

**CITY OF CONCORD PLANNING BOARD
October 22, 2012 SPECIAL MEETING**

A special meeting of the City Planning Board was held on October 22, 2012, in the Second Floor Conference Room, in City Hall, at 41 Green Street, at 7:00 p.m.

Present at the meeting were Chair Drypolcher and Members Smith Meyer, Hicks, Foss, and Regan. City Planner McPherson, Mr. Henninger, Ms. Hebert and Ms. Muir of the City's Planning Division were also present.

At 7:04 p.m., a quorum was present, and the Chair called the meeting to order.

REGULAR MEETING

1. Discussion of the Downtown Complete Streets Improvement Project

Ms. McPherson presented a powerpoint presentation on streetscape design and improvements that are considered part of a complete street.

Ms. Smith Meyer suggested that the typical dimensions be shown on the cross section of the sidewalk for the preferred alternative to depict the desired width of the edge zone, furniture zone, throughway zone and frontage zone. Ms. McPherson responded that there is a range of what would be acceptable given the individual circumstances and constraints.

The group discussed parking downtown. Mr. Regan asked how much parking would be lost on Main Street if the City chose to change the parking to parallel spaces. Where would the cars go? Would they use the side streets and garages and is there enough capacity to handle the additional cars? Ms. McPherson said that the Planning Division is currently preparing a map to illustrate the amount of on-street and surface parking within the vicinity of the project area. There appears to be adequate parking on the side streets and in the garages to accommodate the spaces lost if the City selects some or all parallel parking. The Board agreed that parallel parking provided a more attractive streetscape and greater flexibility to make significant changes to the walkability of downtown.

Mr. Hicks asked if the City were to select the TPAC preferred option with bike lanes, median and parallel parking on both sides of the street, would the people tend to avoid driving down Main Street. Ms. McPherson said that the traffic models done by the Engineering Division do not indicate that traffic would move less efficiently through Main Street.

The group discussed the current capacity for public parking at the garages and the need to improve way-finding and signage to direct visitors to and from the garages. The group also discussed the need to review the time limits and prices for parking along Main Street and in the

municipal garages, with the goal of creating a comprehensive parking plan for the downtown that encourages walkability.

Ms. Smith Meyer commented that whatever improvements the City selected, the design would need to be sustainable in terms of City maintenance. She also said that sidewalk width should be maximized and that the City should not plant street trees in an inadequate planting area. The trees should be planted in large planters so they have the greatest chance to grow properly.

The group discussed the need to provide an attractive accommodation for the newspaper and mail boxes. There are so many boxes up and down Main Street, they clutter the sidewalk and reduce the functionality of the furniture zone. Ms. McPherson reviewed slides from the streetscape presentation that illustrated good examples of how other communities have treated the newspaper boxes, including dispensers and corrals. The group agreed that newspaper boxes would need to be managed, but did not have specific recommendations on the method of management at this point.

The group discussed the need to accommodate bicycles and provide places for people to park their bikes. Ms. McPherson said that the City currently recommends the inverted “U” style of bike rack.

Mr. Hicks commented that the City will really need to determine the ideal functional width for the sidewalk along Main Street. If the project is only going to add two feet of additional sidewalk it doesn't seem worth it. The sidewalk needs to be wider than 14 feet.

After drawing various sidewalk zone widths on the white board, the Board agreed that 18 feet would be a good minimum sidewalk width for downtown. Although not providing the “optimal” width for each of the sidewalk zones in all locations, the 18-foot minimum would provide enough space to accommodate pedestrian traffic, café seating, street trees and furniture - as some uses took up more sidewalk space, the other sidewalk zones could shrink to accommodate.

Mr. Hicks suggested that the design start with the ideal sidewalk width of 18 feet and work backwards to see how much room is left for parking, taking into consideration what an acceptable loss of parking spaces might be. He said that he prefers the option with parallel parking on both sides of the street because it provides for the most livable option and can create a functional, friendly, dynamic space downtown.

The group discussed the importance of accommodating all modes of transportation including public transit, motor vehicles, bikes and pedestrians in the Main Street design and discussed the safest options for bicycles including back-in angled parking, dedicated bike lanes or

sharrows. The Board agreed that for bicycle safety, if some angled parking is retained, it should be back-in angled parking.

The group agreed that the three lane section with a textured median would be an improvement and considered it the best option, noting that it was important that the median be textured and of a different material to distinguish it from the drive lanes.

Robert Baker, a resident of Concord, spoke in favor of giving people an attractive place to be. He said that there was a trade-off that the City has to make between people and parking, and that Main Street should not be used as storage for parked cars because this does not improve the livability of the downtown. He is a proponent of using the streetscape for the people and he is in favor of the parallel parking on both sides of the street because it provides more space for the people.

Mr. Drypolcher said that he was in favor of recommending the parallel parking on both sides of the street and making the widest possible sidewalk that makes sense with all the other components. Mr. Drypolcher stated that the streetscape improvements, wider sidewalks and increased livability might encourage upper floor residential development.

Ms. Smith Meyer agreed, noting that parallel parking leaves the greatest amount of space for a sidewalk. She suggested that the City could look for opportunities to add angled parking on the side streets. She also added that she would not be in favor of tree grates, but rather large curbed planters to give trees more air, water and room to grow. She cautioned that the use of heated sidewalks could impact the trees and this would need to be analyzed during the design process.

Mr. Hicks thought the plan should be forward thinking, progressive and encourage bicycling and walking.

Ms. McPherson said that the City might establish a Business Improvement District downtown to help pay for the maintenance of the downtown improvements. She also said that the consultant design team has been selected, but the overall direction for the design will come from the Downtown Complete Streets Project Advisory Committee.

Ms. Smith Meyer moved to recommend that the Planning Board submit the following comments to the Downtown Complete Streets Project Advisory Committee in advance of their meeting on November 1st.

1. The sidewalk width should be a minimum of 18 feet.
2. Parking on Main Street should be parallel on both sides of the streets.

3. The design should not use tree grates around the base of street trees; trees should be provided with adequate planting areas and tree enclosures.
4. The plan should provide a dedicated bike lane for bicyclists rather than sharrows.
5. Newspaper boxes need to be addressed along Main Street and the boxes should not be located next to the entrance to the State House, Eagle Square or other plaza space.
6. The State House Plaza should be left open. Plantings and/or seating could be added to the edges and corners, as well as using different paving patterns, to define the plaza space, but this is an important demonstration area for the state and should be left open.
7. The crosswalks should be a different texture and paving material from the vehicle travel lanes.
8. The sidewalks should be paved with brick if possible, and make use of paving patterns.
9. The Planning Board would like the opportunity to review plans for the downtown as the design develops.
10. The street furniture does not need to be consistent with what was used at the Capital Commons building. Seating areas/gathering places should be created.
11. Public art should be encouraged downtown.
12. Light fixtures should be LED and the City should consider selecting a pedestrian scale fixture and one that illuminates a broader area of the street. All lighting should be compatible with the historic character of the buildings downtown.

As there was no further business to come before the Planning Board, Ms. Smith Meyer moved to adjourn. The Board unanimously agreed and the meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST:

Gloria McPherson
Clerk