker signed an Executive Order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic allowing virtual meetings, which suspended the usual Open Meeting Law requirement that a quorum of committee members be physically present in order to hold an official committee meeting. Amstutz confirmed the committee members in attendance for the meeting.

Amstutz went over the agenda and explained how committee and public comments would be handled. He noted several items that had been posted on the calendar page on the Town's website.

2. Approval of Minutes of March 23, 2021.

Meeting minutes were approved on a roll call vote.

3. Updates: Committee Scope, Membership, Public Comments, and Follow-Up from Last Meeting.

Amstutz noted the goal for the meeting is to come to a consensus on the preferred design elements to provide guidance to Green International on the

short-term concept development, if possible.

Amstutz explained that after looking further into Select Board minutes from June 15, the Board had approved the expansion of the committee's scope to include the corridor on Mass Ave between Lowell Street and Forest/Burton Streets, and the intersections of Mass Ave at Lowell Street and Mass Ave at Forest/Burton. They also added a representative from Ottoson Middle School to the committee. He introduced Abbi Holt, a teacher at the school, as the Ottoson representative. Holt noted she has been working at Ottoson for 17 years and regularly bikes to the school from Boston.

Amstutz went over several comments received between the last meeting and the current meeting:

- Alex Frieden (Somerville resident)
- Galen Mook (MassBike)
- Lynette and James Cassel (14-16 Appleton Place)
- Tom Tierney (15 Burton Street)
- Tycho Nightingale (6 Appleton Place)

He quickly summarized each comment. Alex Frieden said more protection should be given to cyclists and car space should be reduced. Galen Mook said his understanding is that solar glare is only a part of the issue that contributed to the crash and tightening the intersection is necessary. Finally, the residents who live along Burton Street and Appleton Place said they would prefer that Appleton Place was one way towards Mass Ave, not away from Mass Ave. Amstutz also noted that Mass Ave/Appleton Street is not on the Town's Complete Streets Prioritization Plan; he will reach out to the Disability Commission about reviewing the concepts discussed in this committee; and Green International collected more recent traffic data in advance of developing their concepts, so we can look back at that data.

Lt. Pedrini said he was part of the crash reconstruction team and found solar glare was a contributing factor and objected to Galen Mook's comment that solar glare did not have as much to do with it. Mook clarified that he received this perspective from witnesses on the scene but did not mean to diminish the impact of solar glare in contributing to the fatal crash.

4. Summary of Committee and Public Feedback from Last Meeting.

Amstutz presented a summary of feedback and discussion from the last meeting:

- Reduce the number of conflicting vehicle movements by making Appleton Place one-way and prohibiting some left turn movements

- Reduce vehicle speed and reduce the time for motorists/bike/peds to cross through the intersection by tightening the intersection and providing clearly marked lanes
- Provide protection for pedestrians and bicyclists

Amstutz also noted some decisions or options for discussion that need clarity in giving Green International (the Town's traffic consultant) direction on developing future concepts:

- Appleton Place one-way/access
- Prohibiting certain turning movements
- Parking restrictions (Mass Ave, Appleton Place)
- Bicycle accommodation
- Signalization – existing signal vs. pedestrian-activated warning beacon
- Mass Ave/Lowell St and Mass Ave/Forest St/Burton St (as they are now part of the committee scope)

Additional public outreach and engagement would be needed for these changes as they would impact abutting residents and businesses. Wayne Chouinard suggested working with the Economic Development Coordinator to contact nearby businesses about these possible changes. Amstutz noted Kim Cayer is the business representative on the committee and can work with the Economic Development Coordinator on business outreach.

5. Continue Review of Initial Concepts and Build Consensus on Design Considerations for the Area.

Amstutz showed existing conditions maps for the intersections of Mass Ave and Appleton, Mass Ave and Lowell Street, and Mass Ave and Forest/Burton Street that can be reviewed if needed. He noted he has all the concepts available to look at and commenting on the decision points would be helpful. He then opened the discussion to the committee.

Phil Goff said it seems likely that Appleton Place should be made one way but having a list of pros and cons would be helpful to make a clear decision. Mike Rademacher asked if any short-term measures will be satisfactory without continuing to limit left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton Street during evening hours as APD is doing now. It is unclear if the police will be able to continue blocking that turn in the long term. Chouinard agreed the left turns are an issue. The committee discussed the issue of speed on Mass Ave and how to slow turns onto Appleton Street and slowing cyclists and vehicles going downhill eastbound. Forcing motorists to make more of a 90-degree left turn onto Appleton Street would be better, as well as narrowing the traffic lanes. The committee also discussed restricting all left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton Street, but it was noted that there are as many as 200 left turns from Mass Ave to Appleton Street

during the peak hour and concerns about accessing other properties on Appleton Street.

Jeff Maxtutis asked Green International if they reviewed the traffic signal warrants for this intersection. Jayson Gauvin said they did the analysis and it meets the 8-hour warrant which is the most important from the perspective of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). Amstutz asked about the proposed restriction of left turns from Appleton Street to Mass Ave, as shown on one of the concepts. Gauvin said it was a safety recommendation due to sight distance problems, and there were also few left turns happening there. Nicholas Kriketos said this turn is very difficult to make. Goff asked about the painted median in Green International's Alternative 2. Gauvin explained the goal is to narrow the road and provide a pedestrian refuge for the crosswalk. Goff argued this painted median would lead to faster traffic and not safe for bicyclists. Rademacher asked if the left turn lane proposed in Green's Alternative 1 would be warranted in a signalized condition. Gauvin said that based on turning counts a turn lane is warranted in both signalized and unsignalized conditions.

The committee discussed the effect of the left turn lane on traffic speed and safety and concerns about lack of bike lanes in the alternative with the painted median. Committee members and public commenters raised safety concerns for bicyclists about shared lane markings along this part of Mass Ave. In response to a question about long-term improvements, Amstutz noted the traffic signals recently installed at Lake Street and the Minuteman Bikeway and Lake Street and Brooks Ave cost about \$200,000-\$250,000 each.

Amstutz summarized the discussion so far, noting that there was a desire for the left turn lane and bike lanes, slowing down traffic, and hardening the left turn from Mass Ave to Appleton Street to make it a slower turning movement. Goff said it may be possible to create a left turn lane for Appleton Street/Appleton Place and bike lanes with creative design, such as through a shorter left turn lane. Maxtutis said he agreed with Goff and asked for more information about the suggestion to replace the existing signal with a rapid flashing beacon. Gauvin explained the beacon is meant to increase driver stopping compliance and they would also move the crosswalk to the west leg of the intersection. Amstutz noted that the beacon would only be for Mass Ave, removing the protected crossing phase for Appleton Street and Appleton Place, and moving the crosswalk to the west side may have some engineering issues associated with it. Committee members discussed the length of the left turn lane, the desire to include bicycle lanes, the existing signal at the intersection, and possible impacts on Mass Ave parking through the intersection and towards Lowell Street and Forest/Burton Street. Amstutz noted he could do observations to get an understanding of parking usage here. Holt brought up concerns with schoolchildren crossing Mass Ave and biking to Ottoson, and how best to accommodate them. There was further discussion of the signal and how to make the existing operation more visible and increase driver compliance with stopping. Another issue is that there

is no signal head facing the driveway of the Leader Bank.

Amstutz noted it was after 8:30 and summarized some possible direction for Green International based on the meeting discussion, including: shortening the proposed left turn lane, incorporating a bike lane into the design and connecting it to the bike lane to the west, and understanding the pros and cons of making Appleton Place one way. Committee members were generally in agreement, and discussed the issue of making Appleton Place one way towards Mass Ave or away from Mass Ave. There would be impacts to abutters and nearby residents either way, but would improve safety overall for the intersection. Mook asked if there was a way to analyze prohibiting the left turn from Mass Ave to Appleton Street, and if that was settled. Amstutz noted doing a time-limited left turn prohibition would likely continue to require regular enforcement by police to ensure compliance. Kriketos raised concerns of shifting traffic onto other streets, access to the church and associated properties, and police enforcement of speeding. There was discussion of ways to address speeding via signage and traffic calming measures. Joe Solomon noted his concern that the left turn lane may encourage drivers to use Appleton Street as a cut through. Chouinard noted certain safety benefits of the turn lane in response to the comment.

Amstutz asked Green International if they had enough direction from the meeting to create a new concept iteration for the committee. Wing Wong said they would need to follow up with Amstutz and Chouinard to further discuss this as well as the scope and budget available.

6. Discuss Next Steps and Set Next Committee Meeting Dates.

Amstutz went over next steps for this project that can lead to a recommendation to the Select Board on short term improvements. The next meeting scheduled for April 29 needs to be rescheduled due to a conflict with one of the committee members.

Kriketos brought up an issue with nighttime signage at the new liquor store at Mass Ave and Clark Street that is too bright. Amstutz noted he would follow up with the Economic Development Coordinator on this as it appears to be a signage issue.

7. Adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.