

February 6, 2024 Public Meeting, VPI Task Force, Transportation Infrastructure Study

Sewall: Diane Morabito, Brett Harte, Noah Boisvert

Viewshed: Eammon Hutton

Members: Orion Thomas, Denise Kennedy Munger, Clare Tully, Mary Jane Young (in person), Sally Cook (via video). *Note: Not sure if other members also participated on line?*

Orion called meeting to order at 6:02PM and gave a brief introduction about the Request for Proposal (RFP) process which led to the infrastructure study. He then introduced the Sewall/Viewshed panel. Orion noted that this was the second public meeting, the first having taken place in May, 2023.

Diane then began the presentation of a Powerpoint summary of the infrastructure study, including proposed designs. She noted that the study area did not include Franklin and Church Streets or Mechanic and Winter but that the study included some recommendations with respect to these streets.

Eammon then discussed the results of the survey that was posted for public input around the time of the first public meeting and which remained up until late 2023. He noted that the top five areas of concern among responses were: not enough safe biking lanes, issues around speeding, biking to and from school, inadequate crosswalks and downtown parking.

Diane then discussed an existing conditions analysis. She noted that there were no high crash locations. She also noted that the intersection of Route 1 and Pascal was the only one with extensive delays on turning. There also was no significant speeding, meaning more than 5 miles per hour over the posted speed limit, with the exception of Route 90 and Pascal, where speeds are often up to 8 mph or more over the limit. She noted that they are looking for ways to “calm speed”. Diane also reviewed a parking study that was done in August during peak summer in the afternoon. The count revealed that only 171 out of 198 available spaces in the downtown area were in use, with the empty spots being more on the outskirts.

Diane then discussed proposed traffic calming measures for the intersection of Route 90 near Route 1, including narrowing the travel lane from its current 12 foot width to 11 feet, the minimum width MaineDOT will permit on a road with higher speeds. She noted there would be an esplanade between the road and the proposed bike path to the school, except on a section of the path which needs to be only 8 feet in width rather than 10 feet, so there will not be an esplanade there.

Diane then discussed Pascal Avenue from Route 1 toward West Street. The design proposal includes reducing the travel lane to 10 feet for cars, allowing more space for cyclists through establishing a “sharrow”. Diane noted that these changes could be achieved at a low cost as

they mostly just involve restriping. Diane also noted that on Pascal Avenue closer to West Street, they were proposing creating 8 foot “parking pockets” to better demarcate parking for the apartments and nearby shops.

Diane next discussed the Goose River bridge on Pascal which meets Main Street. She noted that there currently is only a sidewalk on the Goose River side of the bridge but that the creation of a second sidewalk on the harbor side of the bridge has been recommended by the Task Force. Diane mentioned that the creation of the second sidewalk would involve the building of a retaining wall.

Diane then discussed a design proposal to establish a sidewalk on Central Street opposite the hotel extending from the end of the existing one at Goodridge Park and extending up to the first residential driveway on that side. She noted that there is no place currently for passengers to go when they exit cars and that drivers also could use the sidewalk to access the crosswalk instead of walking in the road.

Brett Hart then introduced the topic of West Street near Pascal and the design idea of creating a multiuse trail. This trail would connect up with the bike path to the school and would skirt some public parking that will be established near the community park. Brett presented some concept plans for Route 90 and also discussed where the bike path might cross over closer to the schools. He noted that Cross Street might work for this purpose but would require an easement or taking from the landowner. To ensure the safety of school children crossing the intersection, an “all traffic stops” design is proposed so that no cars are turning while children are in the crosswalk. The crosswalk would be equipped with a high visibility Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) which would be activated when the crosswalk button is pushed. RRFBs are powered by solar, are highly visible to drivers and can also be purchased from MaineDOT by the Town at a special bulk rate, according to Diane.

The discussion then turned to the subject of crosswalk placement on Pascal Avenue, including one at Pine Street/Harbor View. Unfortunately, there cannot be another one at Ship Street back to the crosswalk as MaineDOT does not allow crosswalks to be placed too close together.

Diane then noted that Sewall is waiting on a survey of Town land near Rockport Marine Park to see if another entrance to the Park could be created utilizing that land. Brett noted that they have conveyed to MaineDOT that having two sidewalks into the Park would also increase connectivity, which MaineDOT seeks to improve.

Brett also noted that the existing wide intersection across High Street could be visually narrowed for pedestrians by creating a separate concrete apron area that trucks and trailers could use for turning around or passing through. It was also noted that an ADA-compliant ramp will be added near the existing stairs that lead from the crosswalk adjacent to the bridge on Main Street up to the raised sidewalk.

Diane then spoke about Franklin Street and how they had hoped to create additional public parking there by making the street one way. Due to the narrow 16 foot width of Franklin, however, Diane said this would not be possible as there is not enough room to also create a sidewalk there. She noted that the sight lines are not great on Franklin Street, which is also hilly. Although creating additional parking on Franklin would not be viable, Diane said that making it one way could make it safer.

Diane then spoke about Central Street and how although there is parking on both sides, there is no sidewalk on one side. She noted that “there are property issues to contend with” involving residents whose properties border on that side of Central Street. She noted that the design would maintain all existing parking on Central Street.

Diane then mentioned a concept plan for Mechanic Street to create additional parking for the downtown. Brett noted that Mechanic would become one way from Russell to Winter Street to create parking spaces on one side and then would loop back through Winter Street. Diane noted that this would be a low cost option for creating additional parking. Eammon also noted that Viewshed is looking at establishing some “parking pockets” in Cramer Park.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the public was invited to comment on the proposed designs. Jan Rosenbaum suggested that in addition to visually demarcating bike lanes for drivers, that they could also be separated by reflectors and raised metal that drivers could sense through the tires of their cars.

Bob Baldwin indicated he lives on Winter Street at the corner of Mechanic Street. He said he opposes making upper Mechanic Street one way and having traffic turn onto Winter Street. Bob said it is already difficult for him to back out on to the street. Diane responded that perhaps Winter Street could become one way as well. Bob said that he also would not like that possible alternative as drivers already don’t notice residents, as he has been hit several times already just backing out of his driveway.

Bob Lawrence then asked Diane if they had looked at pedestrian data for the Village. Bob said that there are more people walking on Pleasant Street than Pine, as Pleasant is a very popular route. Diane responded that she could look into it.

Phil Gaudet said that he lives across from Bob at Ship Street and Pascal, on the east side of Pascal. He said that people from Ship Street to Harbor View have to go to the opposite side of the street to get their mail. He asked about getting a crosswalk closer. Brett responded that crosswalks need to be a minimum of 400 feet apart due to MaineDOT guidelines.

Lynda Clancy mentioned that she was so moved by the plans for a bike path to the schools that she could cry, saying there have been multiple attempts over the years to achieve this result. She thanked the committee members and the consultants and then asked a question about “all traffic stops” at the crosswalk. Diane confirmed that this would also preclude any right turns on red lights.

A woman (*didn't catch her name*) asked if it would be possible to cross diagonally. Diane responded that diagonal crossing likely would not be allowed but said she would check.

A question was asked about a possible speed limit decrease on Pascal Avenue from 30 to 25. Diane responded that once traffic calming measures were implemented, they could document the lower speeds and request a reduction. She noted that it would be harder to achieve a speed reduction at the crosswalk for Route 90 due to its designation as a mobility corridor.

Emily Marshall, the manager of Aldemere Farm, asked about the possibility of getting sidewalks built on Russell Street, leading to the Farm. Diane responded that the study area did not include Russell. Emily then asked about the possibility of having a crosswalk from the proposed pathway to Erickson Field. She noted that kids go there after school for activities and the cross-country team also runs there. Diane responded that this would likely be an issue for MaineDOT given that the speeds are about 45 miles per hour on Route 90.

A woman (Genevieve?) then mentioned about traffic being backed up for the right turn on to 90 and also noted that some trucks go over the median strip. She asked about having a sidewalk on the north side. Diane responded that this might not be in the right of way and could involve a taking. Genevieve (?) reiterated her concern about turning trucks.

Someone mentioned the transition between Mechanic and Russell, that vegetation covers the sidewalk in the summer and that there is high ledge. They also noted that if parking is put on the left side, there's not enough space, not enough of a curb.

Several people commented about the corner of Winter and Russell Street, including the blind curve from Aldemere Farm and no safe place to walk across. Phil (?) noted that his daughter had been walking there with a baby carriage and a dog and a school bus came screaming around and nearly hit them. Diane responded that Russell and Winter are beyond the scope of the study so no changes are proposed.

Lynda Clancy then mentioned the Forest Glen housing development across from the high school and kids crossing there. She asked about how to get kids across, noting that there was once a plan and it still is a valid concern.

A man asked about getting a sidewalk continued from Doug Cole's house to Calderwood Lane.

Walker Angell said he wanted to put in a word for a crosswalk to Erickson. Diane said that you have to a sidewalk with which to connect the crosswalk. He also mentioned that he lives across from the Rockport Library and that drivers are blowing through the stop sign. He asked about the possibility of bringing the curbs in.

Jan Rosenbaum proposed that Pascal Avenue could become designated for no truck traffic. Denise Munger responded that Rockport has become a Route 1 bypass because the stop sign on

at the Route 1 intersection near the Stop and Go intersection has created a high incentive for this short cut. She said that the committee is looking at what can be done.

Diane responded that Maine DOT had done a study and had recommended a four way stop or a traffic light there.

William (?) who was participating on line asked a question about storm drainage grates and the issues this present for bikes. Brett said this concern would be addressed later in the design phase.

A man asked if there would be a RRFB at Elm and Pascal. Diane answered yes. He also asked whether the esplanade on Pascal would be changed and Diane said it would not be redone.

A man asked how many new parking spaces will be added under the proposed design plan. Diane responded about a dozen on Mechanic and a dozen in Cramer Park. She noted that although parking will be marked on Pascal it won't add to the number of spaces. Diane noted that it would not be possible to add more spaces at Rockport Marine Park. Denise asked about adding parking on Franklin as it becomes one way. Diane mentioned that wouldn't work with the steep grade and lack of a sidewalk there. Denise mentioned the possibility of adding parking in the boat storage area near the park and noted that the Select Board is very aware of the lack of parking.

Allie Angell said that her home office overlooks the crosswalk to the Rockport Public library and she noted that cars are now regularly making U-turns in the crosswalk. She is worried about the kids who use it regularly to go the library. She noted that this has been happening more since the hotel has opened as drivers make a U- turn to double back to get parking on the opposite side of Central Street. She asked if these U-turns are legal or not. She also asked whether there is somewhere else these U-turns can occur other than the crosswalk. Walker asked about the possibility of doing a RRFB there.

Vanessa Burnes said she really appreciated the committee's work. She expressed concerns about the plans for Main Street noting the dangers that would be posed by people running back and forth Main Street without access to a crosswalk particularly if a sidewalk is established on the other side of the bridge. She said that the sidewalk would create more of a congested area for Rockport Marine Park. Vanessa noted that the old crosswalk lower down on Main Street had been taken away yet there is a blind curb. Vanessa asked about a RRFB for the crosswalk adjacent to the hotel. Diane said one had not been proposed there because there will already be a lot going on there. Joe Sternowski mentioned the possibility of having a raised sidewalk there to give it more prominence. Diane responded that that was a good point.

In terms of next steps, Diane said she is going to look at the areas of concern and will go back to the committee. She also mentioned that there would be a new survey.

Someone asked a question about the timeline and Diane responded that it was originally planned for completion in April but due to waiting for a survey to be completed, it has been moved to May.