

**Emerald Necklace Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings Committee Meeting  
Town Hall, Selectmen's Hearing Room, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Wednesday, June 6, 2012, 6 p.m.**

**Committee Members Present:** Jesse Mermell (Chair), Kate Bowditch, Rob Daves, Guus Driessen, Linda Hamlin, Patrice Kish, Arlene Mattison, Tommy Vitolo, Clara Batchelor

**Committee Members Absent:** Julie Crockford, Kathe Geist

**Staff Present:** Erin Chute Gallentine, Peter Ditto, Rob Kefalas

**Guests Present:** see attached

**Welcome/Call Meeting to Order**

J. Mermell, Selectman and Committee Chair, called the meeting to order and Committee members introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes**

K. Bowditch moved to approve the minutes from 3/7/12 with minor modifications. T. Vitolo seconded. All in favor.

**Review of Project Scope, Schedule & Goals**

J. Mermell welcomed everyone again and noted that this is expected to be the final meeting for this Committee. She reviewed the Committee's charge, including the goal of a recommended conceptual design for each of following crossings in the Riverway, including the associated bicycle and pedestrian pathways: Route 9/Washington St., River Rd. access ramps, Brookline Ave., Parkway Rd., and Netherlands Rd. She reviewed the overall design goals for the crossings. She explained the schedule going forward, including that Engineering, Planning and Community Development, and Parks and Open Space will continue to work with the consultant to develop construction bid documents, particularly for the Route 9/Washington St. crossing, and to complete the work through the MassDOT Transportation Improvements Program (TIP). She discussed the schedule and importance of utilizing the TIP funds in a timely manner. She reviewed the agenda for the meeting, and the process and some of the discussion to this point. She noted all of the input that has been received and that the Town has worked with the state and Boston as well.

**Project Area Crossing Recommendations**

John Diaz, Vice President/Project Director with GPI, reviewed the meeting goals, including a summary of the project, review of recommendations, and a Committee vote and moving forward. He reviewed the project goals, including implementing a safe at-grade crossing at Route 9/Washington St., and providing conceptual recommendations for a long-term goal of improved connections from Olmsted Park to the Riverway. He briefly reviewed the past Committee and staff meetings, and noted they have reviewed several alternatives, landscaping, construction options, traffic projections, ramp closures, stormwater management, and coordination with other area projects. He reviewed the critical crossing areas in the project area.

J. Diaz presented the recommended concepts at each crossing:

### ***1. Netherlands Road to Parkway Road***

He reviewed the discussion around making Netherlands one-way (only section that is north of Water Division garage) or a full-closure. Full closure would likely require construction of an additional travel lane along the Riverway, and DCR and Boston Parks are not in favor of impacting the park, and Pressley Associates has determined this would not be consistent with the Emerald Necklace Master Plan. The recommendation is to make Netherlands one southbound to the Water Division garage, and associated signal modifications at Riverway and Brookline Ave. to be coordinate with Boston. J. Mermell noted that recommendations for all crossings but Route 9/Washington St. are more long-term at this point, and when it's financially possible to implement them, there would be additional review of the status of these intersections at that time. Later, J. Diaz discussed potential stormwater management options for this area including a vegetated island, porous asphalt, and stormwater tree systems.

### ***2. Brookline Avenue Crossing, Ramps, Bike/Pedestrian Path***

He reviewed that there are no immediate plans for a new multi-use path in the Riverway in Boston based on meetings with DCR and Boston Parks, and geometrics and signal operations have confirmed that an at-grade crossing at Parkway Rd. is feasible with ADA ramps and access to the crosswalk. The recommendation for Brookline is to configure the pathway with at grade signalized crossing at Parkway Rd./Brookline Ave. and Aspinwall Ave./Brookline Ave., which will operate as one signal. Long term, it's recommended to continue coordination with Boston on a potential Riverway path. J. Diaz said the new crossing is to improve safety for pedestrians, and noted bikes can cross there too. There was some brief discussion of how this area works.

### ***3. River Road Ramp Closure and River Road***

He reviewed that DCR supports closure of the River Rd. off-ramp and it will have minimal impacts on traffic, and noted that the on-ramp provides the only access to the Riverway southbound so it is critical to leave open. The recommendation is to close the off-ramp to River Rd. and reconfigure the area of the intersection, which makes travel easier and adds more green space. Later, J. Diaz discussed River Rd. and that the Town discussed options with abutters, the volume serviced by River Rd., and that the Town and abutters want to maintain parking. The recommendation is to maintain two-way flow and parking, but adjust to provide a multi-use path adjacent to the wall. Later, he discussed potential stormwater management options for this area including a vegetated swale, and noted he prefers a one-way southbound.

### ***4. Route 9 Crossing with Connections***

He discussed stormwater management for this crossing, said the final design will require Conservation Commission approval and MassDOT environmental review, and gave examples of options including detention basins/recharge areas, rain gardens, catch basins, bioswale, and stormceptor, and gave specific examples and areas. He said the Route 9 crossing can be done with or without the work on Pond Ave. and River Rd. He said Boston Transportation Department generally supports the project, and signal operations will be coordinated with them. He reviewed existing conditions, traffic analyses and implications of changes. The proposal is for a pedestrian actuated signal to be installed with optimization on the crossing time, with a wider median (~8-9 feet). He responded to questions about the logistics of how this would work. He discussed their intersection capacity analyses for the area and project implications. The recommendation is for an advance signalized crossing of Route 9 to MassDOT 25% design state.

### ***5. Pond Avenue Realignment, Off-Ramp Closure, Crossing on Bridge***

He reviewed the Pond Ave. ramps and bikes crossing, and ramp closure, which is critical if the bridge path is constructed. He discussed the significant impacts this could have on area roadways, and discussed an alternative design for this area, which J. Ferris provided some input on. He discussed the results of traffic analyses and implications for area roadways for both River Rd. and Pond Ave. ramps closures, including some traffic increases and decreases, including an increase at Willow Pond Rd. during the peak PM hour. The group briefly discussed the alternative design and implications of changes to these crossings. J. Diaz noted a Pond Ave. off-ramp closure will require future coordination with BCR/Boston for traffic signal timing along the Riverway. The recommendation is to maintain on/off ramps to/from Pond Ave., and to reexamine closure or other alternatives when/if a path over the bridge happens. Later J. Diaz discussed the Route 9 bridge crossing, and showed the bridge plans, which indicate it is not a stone arch bridge with fill as they had thought, but is a steel bridge with a stone façade and steel girders. He reviewed the plans and implications for a path, which is proposed for 11 feet, with a barrier, and a relocated concrete median. He presented potential costs for this work, but noted that don't know the exact condition of the bridge, which affects the cost.

J. Diaz briefly summarized all the recommendations.

### **Emerald Necklace Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings Comment**

#### ***Committee Comment***

J. Mermell asked for comments or questions from the Committee members.

- A. Mattison said she hoped it would be possible to implement more than just the Route 9 crossing at this time, and asked whether there was any possibility of including the River Rd. area improvements and reincorporation of part of this area into the park with the Route 9 improvements. E. Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open Space, said that while there is no funding currently available for this, they will continue to work with DCR and will consider how to accomplish this critical connection in the future. E. Gallentine said that funds are only available for full design and construction of the Route 9 crossing at this time, however if additional funds become available they will look to implement additional improvements as recommended in the plan. She discussed prioritization including factoring in safety considerations. J. Mermell noted that there would be additional evaluation of current conditions in the future as needed.
- K. Bowditch thanked the consultant team for looking at stormwater and including some of the information she provided, and for the commitment to including stormwater management in the first phase of work at Route 9, where she noted some opportunities are not too expensive. She supports T. Vitolo's suggestion to make the Route 9 refuge a bit wider, which would be helpful for both pedestrians and bikes. She agrees with A. Mattison that the River Rd. recommendation is not as exciting and as expansive as she would have liked to see from a park perspective, though she recognizes it is perhaps the most difficult area. E. Gallentine acknowledged K. Bowditch's concerns and informed the Committee that there had been a community meeting on River Rd. where all options were discussed and it was concluded that two-way traffic and parking is critical now, but that the recommendations will be a significant improvement and there could be further changes in the future. K. Bowditch thanked E. Gallentine and said that it was helpful to understand the tradeoffs and

limitations. J. Mermell and E. Gallentine discussed the possibility that individual Committee members could include a supplemental report with the final Committee report to express additional wishes for any of the intersections.

- G. Driessen asked questions about the Route 9 crossing signal, and expressed concern that able-bodied cyclists will not wait through a longer signal cycle, and suggested using alternative signals for safety. He also asked questions about some of the data in the intersection capacity analysis summary and J. Diaz clarified and explained. G. Driessen asked about alternative controls and J. Diaz discussed their past use of rapid flashing beacons, which he hasn't seen having a significant impact on vehicle behavior, and hawk systems. He explained why they are recommending a signal here, including that it will be coordinated with other signals.
- P. Kish thanked team for their excellent work and for listening to input from the Committee and the public. She especially appreciates the analysis done by Marion Pressley (Principal with Pressley Associates) looking at the closure of Netherlands Rd., and understands that the impacts on the park and the historic resources would be too great. She looks forward to implementing the recommendations.
- T. Vitolo commented that some people still seem concerned about certain crossings, and he is concerned about the implications of making recommendations now when conditions or community interest may be significantly different in the future, and he is not sure whether recommendations for some areas and ramps are exactly right now. J. Mermell said the process is similar to any long term plan and the recommendations are being made based on what we know now, and the report can reflect that things should be reexamined based on future changes. T. Vitolo asked questions about the lane and road widths for the bridge overpass, and J. Diaz explained and noted they looked at this carefully. T. Vitolo asked about the vehicle calculations for the Pond Ave. ramp closure and questioned whether a longer closure would change the numbers as people adjusted to the closure. J. Diaz said numbers from the latter part of the week-long closure were used, when daily drivers especially would have had a chance to adjust, so they shouldn't change much. T. Vitolo asked about wait times at the Route 9 crosswalk, and J. Diaz said the longest time would be approximately 93 seconds in the morning, or 113 seconds in the afternoon. T. Vitolo expressed concerns about the Pond Ave. crosswalk and ensuring cars turning right onto Washington St. are interacting well with the traffic light and crosswalk. J. Diaz said the Town agrees this is a critical crossing to implement when funding is available and they will shift the crosswalk as needed.

### ***Public Comment***

J. Mermell asked for comments or questions from the public, particularly specific to final recommendation, and thanked people for their comments in past meetings.

- Sandy Gadsby, Trustee of Olmsted Park Condominium, commented that their board only learned about this process last week. He asked for clarification on the project funding and implementation of the recommendations, which J. Mermell explained briefly, and some features of the plan. He asked how long there would be to cross at Route 9 once the light is activated, and J. Diaz explained the actual walk signal is 7 seconds, which is standard for pedestrian signals, and the full time to walk from one curb to the other is closer to 30 seconds. He also explained the full 100 second cycle for the signals.

- Hugh Mattison, resident on Pond Ave., said he would like to more of an effort to make River Rd. a continuous green strip, and suggested at least eliminating some of the parking in the future, and noted this would enhance the properties of the business owners. He also said there is a desire line for people walking to the bus stop under the overpass and lots of foot traffic here.
- Anne Lusk, resident on Hart St. and at Harvard School of Public Health, asked about federal funding, and J. Merrell said funds are earmarked, dependent on the project. A. Lusk discussed the Route 9 crossing and said that signals are typically for pedestrians but that the majority crossing here will be bicyclists using the Emerald Necklace. She suggested a bicycle signal with a countdown number, which will lead to better compliance and cyclists being better prepared to cross. She discussed that she is working with other organizations on implementing these types of signals in the United States and discussed the value of this as potentially the first such signal in the Boston area. J. Mermell said they will consider this, and suggested to E. Gallentine that it be explored in the 25% design phase versus in the conceptual plan.
- Jeffrey Ferris, Jamaica Plain resident and Ferris Wheels Bike Shop, said the Route 9 crossing is critical to move forward, but recommended that the Committee vote no on the other recommendations, which he thinks lack vision, though he acknowledged the consultant's hard work. He said that it is critical to close Netherlands Rd. both ways and he discussed how paths could connect based on the Emerald Necklace Master Plan. He appreciated that his proposal was considered. He thinks the parkland at River Rd. should be improved and suggested ways to eliminate one lane of travel, such as a U-turn on Route 9. He said the Route 9 crossing shouldn't be so wide that cars try to take a left turn. He thinks more vision is needed for the park and park traffic can be better accommodated.
- Eddie Nasson, owner of Alignment Specialty Co. on River Rd., said the wall is an eyesore but it needs to be there to keep the river from overflowing and it has worked for many years. He said an admirable job has been done with the project, and the consultants and staff have worked very hard. He agrees with the recommendations and putting in a bike path at a crosswalk, which will help keep bikes off the street and off River Rd. and will solve many problems. He agrees with keeping River Rd. two-way with the ramp closure.
- John Bain, Chairman of Park and Recreation Commission, asked about traffic implications of closing River Rd. and Pond Ave. ramps, and J. Diaz explained how they closed both during their analysis. J. Bain asked about the width of the River Rd. path and whether there will be a tree lawn and trees. E. Gallentine said there will be a tree lawn for as much as possible, which is currently shown along a portion of River Rd., but it is too narrow at the ramp end, and they are trying to minimize impacts to parking. J. Bain asked if there will be room for both pedestrians and cyclists and J. Diaz said there will be, though it is relatively narrow. J. Bain said he supports the project as designed, thinks everyone has done a great job, and hopes it is approved.
- Pete Stidman, Boston Cyclists Union, said this is the first time he is seeing the plans and to make thoughtful recommendations would require seeing and studying plans ahead of time, and he felt the presentation was limited in some ways. He said it's important to examine future traffic predictions, which he thinks will show some decline in vehicles and to focus more on people and less on cars in the project area. He agreed with J. Ferris regarding closing Netherlands and thinks parkland may not need to be removed in the future based on

traffic projections. He suggested making the off ramp to Pond Ave. a sharper turn to slow vehicles and to make the crossing safer.

- Ann McKinnon, Jamaica Plain resident, said with money to move forward on Route 9 this is a great job and well done. She agreed with P. Stidman and J. Ferris on not getting locked into recommendations on the other crossings. She thinks the plan does a good job of identifying issues and opportunities, but is disappointed about waiting for additional funding and thinks the plan needs to propose funding sources and commit to securing additional funds, and have a timeline and next steps.
- Sarah Imershein, resident on Netherlands Rd., thanked everyone for hard work, and said it would have been nice to see the presentation in advance. She suggested moving forward with the Route 9 area as soon as possible and making the refuge as large as possible, especially given how people stack up there and don't fit now. She asked that closure of Netherlands Rd. be reconsidered and though she understands the concerns about removing parkland, she discussed its current use and state and that she thinks it would be a good tradeoff. She also said that many people walk in the area and cross the Riverway at Netherlands Rd., which is unsafe.
- Charlotte Fleetwood, Boston Transportation Department, thanked the team for reaching out to the City of Boston, said they are very supportive of the overall idea of improving connectivity especially for bicycles and pedestrians. She looks forward to seeing the Route 9 crossing move forward and working together on the details. She thinks loop detectors and similar suggestions are a good idea. She suggested working with them on a possible connection to the Boston side at Huntington Ave. For Netherlands Rd., they have concerns about additional traffic at Brookline Ave. and Riverway and suggested working with them regarding changes to signal times to avoid degradation of service at that intersection.
- Andrew Venis, partner at Brookline Ice Co., thanked the Parks and Open Space Division and the Department of Public Works for involving them and asking their opinion on how changes would affect them. He said they think any improvement to River Rd. will be beneficial to the town and noted it is unsightly now, but he asked for as much parking as possible to be maintained and said the parking is critical to them and the other businesses in the area.
- Andrew Fisher, former president of Mass Bikes, discussed his and others efforts to get action on this area many years ago and how please he is to see this excellent work being done, and finally fixing the gaps in the Emerald Necklace and in Brookline. He commended the Committee and consultants for the excellent job and thanked everyone for these improvements.

### **Conclusion of Conceptual Plan Review**

#### ***ENBPC Committee Recommendation & DOT/MPA Process & Next Steps***

E. Gallentine thanked the Committee for agreeing to come together and work on a conceptual plan to address this long-term problem with connectivity in the Emerald Necklace. She noted that they had worked with area businesses and abutters and boards and committees, had multiple public meetings, and they will continue to coordinate with the Gateway East project, DCR, and the City of Boston. She explained that the conceptual plan is a tool to move forward to make improvements, develop funding strategies, set priorities, and serve as a guide for relevant boards and commissions (e.g., Park and Recreation Commission, Transportation Board, Planning Board,

Conservation Commission). She urged the Committee to support the plan so that the Town could move forward with the recommendations, and she thanked them again for their hard work.

J. Mermell summarized the comments received from Committee members who were not present at the meeting, including that J. Crockford expressed support for the entire plan, and K. Geist was also supportive of the plan. E. Gallentine noted that the Netherlands Rd. area will also be revisited during the Muddy River Restoration Project construction.

K. Bowditch commented that if priorities are identified based on additional funding, she would recommend the Pond Ave. area next. She thinks this is an exciting opportunity to integrate stormwater into this historic park. She said the full signal at Route 9 is also very important and helpful for pedestrians and they should be included since many do cross here. She likes keeping some flexibility with some details to be determined, but she supports the entire overall plan.

T. Vitolo suggested that advocates should continue to push on this project and plans and thanked everyone for their efforts and comments.

J. Mermell thanked the Committee, consultants, and meeting attendees throughout the process. She would like to see the entire plan move forward and she reiterated that it is a conceptual design plan and not a final long term plan, so there will be reevaluation in the future, along with timelines and budgets, but the plan is necessary for long-term planning. The final plan will be circulated to Committee members and they can also include amendments or supplement documents from members.

C. Batchelor moved to approve the recommendations as presented by the GPI Emerald Necklace Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings Design Team, whether Brookline or its partners are to do the implementation, acknowledging that further studies, analyses and potential revisions will be required as portions are implemented in the future. The recommendations included are as follows:

- Signalized crossing at Route 9, including exploring the recommendations made by the Committee and public comments
- Bike and pedestrian pathway connections to Olmsted Park
- Improving alignment of Pond Ave./Riverway on the ramp/Route 9 intersection
- Bike and pedestrian shared path along River Rd., and considering further incorporation of green space into the River Rd. area
- Closing off-ramp to River Rd. and reconfiguring the intersection
- Improving the bike and pedestrian path along Brookline Ave.
- Netherlands Rd. becomes one-way southbound and/or other bike/pedestrian improvements as supported by further analysis in the future
- Signalized crossing at Parkway Rd. and Brookline Ave.
- Construction of bike and pedestrian crossing over the Riverway bridge, and reexamining closure of the Pond Ave. on/off ramps if and when this path becomes a reality
- Appropriate and innovative stormwater management approaches be considered for all alternatives during implementation
- Appropriate landscape treatments be incorporated for all phases

Finally, the Committee requests that the Town move forward with the submittal package for the MassDOT/TIP (Transportation Improvements Program) process to implement the Route 9 connection solution. A. Mattison seconded. Following some brief discussions and modifications, which are reflected in the above motion, Committee members voted unanimously in favor.

***Adjournment***

J. Mermell thanked the Committee members and attendees again, and said a report will go to the Board of Selectmen. She adjourned the meeting.

Documents Used at the Meeting:

- Meeting agenda
- Draft minutes from 3/7/12
- Emerald Necklace Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings Committee Charge
- Presentation prepared by GPI, 6/6/12

Submitted by H. Lis.