

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, May 31, 2022
Needham Town Hall
Powers Hall
and
Via ZOOM
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81453983558>**

6:30 p.m. Call to Order:
A meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair Marianne B. Cooley. Those present were Kevin Keane, Heidi Frail, Matthew Borrelli, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick. Vice Chair Marcus Nelson was not present. Dave Davison, ATM/Finance, Katie King, ATM/Operations, Myles Tucker, Support Services Manager, and Mary Hunt, Recording Secretary were also in attendance.

6:30 p.m. Appointments and Consent Agenda:
Motion by Mr. Borrelli that the Select Board vote to approve the Appointments and Consent Agenda as presented.

APPOINTMENTS: No Appointments were made at this meeting.

CONSENT AGENDA *=Backup attached

- 1.* Approve a Special One Day All Alcohol License for Monique Goodrow-Trach of Needham Pool and Racquet Club to host “New Members Welcome Event”, Friday, June 3, 2022 from 5:00-10:00 PM. The event will be held at the Needham Pool and Racquet Club, 111 Richardson Drive.**
- 2. Ratify a Weekday Entertainment License for Eastern Bank for May 24, 2022**
- 3.* Approve a grant request application from the Needham Commission on Disabilities for an intensive learning center at the Pollard Middle School**
- 4. Accept the following donation made to the Needham Community Revitalization Trust Fund: \$100 from the Needham Diversity Initiative, Inc.**
- 5. Accept the following donation made to the Needham Health Division, Domestic Violence Action Committee (DVAC): \$2,000 from the Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital – Needham.**
- 6. Ratify acceptance of the following donation received by the Needham Public Library originally accepted at the Board’s May 24, 2022 meeting: Jan Drake donated two copies of her book, Remember Me to All the Friends (estimated value of \$60).**

Second: Mr. Keane. Unanimously approved 4-0.

6:31 p.m. Downtown Design Infrastructure/Streetscape Project:
Edward Olsen, Acting Assistant Director of Public Works, Rhain Hoyland, Highway Superintendent, Thomas Ryder, Town Engineer, Cecilia Simchek, Director of Finance/Administration, Bob Mackie, BETA Project Officer, and

Melissa Recos, BETA Project Manager spoke with the Board as to the status of the Downtown Design Infrastructure/Streetscape Project.

Mr. Olsen gave a brief introduction of the project, saying it began years ago and is a testament to the vision and work of Richard Merson, former DPW Director and Tony Del Gaizo, former Town Engineer. Mr. Olsen introduced the BETA team members and asked Mr. Mackie for a history of the project, the initial charge given to BETA, and the changes made over the years, and in particular, how COVID-19 has changed the design.

Mr. Mackie stated the project began in 2009 with replacement of the Chapel Street watermain and when Tony Del Gaizo suggested it may make sense to consider updating the streetscape of Chapel Street. He said the design of the streetscape began in 2013 and showed an overview of what the downtown could look like. Mr. Mackie said many meetings were held, noting the basic charge was flow of traffic and the preemption signals of the commuter rail crossings. He noted pedestrian safety, visibility, and appearance of the downtown area was also part of the charge. Discussion ensued on the 5 phases of the project and a brief PowerPoint presentation with renderings was shown. Mr. Mackie also discussed the speed of traffic through downtown, parking, accommodations for bicycles, ADA compliance, the quiet zone, and gateways as drivers approach the downtown area.

Ms. Cooley commented on the possibility of eliminating a lane for traffic. She said her understanding is that if the Town wants to increase the size of sidewalks for pedestrians, then something must be eliminated (i.e., traffic or bicycles). She asked if there was an option to provide for wider sidewalks, along with a recommended route for bicyclists to go around the center of town on a through route? She also commented on the possibility of making Chapel Street and part of Highland Avenue one way in each direction.

Mr. Mackie pointed out two basic routes through Needham for staunch bicyclists, noting there are ways to get through the downtown without riding directly through the Center. Mr. Mackie commented on making Chapel Street and part of Highland Avenue one-way streets, however he noted the thought was to give drivers as much freedom as possible without restrictions. He said Chapel Street and Highland Avenue are both adequately wide to accommodate two-way traffic and signals are properly timed. He stated it is possible to make each road one way, however a traffic study would be required.

Ms. Frail asked Mr. Mackie to elaborate on recreational bikers and how they can safeguard their bicycles. She said people should be encouraged to do errands on foot and by bicycle.

Mr. Mackie said at each end of Great Plain Avenue, a bike corral will be provided for riders going to Needham Center.

Mr. Borrelli said he likes the design as presented as it is much more streamlined than previous iterations. He said he is concerned with tweaking the design and forcing drivers to go around the center of town onto neighborhood streets, noting people must be encouraged to use Great Plain Avenue. He commented on crosswalks, particularly at the railroad tracks. Mr. Borrelli suggested having electric power at some of the kiosks.

Mr. Keane said he likes the design. He asked if the area around the Sweet Basil restaurant would be one way in each direction? Mr. Keane asked about 45-degree parking spaces. Mr. Mackie said Great Plain Avenue in the location of Sweet Basil restaurant would be one lane in each direction in order to accommodate for larger sidewalks. Mr. Mackie noted safety is the reason 45-degree angled parking spaces are not being considered. He also commented on Quiet Zones and the requirement for 4-way gates at railroad crossings. Mr. Mackie commented on previous iterations of the gateways vs. the less intrusive design.

Ms. Cooley said she is unsure of the gateways and their purpose. She noted tonight's meeting was scheduled to allow members of other boards and committees to attend. She invited comments.

Jeanne McKnight of the Planning Board said she is glad to see the improvements to the gates at the railroad crossings. She said multi-family housing should also be encouraged. She clarified the use of Chapter 90 funding for quad gates and that bicyclists can ride on sidewalks, except in the downtown. She said the design accommodates bicycles at a corral, also commenting on sidewalk dining. She asked whether the current plan takes into account the lessons from the COVID-19 era? Mr. Mackie said the plan does consider the lessons learned from dining outside during the pandemic, as well as including parklets. Ms. McKnight concurred with Ms. Cooley on the purpose of the gateways.

Justin McCullen of the Traffic Management Advisory Committee and Transportation Committee said he is concerned that cycling may be compromised, as Needham has tried to adopt a complete-streets, multi modal vision. He said the town must be vigilant in its presentation to the community. Mr. McCullen noted cars turning left from Garden Street onto Great Plain Avenue, commenting the issue should be studied. He said the plan is good.

Moe Handel of the former Downtown Streetscape Committee said the Town Meeting strongly supported banners in the downtown. He said there is value in the ability to announce events and occasions across the street, noting it is a nice New England flare. He said outdoor dining should be maximized.

Paul Good of the Needham Community Revitalization Trust Fund spoke about a bike lane through the downtown connecting the network as one system. He acknowledged "connecting the dots is difficult."

Artie Crocker of the Planning Board concurred with Mr. Handel's comments on the importance of using banners to announce events.

Discussion ensued on the timeline, a parking study, and use of parking meters before design is completed.

Ms. Cooley invited public comment.

Jackie DeWolfe, 242 Dedham Avenue, noted her letters to the Select Board over the last 5 years on this project, commenting she is glad discussion has been renewed. She urged the Select Board to rethink the design, noting many aspects of the project are over 10 years old. Ms. DeWolfe said the notion that the Town is actively discouraging biking is upsetting to her, as more people are choosing to bike for fun, health, climate, to support businesses, and to live locally. Ms. DeWolfe urged the Select Board to ask more questions on how to achieve equity for all modes of transportation, rather than having excess capacity for any one mode. She commented that she does not have an opinion on the banners. However, she said it is frightening to her to have banners over crosswalks, while asking drivers to look up at the same time when they should be slowing down and concentrating to see whether anyone is trying to cross the street. Ms. DeWolfe said she will follow up with the Select Board by letter with further comments. Ms. DeWolfe said \$5 million is a lot of money and there are opportunities for the town to pilot and test different configurations, along with public engagement.

Discussion ensued on bike trips through and to town and diagonal crosswalks on the renderings.

Mr. Borrelli reiterated the layout of the area is very restricted. He suggested using caution in changing the plan for the sake of the businesses and surrounding streets. He said a study of the number of bikes through town would be beneficial, concluding that, in an ideal world, Needham would want all modes of transportation. He said the committee did a great job finding a balance and the plan will work as modeled by BETA. Mr. Borrelli said he supports banners across the street, as long as retail shops are not impeded.

Mark Gluesing, 48 Macintosh Avenue, commented on bikers approaching the center of town from Dedham Avenue and Highland Avenue. He said the banners and towers will act as a traffic calming measure to slow drivers down as they approach the center of town. He urged careful design of the towers and suggested parklets could function in different ways (children play area, seating, etc.)

Ms. Cooley reiterated the need for a traffic count to move the project forward. She suggested making Chapel Street and Highland Avenue at the Town Common one-way, taking safety and traffic into account.

Discussion ensued on one-way traffic and protected bike lanes between the curb and parked cars along Great Plain Avenue.

Mr. Handel said one-way streets could improve traffic flow, but may increase driving speed in the downtown. He said while Chapel Street “feels tight” it does calm traffic, which is safer for everyone.

Ms. Frail referred to students biking to school, suggesting wider sidewalks to accommodate a bike lane on the sidewalk. She said the reality is the kids will be riding on the sidewalk, but not at all times, and that the additional space could be used by pedestrians. Mr. Mackie said a bike lane on the sidewalk is an interesting idea.

Mr. Borrelli suggested caution on the use of one-way streets, wondering about the effect on businesses and public safety vehicles. He concurred with Ms. Frail that other accommodations could be made for bikes.

Discussion continued on traffic through and to the downtown, biking, walking, and encouraging different modes of transportation in the plan.

Mr. Keane noted Great Plain Avenue should not have to be and do everything for everyone. He suggested a wider project scope in order to accommodate different facets so Great Plain Avenue is not overburdened.

Ms. Cooley concluded the pandemic has shown that people want to use the center of town differently, which she hopes will benefit merchants.

Ms. Cooley thanked the presenters for the discussion.

7:50 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Mr. Borrelli that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting of Tuesday, May 31, 2022.

Second: Mr. Keene. Unanimously approved 4-0.

A list of all documents used at this Select Board meeting is available at:

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID>

The Select Board has their next scheduled meeting on Tuesday, June 14, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall.