

Town of Westwood

Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Committee
Thursday, June 22, 2023
Carby Street
Champagne Meeting Room

Committee Members in Attendance:

- Michael Kraft (Chair)
- Steven Olanoff (Vice Chair)
- Tom McShane
- Michael Tinsley
- Enkelejda Klosi
- David Atkins
- Maria Constantini

Ex-officio: None

Residents in attendance: Shelly Reaver (549 Canton St), Maura Van Wagenen (181 Canton St)

Police officers in attendance: None

Selected to record minutes: David Atkins

Meeting Start: 7:36 pm.

- Town Planner Elijah Romulus was unable to attend due to family emergency and Planning Board member Kate Wynne informed the chair she was not also not available.
- No updates from police, DPW

Topics Discussed

22 Everett St

Steve Olanoff reported on this project currently under review by the Planning Board and Conservation Commission for a multi-family residential development on the property located on Everett St near Washington Street and the MBTA overpass known as the "Foster" or "Tumblebus" lot.

The committee discussed the goal of promoting the development of more greenspace in the Islington center area and the need for a specific master plan to achieve more than incremental changes in specific projects reviewed by the Planning Board. The committee discussed how the town's comprehensive plan includes implementation steps and that the Planning Board has indicated its intention to review progress on that plan regularly.

For the development at 22 Everett, there were 3 key areas of concern discussed:

1. How to ensure the development of a safe walking path between the new development and an existing path between Wilson Way and East Street which would then provide access to the Islington Center business district and the MBTA station.
2. How to avoid traffic entering and leaving the development from blocking Everett St.
3. How to get more specifics about how the traffic, deliveries, and parking would be handled around these entrances to ensure accessibility and safety issues are addressed.

The committee considered a motion by David Atkins, seconded by Steven Olanoff, to make a recommendation that the developer work with abutters and the town to address these items, but felt more specifics were needed. The motion was amended to create a working group of Kela Klosi, Steven Olanoff, and Michael Kraft to meet with the town planner and report back at the next committee meeting with prepared recommendations. This motion passed unanimously.

New Sidewalk Construction

There were no updates on new sidewalk construction.

Community Trails

Steven Olanoff reported that the Westwood Community Trails group had led another successful hike with about 6-7 residents.

Hale Education/Conservation

Two members of the committee had come to the meeting after attending a presentation by Hale Education, Inc (Hale Reservation) on the current status of discussions between the Town of Westwood and Hale about the possible purchase by the Towns of Westwood and Dover of comprehensive conservation easements on the Hale property, to be managed by the Trustees of Reservations nonprofit. The presentation was put on by the Trustees and the Westwood Land Trust who are supportive. A website has been published at <https://www.votehale.org/> which contains more information about the project, but specifics of when it might come to a vote and the exact impact on residents are still not set.

The committee discussed whether it should take a position endorsing the project, but took no formal vote.

Discussion themes:

- Protecting hiking and recreation land improves pedestrian and bicycle safety by preventing the development of new homes and increased traffic associated with those homes. It creates a dedicated recreation space where people can bike and hike.
- Lack of support, based on individual financial reservations, fails to indicate how broadly supportive the committee is of the overall goals of the project. Some members felt they could endorse the project, but were not ready to vote to have taxes raised for it.
- The committee has repeatedly endorsed the Gay Street sidewalk project. Some members consider this a higher priority and are concerned that funding the Hale project would make it less likely Gay Street would ever be presented for a vote.

Most discussion at the committee has been on the financial concerns, but ultimately that is a decision up to voters and the most value the committee could add is by enumerating the benefits of the project and making recommendations to ensure those benefits are fully included in any ultimate proposal to voters.

Vulnerable Road Users - Signs

The DPW is in the process of obtaining signs to be posted about the new vulnerable users law which requires drivers to give bicyclists and pedestrians a passing gap of at least 3 feet. Tom McShane displayed some "heatmaps" from the online app Strava which uses data from runners and bikers who track their activities using the strava app to show the most frequently used roads. These maps indicated significant usage of Oak Street and Dover Road/Powissett St as areas that are less heavily traveled by cars but are heavily used by runners and bicyclists. There was discussion about whether priority for signs should go to where the bike are or where the cars are. Kela Klosi and Tom McShane will review and forward the information to Westwood DPW to help choose sign locations.

New Business/Concerns By Residence In Attendance:

Two residents from Canton Street attended to speak about the Canton Street Sidewalk Project which is currently in the design phase. A public information session was held on May 16, 2023 at the Westwood Public Library, and discussed at the May meeting of this committee. It was attended by at least 60 residents (full room), select board members, and members of the Pedestrian and Bike Advisory Committee.

The residents reported to the committee that:

- There is significant opposition by residents who live on Canton Street.
- Most favor sidewalks, but are not in favor of the multi-use trail (MUT) on the East side because they believe the detriments do not justify the limited value and use they believe it will get
 - Cutting down dozens of 75+ year-old trees and disrupting old stone walls will fundamentally alter the character of the street.
 - Encroachment of an additional 11-16 feet for the MUT will require, in some areas, removal of all the trees and will destroy the charm of the town.

- It is not an appropriate place for a bike path because it does not connect anything.
- Don't believe the path will be used.

The committee discussed some clarifying specifics of the current design. There was general agreement that marking the trees to be removed and stone walls impacted would be helpful to better understand and communicate the impact to enable more effective discussion.

Approval of last Meeting's Minutes

Steven Olanoff motioned to approve the May 25, 2023 minutes, seconded by Maria Constantini, unanimously approved.

Westwood Day

The committee should have a presence with much information needed to share (e.g. Hale, Canton St, vulnerable road users legislation, sidewalk updates). Maria Constantini will reserve a table for Westwood Environmental Action Committee and Pedestrian and Bike may share.

Renewal of Committee Appointments

The select board has approved renewed appointments. Committee members need to go to Town Hall and be sworn in before the next meeting. In order to avoid all terms expiring at once, the membership has been staggered, with the intention that future terms will all be 3-years.

Appointed to 3-year terms: Steven Olanoff, Kela Klosi, Maria Constantini

Appointed to 2-year terms: Kathleen Wynne, Michael Tinsley, Michael Kraft

Appointed to 1-year terms: Tom McShane, David Atkins

Next Meeting Date: July 27, 2023

Meeting Adjourned: 8:47 PM