

Main Street Project Committee
Public Informational Meeting, May 14, 2019
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The Main Street Project Committee held a Public Informational Meeting on Tuesday, May 14, 2019, at the Chester Town Hall, 203 Middlesex Avenue, Chester, Connecticut. Committee members present included Michael Joplin, Chuck Mueller, John Schroeder, Leslie Strauss, Ed Meehan and Jeremy Ziemann. Others present included Brian Kent, Jeff Jacobson, Aaron Mortensen, First Selectwoman Lauren Gister and Selectman James Gryzbowski. Chairman Joplin called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM.

Chairman Joplin noted about 9-10 years ago the Committee got together and discussed conditions downtown. The curbs, drainage, sidewalks, etc. were all deteriorating. In order to qualify for State funds, they spent time doing a Master Plan which was accepted by the Town on July 23, 2013. The Committee then started fund raising and looking for grants. There were 3 phases to the Master Plan – Phase 1-Main Street down to Laurel Hill Cemetery, Phase 2-State Bridge on Main Street and Phase 3-Connecting the two phases together from the State Bridge to Laurel Hill Cemetery. A LOTCIP grant has been obtained for Phase 3. This meeting is to discuss the scope of work, project area, funding and timing.

Aaron Mortensen, Civil Engineer, Jacobson & Associates, introduced himself. On the drawing he pointed out the State Bridge, the Villager and the Cemetery. He noted there would be improvements to storm drains, street lighting, sidewalks, etc. The first two phases would be connected and this phase would go up Spring Street about 600 linear feet and some distance up Maple Street. The State funding covers urban connectors and Maple and Spring Streets are local connector streets. He briefly reviewed the work on Maple and Spring Streets.

Mr. Mortensen noted the entire road from beginning to end would be hogged out. Currently there is a lot of pavement overlay. Better drainage will be provided. The end product road surface will be about 6" lower than today which will allow a 4" curb and drainage away from the buildings. There will be storm drainage improvements with a few added inlets to replace drainage. Peak outflows will be the same. Sidewalk replacement was reviewed. There is a void under the sidewalk in the area of Simons. The State will not fund that part of the work because it is private property. Mortensen reviewed the process for dealing with the voids. All sidewalks will be concrete with Belgium Block pavers. They will look at ways to make it smoother. He reviewed the widths of the sidewalk as it goes down the street. It was noted there are 3 driveways along this area which will have a concrete apron. The sidewalk surface will be the same.

Mr. Mortensen then reviewed the south side of Main Street starting where the State D.O.T. Bridge left off. There will be a walking path. The 6" step along the sidewalk will be eliminated. A couple concrete steps will be provided to the French Hen and the Brew House. The Chester Wall will have a kiosk. Minor repairs will be made to the Wall. Adding a sidewalk in front of the

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Black Kat. Area in front of Priscilla Robinson's will not be touched. Adding an 8' wide sidewalk in front of Maple & Main. Crosswalks were reviewed. The electrical cabinet was reviewed, the street lights will be fed from the Cemetery electrical. Mortensen noted they have been working with the CT Water Company to replace the water main through this area. It was noted that work should be done before work starts on the street.

Mr. Mortensen noted their schedule is to have final design in October this year, go out to bid in early 2020 and to start construction in the summer of 2020.

Brian Kent from Kent & Frost introduced himself. He noted his firm has been involved in the Master Plan design and planning since it first started in 2012. This is the original project phasing plan. He reviewed several historical photos showing architecture from years ago, the trolley that operated between 1905 and 1925, Chester Wall from 1920. He showed photos from the Late 1800's, Circa 1900, Circa 1910, Circa 1920, Circa 1930, 1970 and 2018. He reviewed photos of existing conditions, such as sidewalks in disrepair, water flowing over the sidewalks, no curb reveal, water flowing down Maple and Spring Streets, fire hydrant at the flagpole (it will be moved to one of the corners on request of the fire department). A lot of the deteriorating conditions were reviewed. Kent noted the Original Chester Streetlights were controlled by private property owners adjacent to them. When the new bridge was installed, new lights were put in replicating the old ones.

Mr. Kent reviewed the recommendations in the Master Plan. Enhancements were being made to make things more friendly, an information kiosk will be in the Plaza, couple of old trolley tracks will be inlaid in the pavement near the Chester Wall. He reviewed the overall site plan showing street scaping and landscaping.

Mr. Kent next reviewed the two options – Option A and Option B. He noted the only difference in the two options was the paving material. Option A also had removable bollards for the winter. Both options were reviewed in detail. He showed drawings with cars parked in the plaza area of both options. He also noted delivery trucks can park behind the cars. Kyle from The Villager noted the trucks won't fit there.

Mr. Kent noted they would like to replace the wire lbeams, curbing and landscaped area above the Wall on Spring Street. He reviewed the crosswalk below Spring Street and the handicap space next to the crosswalk. He indicated there was a second handicap space at the crosswalk in front of Maple & Main. The flagpole area was reviewed, plantings are overgrown and will be replaced. He reviewed 2 Stone Paving Case Studies with photos of each – Ocean House, Watch Hill, RI and Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME. The Parking Comparison both before and after was reviewed. The total for both was 50.

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Mr. Kent reviewed street trees and street furnishings. Wayfinding & Signage designed by Cummings & Good were also reviewed.

Public Comments and Questions –

John Williams – questioned whether the no parking signs at the Chester Wall would be removed. Will there still be a need for a sign in the winter? Mr. Kent noted that would be decided by Public Works. A temporary sign could be devised that says “don’t park here during a storm.”

Bill DeJonge –he felt parking at the Plaza would be confusing to people and didn’t understand spending money for that. What happens when oil from cars drips on the surface? Should it just be left asphalt? Why not just draw a line on the road? Mr. Kent replied that was an option.

Tom Archambault – will the Chester Wall be redone? Mr. Kent replied no. Ed Meehan noted it should be repointed.

Ray Archambault – questioned moving the parking area out that far. Chairman Joplin noted the Committee reviewed a prior parking arrangement with the Fire Department and made changes at their request. This has been reviewed by the Fire Department.

Steve Holmes – noted it would be nice not to have the kiosk as its too much clutter. It would be nice to have a charging station for cars. He noted asphalt for the parking area is a clear delineation and a lot less staining of the roadway.

Ivy Gianetti – where will the construction equipment be? Mr. Mortensen noted that hasn’t been decided yet. They are trying to narrow down the final design. Ms. Gianetti asked the committee to notify Park & Rec once decided so they can discuss it.

Sarah Jansen – liked Plan A, wider delineation of roadway might keep people on the road rather than swinging out.

? - start time? Mr. Mortensen noted the start time hasn’t been determined yet but looking at mid-May. A staging area has to be developed to accommodate all businesses. It will be a balancing act with the contractor. The question was asked “have you considered doing it over the winter.” Mortensen responded that the asphalt plants are closed during winter.

Jim Reilly – noted he would like to get rid of the whole Plaza area. They have lost a lot of business since the road construction.

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Henry Krempel – noted the POCD was recently redone. The biggest thing that came out of that process was easing parking in town. There is \$30,000 to fix the Maple Street Parking Lot. You mentioned the quirky nature of Chester is what Chester is about. This is just like any other parking space, like Madison or West Hartford. He felt this should go before the voters to see if they want to do this. He suggested the Committee install the bollards and paint the stripes in a test fashion to see what happens.

? - he was uncomfortable with the crosswalk in front of Ceramica. No one is going to use it. The other crosswalk is all the way at the other end. Why can't there be one in the middle? The crosswalk in front of Ceramica goes to nowhere. Mr. Kent noted there has to be space on each side of the crosswalk. There are only 2 handicap spaces because of grading. Having a crosswalk in the middle would meet the goals but you would lose a parking spot. Discussion ensued about moving the crosswalk and handicap space.

? – there has to be a balance between practicality and aesthetics. Chester has become a destination town. Aesthetics should not be discounted. It does attract people to the area. This project has to be done to some degree. He didn't see aesthetics outweighing practicality. That spot is the only area where he didn't see the practicality. We have to look for the balance between practicality and aesthetics.

Brian Kent noted the pedestrian space is the same in both options. This will become a very important space. This is the town square. Many communities have lost this.

? – He suggested eliminating parking in town except for handicap and directing people to the Maple Street Parking Lot. It may be possible that the State will lower the speed limit.

Jodi noted she owns Simons and the past 2 years have been beyond scary. We need all the parking we can get. Why is construction always in the summer? Why can't it be done in the winter? We are all barely surviving. Aaron Mortensen noted the price would increase and the asphalt plants close in the winter. Jodi asked why not plan it for early spring. Mr. Mortensen noted they are trying their best to do what they can.

First Selectwoman Gister noted the town doesn't have a lot of control. This is a State funded project. There was talk of starting in early March but the problem is we can't predict that with any certainty. Once everything is drafted, it has to go up to the State. If we can't go out to bid until January, we have to go back to the State to accept the bid. If it was just the town, we would have a lot more control over the timing. We have talked to CT Water Company about starting as early as possible. At this time we don't have enough knowledge about turnaround

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time with the State. We are trying to coordinate all the moving pieces with CWC being one of those pieces.

Susan Wright – what about starting 2021? First Selectwoman Gister noted the town applied for this money 3 years ago. We waited 2 years to get a commitment. If we don't take it when available, we may not get anything and we may have to wait for another 8 years. Other towns are waiting in line. A lot of it has to do with using the State funding when it's available.

Jodi noted Simons has one of the biggest gaps. Are we going to have to close down for awhile when the work is being done? Where will the Farmer's Market go? The reply was until we know more about the timing, we don't know much about that.

First Selectwoman Gister noted they are putting together plans to upgrade surfacing and lighting in the Maple Street Parking Lot. We will try to redo the walkway from Main Street to the Maple Street Parking Lot too. We are working toward completing that in the fall. The MSPL will not be paved, but will have process put down and be lined.

Brian Kent noted the Maple Street and Water Street Parking Lots now show up on Google Maps.

Susan Wright asked if the bollards would be taken out for every storm. Mr. Kent replied it will be trial and error.

Leif Nilsson asked where the trolley tracks will be and what happens when the road needs paving. Mr. Kent noted they will be in the Belgium Block area.

Mr. Kent thanked everyone for coming out and for all the questions and comments.

Respectfully submitted,



Judith R. Brown, Recording Secretary