

APPROVED

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 10, 2023 Woburn Planning Board Meeting | 7:00 p.m.

Meeting held virtually via Zoom Platform

Planning Director Tina Cassidy stated the meeting was being recorded by audio and video.

Chair Claudia Bolgen called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and asked Cassidy to call the roll.

Mr. Jim Callahan, Mr. Bob Doherty, Mr. Kevin Donovan, Mr. Dave Edmonds, Ms. Carolyn Turner, Mr. Michael Ventresca and Chair Bolgen were in attendance along with Cassidy.

ANNUAL ELECTION OF PLANNING BOARD CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Cassidy presided over this portion of the meeting. She explained that it is customary for the Board to hold its annual elections for Chair and Vice-Chair at the beginning of each year.

Cassidy asked if there were any nominations for the position of Planning Board Chair for 2023.

Ventresca nominated Bolgen for position of Board Chair;
Seconded by Doherty.

Cassidy asked if there were any other nominations for Chair. There were not.

Motion to close the nominations for the position of Board Chair for calendar year 2023 made by Doherty;
Seconded by Turner;

Roll call vote on the motion to close the nominations for Board Chair for 2023:

Edmonds- Aye; Turner - Aye; Callahan - Aye; Bolgen - Aye; Ventresca - Aye; Doherty - Aye; Donovan - Aye

The motion carried, 7-0.

Motion to elect Bolgen to the position of Board Chair for calendar year 2023 made by Doherty;
Seconded by Turner;

Roll call vote on the motion to elect Claudia Bolgen as Planning Board Chair for 2023:

Edmonds- Aye; Turner - Aye; Callahan - Aye; Bolgen - Aye; Ventresca - Aye; Doherty - Aye; Donovan - Aye

The motion carried, 7-0.

Cassidy called for nominations for Planning Board Vice Chair for 2023.

Bolgen nominated Ventresca for the position of Vice Chair;
Seconded by Turner;

Cassidy asked if there were any other nominations for Vice Chair. There were none.

Motion to close the nominations for the position of Vice Chair for calendar year 2023 made by Doherty;
Seconded by Bolgen;

Roll call vote on the motion to close the nominations for the position of Vice Chair for 2023:

Edmonds- Aye; Turner – Aye; Callahan – Aye; Bolgen – Aye; Ventresca – Aye; Doherty – Aye; Donovan - Aye

The motion carried, 7-0-0.

Motion to elect Ventresca to the position of Vice Chair for calendar year 2023 made by Bolgen;
Seconded by Doherty;

Roll call vote on the motion to elect Ventresca to the position of Vice Chair for 2023:

Edmonds- Aye; Turner – Aye; Callahan – Aye; Bolgen – Aye; Ventresca – Aye; Doherty – Aye; Donovan - Aye

The motion carried, 7-0-0.

Bolgen thanked members for their faith in her to Chair the Board for another year and took the metaphorical gavel from Cassidy and began to Chair the meeting.

PRESENTATION BY VHB OF FEASIBILITY STUDY OF POTENTIAL SHARED USE PATH ALONG MIDDLESEX CANAL AND FORMER RAILROAD RIGHT OF WAY

Cassidy stated the City, along with the State, is interested in the possibility of creating a shared use path along the Middlesex Canal and the former Woburn branch of the Boston & Lowell railroad right of way. Cassidy feels it provides a unique opportunity to extend the number of bike lanes and street paths that we have in the City to create a greater network while noting the success of the Tri-Community Bikeway.

City Engineer Jay Corey stated the city applied for a feasibility study grant through Mass Trails with the consulting firm of VHB being awarded the contract. Corey stated there are three segments of the project which run from Wilmington to Winchester along the old Boston and Maine Railroad right-of-way which is currently held in various ownerships including the Middlesex Canal Commission, City of Woburn, and MBTA Realty Trust. Tracie Lenhardt of VHB is the Project Manager and VHB's Bill DeSantis, who developed most of the study, is the Project Engineer.

DeSantis stated VHB was retained for the development of a feasibility study for the construction of a shared use or multi-use path along the former canal. The geographic information system-based study is to look at some of the constraints and opportunities to construct a multi-use path along the canal and railroad right of way and areas of concern have been identified along with the development of some estimated costs. The PowerPoint presentation included a summary of the feasibility study, estimated project costs, and a discussion of the follow-up steps including phasing and scheduling the construction of the path.

DeSantis described Section One which includes Cross Street to High Street parallel to Main Street. Section Two is the longest stretch that includes the Pleasant Street area from the library heading north to the Canal Park located near the Route 95 interchange. Section Three runs from Alfred Street heading north to the intersection of School and Merrimac Streets. DeSantis spoke of constraints, ownership, businesses' rights to use a portion of the shared right-of-way, and easements retained by the MBTA. He went on to further discuss details and constraints of the path as they relate to utilities, parcel lines and various rights-of-way as they become the basis of the feasibility study. DeSantis also stated this project has the potential to make a nice connection to the Tri-Community bike path that runs through Winchester, Woburn and Stoneham.

DeSantis stated the Geographic Information System (GIS) is an efficient cost-effective way to identify constraints within the project. He also spoke of the Woburn Center project currently under design by Mass DOT to reconfigure the traffic flow patterns in downtown Woburn as that would be the opportunity for the for the city to work with Mass DOT to incorporate a connection between sections of the path. DeSantis spoke of Mass DOT's new policies that require cities to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians to be included as active transportation facets in their projects. These aspects are funded by the DOT and it is important that the city do its part to make as many connections into the downtown area within the scope of the current project so they can be considered when the DOT

does their design work. DeSantis discussed the importance of studying traffic volumes and pedestrian signals in relation to roadway crossings. Further north, he spoke of the potential of a pedestrian bridge over the canal near the ballfield in North Woburn to allow access to the field. There was also discussion of the gaps in between the Sections and coming off the rail bed and having to study the possibility of reallocating some space on the roadways to create a space for the path still being off-road but adjacent to the roadway. There is also the possibility to extend the trail through Weafer Park near the new Fire Station and have it come around the backside of Alfred Street and reconnect to the railbed.

In relation to wetland impacts, DeSantis noted Section One does not contain any wetland impact while Section Two and Section Three contain some minor impacts within a flood plain in addition to some minor encroachments that could be accommodated with some compensatory excavation. He noted there are no vernal pools, no National Heritage or endangered species and no areas of critical environmental concern. There are several National Register properties within the area that have been inventoried and the project will need to be sure the features are historically compatible with the original canal design with the railroad bed being used beside it while being mindful of pedestrians with disabilities as all grading must be ADA compatible.

Estimated project costs were discussed in addition to a projected schedule. Plans in 2023 include starting with Section Three by evaluating an alternate route connection north/south of Interstate 95/128 and applying for design funds via Mass Trails grant that is due February 1, 2023. Section Two will be coordinated with Mass DOT's Downtown Safety Improvement Project and will also include applying for design funds via the Mass Trails grant. Section One efforts will include reaching out to the MBTA to figure out the status of any easements or license agreements the city could enter into for that specific section.

DeSantis continued his recommendation for 2024 that included Section Three to begin the design, apply for construction funds with Mass Trails (application due in February 2024) for construction in 2025, and to identify any remaining construction funds needed from other sources. Work on Section Two that year would involve coordinating the downtown center design with MassDOT, and Section One work will focus on identifying design funds. MassTrails funds are limited to \$500,000 annually and the city will need to fund remaining construction costs through another source. By 2026, Section Three should be completed, Section Two should be under construction and Section One will be applying for construction funds via MassTrails that will be due in February 2026 for construction in 2027.

Cassidy stated she is hopeful the Board will instruct her to write a letter of support to advance the study to the next phase. Bolgen asked if any participants that joined the meeting wished to comment, and Cassidy explained the process to be recognized in the virtual Zoom meeting.

Cynthia Tocci, 16 Lowell Street, Woburn is a direct abutter to the path. She likes the current rustic state of the path and is interested in learning more about the plans to connect in the area of Route 128. She is also associated with the Tocci Building located at 660 Main Street that faces the canal and she will follow up with them if they have concerns. She inquired if the property owners would be responsible for putting up fences between their lots and the path. DeSantis said it is a common question and sometime they use chain link, stockade or some type of vegetative screening that is a lot less maintenance long-term and provides a more natural buffer. Lenhardt stated quite often they see business put up fences along the paths to protect their property and eventually remove them as their employees want access to use the paths once established and in use.

Cassidy stressed this is only the beginning of the conversation and additional research needs to be conducted as we get more into the subsequent phase of design and have additional public meetings. Tocci also mentioned she is on the Board at the Woburn Boys and Girls Club and they have also expressed concerns about the issue of possibly having to install a fence along the path due to access, segregation and protection issues.

Jay Corey, Woburn City Engineer, stated the importance of full public participation and public awareness program. It is important that everyone gets a chance to voice their opinions. Many people use multimodal pathways to

commute to work and exercise. These paths connect playgrounds and are well designed; there are robust pedestrian beacons for traversing the roadways and noted that VHB design techniques are very safe and well thought out.

City Councilor Charles Viola state he's reviewed the study and noted the importance of grant funding. He spoke of the narrow streets within the city and stated the care must be taken while designing the bike, pedestrian, and travel lanes.

DeSantis stated each segment has the possibility to be a stand-alone facility. There are several stretches that are straightforward before hitting a gap and they will provide segments for pedestrians and cyclists where they will be able to avoid roadways and city streets. He acknowledged traffic and safety concerns. DeSantis stated the important key to receiving funding, such as MassTrails or another source, is to demonstrate the City has an overall plan. The city will apply for a design for Section One this year while continuing efforts on Section Two and Three while continuously working with the MBTA. Subsequently the following year, you apply for construction funds for Section One followed up by design funds for Section Two, etc. and he noted he considers it a "pipeline" situation.

Anthony Langone, representing the Woburn Traffic Commission and the Woburn Conservation Commission, stated he thinks the plan is great as it's putting our local geography to work in regards to the canal and railroad bed and linking existing bikeways. He feels it will be beneficial to local businesses and local tourism. He questioned the cost of the rapid rectangular flashing beacons and the hawk systems and asked if the cost could be lowered. Corey confirmed the cost of \$15,000 per unit. Langone asked if the Mass Trails grant money rolls over if it isn't depleted in one year. Cassidy responded she does not believe there is always a guarantee. Corey stated Mass Trails is only one funding source and mentioned alternatives such as the TIP in addition to a number of grant programs that will be expanding recreational facilities under the recently-passed Federal infrastructure bill.

City Councilor Lou DiMambro stated he is in full support of this project. He spoke of connecting Sections Two and Three and spoke of his concern about the sidewalk widths on Alfred Street. Corey responded if depending on sidewalks, the widths needs to be expanded to 12' to accommodate both pedestrians, skateboards, etc. while adding that specific detail has not been designed yet. DiMambro also questioned if any of the areas of the shared use path be using low voltage lighting powered by solar or wind energy. Corey stated that design detail has not yet been discussed. DiMambro asked if any of the Sections would have loops within themselves. Corey spoke of termination points and turn arounds that allow you to turn back within the section.

Duane Cleak, Woburn Conservation Chairman, stated he has spoken with several Commissioners and they are very positive about the project. He mentioned if fences are installed, the Conservation Commission would have some requirements as to high off the ground they are for the migration of the animals. He stated they look forward to working with the project.

Callahan inquired as to the lack of a connection between Sections One and Two relative to crossing Main Street at High Street and traveling to the Court House and through the Library parking lot. Corey responded that it is not connected at the moment but they are looking at means of combining the two sections as we study the designs for the previously-mentioned Downtown Safety Improvement Project. Corey added the downtown project is scheduled for construction in 2025 so this will include the design for the bikeway through that section. Corey stated design fees and details can be consolidated within the two projects.

Bolgen stated she is an enormous proponent of shared use paths bike paths and appreciates the City of Woburn committing personnel and money into a shared use path/bikeway. She acknowledged abutters concerns but has personally, over time, witnessed the wonderful benefits of shared use paths the community. Bolgen stated she personally fully supports the proposal.

Ventresca agreed with Bolgen's sentiments and inquired of DeSantis what common bottlenecks arise other than funding and design issues. DeSantis stated hurdles can include money and added that coordinating with other State or Federal agencies can often be challenging. DeSantis provided the example of when the MBTA has wanted to retain

long term ownership of parcels in case transit returns in the future. Corey spoke of the importance of patience and mentioned that some projects take a long time to come to fruition.

Seeing no other questions or comments from participants, Bolgen asked Cassidy for guidance as to the next step. Cassidy asked if there was a motion from the Board to instruct her to write a letter of support from the Board that could be used in the upcoming Mass Trails grant application.

Motion by Ventresca to instruct Cassidy to pen a letter of support from the Planning Board to be included in the upcoming Mass Trails grant application to further evaluate the possibility of creating a shared use path (SUP) along the Middlesex Canal and the former Woburn branch of the Boston & Lowell railroad right of way.
Seconded by Doherty;

No further discussion on the motion;

Roll call vote on the aforementioned motion:

Callahan-Aye; Doherty – Aye; Donovan-Aye; Edmonds – Aye; Turner-Aye; Ventresca – Aye; Bolgen-Aye

The motion carried, 7-0-0.

PLANNING BOARD DIRECTOR UPDATE

Cassidy stated the Board's next meeting is scheduled for January 24, 2023 and with no known agenda items slated for discussion/action the Board decided to cancel that meeting and schedule the next meeting virtually for February 14th.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: DECEMBER 13, 2022 MEETING

Bolgen states that next on the agenda is approval of the previous meeting's minutes. Bolgen noted the original draft minutes have a typo on page 4 regarding a date of 3023 instead of 2023. It has been brought to staff's attention and has already been corrected. Bolgen asked if anyone was prepared to make a motion.

Motion by Doherty to approve the December 13, 2022 Planning Board minutes as submitted;

Seconded by Ventresca;

Roll call vote on the aforementioned motion:

Callahan-Aye; Doherty – Aye; Donovan-Aye; Edmonds-Aye; Turner-Aye; Ventresca – Aye; Bolgen-Aye

The motion carried, 7-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Bolgen asked if there were any other business matters that may legally come before the Board not known at the time of posting. Cassidy replied there were none.

Seeing no further business, Doherty made a motion to adjourn the January 10, 2023 Planning Board meeting at 8:08 p.m.;

Seconded by Edmonds;

Roll call vote on the aforementioned motion:

Callahan-Aye; Doherty-Aye; Donovan-Aye; Edmonds-Aye; Turner-Aye; Ventresca-Aye; Bolgen-Aye

The motion carried, 7-0-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Table of Documents Used and/or Referenced at the January 10, 2023 Meeting:

<p><u>Draft Bikeway/Multi-Modal Path Feasibility Study</u> dated October 19, 2022 prepared by VHB Consultants; Shared Use Path PowerPoint dated January 10, 2023 prepared by VHB Consultants.</p>
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<p><u>DRAFT MEETING MINUTES:</u> December 13, 2022 meeting</p>

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Smith

Karen Smith
Planner

APPROVED