

HARVARD TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

Date: February 16, 2022

Time: 7:00PM

Place: Zoom Virtual Meeting

Members Present: Stacia Donahue, Bruce Leicher, Gabriel Medjanis, Jim Lee, Kara Minar, Beth Williams, Rene Turnheim

Others Present: Chris Ryan (Director of Economic Development); Neil Angus (Devens Enterprise Commission), Margaret Kusner, Jayne, Peter Ricupero, Patricia Gallagher, Loretta, Becca Kelley, Justin Brown, Scott Winter, Christine Winter, Davida Bagatelle, Jasper, Wyatt Holt, Kate, Scott Grossman, Guy Hermann, Dave Barnett, Ann Whitney, Thomas Caledonia, Suzanne Mahoney, Gary & Lisa, Julie Anne Medjanis, Katwell, David Fay, Jay Wallace, Valerie Hurley (Harvard Press), Barbara Kemp, Doug Thornton, Karen Grossman, Susan Chen, Gary Lacroix (Chair -Nashoba Regional Green Ways), Laura McGovern, Rob McWaters, Jim Boutelle, Gerry Hall, Robert, Jeff Tingle, Kerry Shrives, Susan Curtis

(Note: Names captured from Zoom naming conventions of participant. These are only accurate to the extent the participant depicted them accurately).

Gabriel Medjanis called the meeting to order at 7:00pm virtually in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, under M.G.L. Chapter 30A S20 and Code of the Town of Harvard Chapter 125

1. Discussion of Old Mill to Devens connector:

Mr. Medjanis started with introductions, overview of project to date, and meeting format.

The primary purpose of this meeting was community outreach to inform and hear feedback of the proposed reconnection of Devens to Old Mill Road via a bicycle and pedestrian path.

Mr. Leicher reviewed a short power point presentation showing a few maps of the proposed project. Bruce reviewed the connectivity at Old Mill Road as well as the greater connectivity to the larger region. Bruce then reviewed the proposed timeline of Grant Application in Spring 2023 with Design and Permitting hopefully in 2023 and/or 2024 with completion in 2024 or 2025. Mr. Leicher then expressed that TAC wanted to reach out to the community to hear concerns before we move forward with the project.

Gary/Lisa (48 Blanchard Road) reviewed history of connection as they have been in this area 33 years. They are enthusiastic about the possibility of the connection for pedestrians and bikes. Asked about how to get from Devens to the Nashua River Rail Trail. Neil Angus described the trails proposed to get from Patton Road to Barnum Road. DEC is working with Ayer on a MassWorks Grant project to connect the Devens gate on West Main to downtown Ayer by sidewalk and/or shared use path (SUP). Neil Angus (DEC) reviewed that the original permitting of the golf course included the easement and use of the cart path to get from Old Mill Road to Patton Road.

Jim Boutelle (109 Old Mill Road) commented that the project 'looks neat', but was concerned about parking. Mr. Leicher noted that the preliminary scoping plans by the engineering firm showed parking but when reviewed by the TAC, the group did not feel parking was appropriate for this project.

Karen Grossman – Asked about status of the TIP and the shared use path (SUP) along route 110 (Ayer Road). Mr. Ryan reviewed that project and noted it's currently targeted for construction in

2026. There will be a public hearing about this project sponsored by MassDOT, tentatively scheduled for March 30th, to review the 25% design plans.

Scott Winter – Noted that many residents wanted to keep the road closed which is why it was originally resisted. He is in favor of the bike/walk path, but not in favor of vehicular traffic. Mr. Leicher noted that the TAC has discussed it at length that it would not be for vehicular traffic, but there will probably be a need for a gate so that emergency vehicular access in the event of an injury on the trail. Neil Angus (DEC) described that the existing 6' wide path at the golf course with a reinforced shoulder that can be used by an ambulance to access all areas of the golf course. The path is envisioned to be like this and not by vehicular use.

Wyatt Holt – (Shirley Resident and Teacher at Bromfield): Noted that Shirley went thru a similar process with the building of their rail trail and bike path. He suggested reaching out to Shirley to discuss ways to gain community support for the project. He personally has used this path to bike commute from Shirley to Bromfield in the past and encourages everyone to support this project. He would use the path again for commuting if it was available. He also noted that the fence has been repaired and the connection is currently closed.

Kara Minar – SB/TAC – Noted that the need for emergency access has been in place since the beginning of the Devens and Golf Course planning. TAC hears the concerns of not wanting traffic in the neighborhood and will keep this in mind as we move forward.

Mr. Angus (DEC) noted that Devens has its own trail master plan and open space plan and it does not include car traffic.

Jay Wallace asks what improvements will be made to Old Mill Road. Mr. Ryan noted it would be the painting of 'sharrows' (pavement markings) and some possible signage.

Becca Kelley loves the idea and the proposed path to Devens. She was wondering if the Depot Road path can be upgraded to keep that path wider year-round as it gets overgrown during the summer. Mr. Leicher noted that Park and Rec (P&R) funded regrading and upgrading the Depot Road to Lancaster County path with the help of an Eagle Scout project and the Snowmobile Club this past year. That path is much improved over its condition from a year ago.

Jeff Tingle wanted to know who will be monitoring this path plus the Depot/Lancaster County path to keep these paths clear and maintained. Mr. Leicher noted that the TAC has discussed how to properly maintain these trails especially with all the work that went into improving the Depot/LC trail last year. It's something TAC does not have an answer to yet, but it is something we are aware of that needs to be addressed.

Davida Bagettle – Approves of plan in general, but wanted to know if it will be handicap accessible designated? She noted that Harvard does not currently have a trail in town that would comply with handicap accessible requirements. What would be required to maintain it for that level? Mr. Ryan noted that to be eligible for the grant funding we're seeking, that we will be required to comply with accessibility requirements. This was good news.

Gary Lacroix (NRG Chair) – Fully supports this project. He noted that it is the vision of NRG to connect municipalities in a safe way for bicycles and pedestrians. This project would align with that goal. He wanted Harvard residents to know that this is not just for Harvard but for the community at large.

Gary Hall asked if there is a way to also open Depot Road again to create a loop. Mr. Angus noted that the crossing at Depot Road is at grade level. The railroads do not want to add crossings at grade, so this connection would be very difficult to make/negotiate with the railroad companies. The underpass at Old Mill Road is the most desirable way as it's an underpass.

David Fay of Still River – Said this would be ‘a dream come true’ to not have to drive over to the Nashua River Rail Trail parking lot in Ayer. He has been driving to the rail trail for years and would love to be able to just bike from home. He is in support of the project.

Thomas Caledonia – wanted to know about signage. Mr. Ryan noted that it would be paint ‘sharrows’ and possibly signage as a bike route. Mr. Caledonia wanted to know if we could save money by not painting. Mr. Ryan noted that it was necessary to show the route.

Scott Grossman (Old Mill Road) – Wanted to know if any analysis been done on the volume of pedestrians and bicycles using this path? Also noted that he was happy to hear that we would not have a parking lot but was concerned that people might still park anyway. Wanted to know how will that be handled? Mr. Leicher/Mr. Ryan/Mr. Angus were all unsure how to even guess the volume we might see. Mr. Ryan and Mr. Angus might try to see if any data or methods are available to try and determine a number and report back to the group. For the parking issues; during design we can review the possibility of no parking signage? Or something that could dissuade parking in that area.

Gary/Lisa (48 Blanchard Road) – Worried the sign that says ‘no access to Devens’ meant for trucks/cars is going to conflict with bicycle signage saying ‘this way to Devens’. TAC will note this for review during the design phase and acknowledged that this could possibly be confusing.

Mr. Angus (DEC) pointed out on the parking issue that this is a connection point and not a destination point. He does not feel parking would not be needed. Destination points (like the rail trail head in Ayer) have parking issues, but this would just be a connector and not a start or end point in the routes.

Margaret Kusner (South Shaker) - Loves the idea, but trying to get across Ayer Road is ‘scary’. She would love to use this in the future if there was a safe way to get there. Mr. Ryan noted that safe crossing of Ayer Road by vehicles and peds/bikes is going to be addressed in the TIP project. It is a known issue and is being worked on to be improved.

Jeff Tingle noted that this isn’t just a 3 season use path as people use the golf course in the winter time for sledding or cross-country skiing. Feels that no parking signs should be used.

Jay Wallace wanted to know when will SUP along Ayer Road will be ready. Mr. Ryan noted it would likely be 2026-27 thru the TIP project.

Christine Winter asked for a copy of the presentation. Mr. Ryan noted that it will be uploaded and available at the town website. Look for the transportation advisory committee page where a link to this project and the presentation will be located. Mr. Ryan will try to post it tomorrow or Friday.

As a wrap up to the open comments period, Mr. Leicher noted that the next steps are to prepare for grant application for next winter. TAC will be coordinating with all entities involved to move the project forward.

Screen capture of Zoom Chat in italics:

18:47:13 From Hildreth Pro to Everyone:

Welcome everyone! We will get started on time at 7:00. Everyone has been muted initially and chat is disabled until we begin.

18:58:25 From Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer to Everyone:

We are not yet with all TAC Members so we may be a minute or two late

19:04:18 From Beth Williams to Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer(Direct Message):

Are we recording?

19:15:42 From Christine Winter to Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer(Direct Message):

What does Sharrow mean???

19:16:22 From Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer to Beth Williams(Direct Message):

Shared roadway

19:20:51 From Dave Barnett to Everyone:
Great plan!

19:21:08 From davidfay to Everyone:
Where is the raised hand function?

19:21:40 From Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer to Everyone:
Raised hand is under Reactions tab

19:21:42 From Bruce Leicher to Everyone:
Raised hand function can be found under Reactions

19:21:51 From Davida to Everyone:
Bottom of your zoom screen on the right under "reactions" just click that and you will see the "raise hand"

19:21:55 From Jay Wallace to Everyone:
Its in the reactions button at the bottom of the screen

19:24:01 From Karen Grossman to Everyone:
What is the status of the pedestrian/bike trail on Ayer Road?

19:29:06 From Ann Whitney to Everyone:
glad to hear that about the parking. We live next to Jim at the end of Old Mill.

19:30:35 From Jay Wallace to Everyone:
What are the improvements on Old Mill Road

19:53:11 From Gerry Hall to Everyone:
Is there an opportunity to extend the end of Depot Road into Devens (across the rail tracks), to create a loop through Devens back to Old Mill Road?

19:54:21 From Davida to Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer(Direct Message):
Thank you for clarifying that Chris! I assumed so but now I have the "facts"

19:54:34 From Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer to Davida(Direct Message):
You bet!

19:55:29 From Gerry Hall to Everyone:
yes, bike trail

20:02:44 From Barbara Kemp to Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer(Direct Message):
I live on Blanchard Road and think this is a wonderful, needed improvement to our town. Thank you for bringing this forward.

20:04:27 From Christine Winter to Everyone:
I like Scott G's question about impact/traffic estimate. Please investigate.

20:06:28 From Jay Wallace to Everyone:
When is the shared use path along 100 anticipated to be put in place

20:06:37 From Jay Wallace to Everyone:
110

20:09:42 From Karen Grossman to Everyone:
can you share next steps?

20:10:18 From Chris Ryan, Harvard Staffer to Everyone:
cryan@harvard-ma.gov

20:13:36 From Dave Barnett to Everyone:
Very excited about the idea of this path. We have been looking for a safe way to bike to Ayer/ a safe bike loop from the house since we moved in last June (Old Mill resident). Thanks for holding this!

20:14:21 From Neil Angus to Everyone:
Thanks everyone!

20:14:27 From Jeff Tingle to Everyone:
Thank you!

20:14:41 From Kerry Shrives to Everyone:
Thank you

2. Ayer Road Transportation Improvement Project (TIP) public hearing:

TEC (engineering firm for the TIP) sent the 25% documents today. These will be uploaded soon. The date from MassDOT for the 25% design review is still tentative as March 30th. It's unknown

what type of meeting it will be. Hopefully open format, but it's not under Town control as it's sponsored by MassDOT.

Mr. Leicher wanted to know if TAC needed a meeting prior to the TIP meeting to review our collective comments prior to the meeting with MassDOT. All agreed this would be a good idea. Mr. Ryan will work to find a time to meet and post the meeting.

3. Transportation Plan:

MRPC was surprised at the volume of comments TAC sent back on their first pass at the transportation plan update. Mr. Ryan was happy with the thoroughness of the TAC in their comments. MRPC will be using EDA money to extend the original DLTA contract and make the comments/corrections/updates to the Transportation Plan for Harvard. It will be extended to April of 2022. The Planning Board, Harvard Climate Initiative Committee (HCIC), and TAC need to review the plan as a group and approve it for implementation once it has been reviewed by all. HCIC wants to attend a TAC meeting to review the goals of the HCIC and the TAC to stay coordinated. The hope is that we're not duplicating efforts. HCIC requested to be at our next meeting for about 30 minutes. TAC feels this will be a good idea and supports the efforts.

4. Meeting Notes:

No meeting notes to review at this time. Ms. Donahue is coordinating with Ms. Williams to get them updated for review at the next meeting.

5. Other Business: None

6. Adjournment:

Mr. Medjanis moved to adjourn. Mr. Lee seconded. Unanimous agreement. Adjourned at 8:25pm.

Next meeting: Doodle Poll will be sent – next meeting to be approximately 2-3 weeks from now.