

Town of University Park
Council Committee on Police, Traffic and Public Safety

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

Meeting notes

Committee Members present: David Brosch, Council Member, Ward 1; Joe Schultz, Council Member, Ward 2 and Committee Chair; Linda Verrill, Council Member, Ward 4; Martha Wells, Council Member, Ward 6; Roland Stephen, Council Member, Ward 7

Guests: Mickey Beall, Director of Public Works

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

Agenda

1. Review the streets repaving, sidewalk construction, and sidewalk/path maintenance work recommended by the committee in its February 2019 report to the town council; reaffirm or revise the recommendations; and propose a prioritization scheme for council.

Mr. Schultz opened the meeting by noting that its purpose was specifically for the committee to review its recommendations to council made in February concerning repairs and new construction of streets, sidewalks, and paths in town, and to receive public input as it conducted that review. The purpose was not to redo the committee's work from last fall/winter and redeliberate over each individual project. To that end, he proposed as a method of proceeding to consider the committee's February recommendations in three main categories of work—sidewalk/path maintenance and repair; streets repaving and reconstruction; and new sidewalks and other infrastructure—in turn, taking account of changes to cost estimates and proposed scope of work that had occurred in the intervening time. The committee would structure its review around a document provided by Mr. Beall (attached, and also made available at the meeting) containing a comprehensive summary of proposed projects and cost distributions as of June 7, 2019 (referred to below at the 6/7 Projects Summary).

Category 1. Sidewalk and path repairs

All work proposed in this category would be funded from designated and undesignated reserves, not new debt. The 6/7 Projects Summary shows additional proposed work at seven sites in

town, which the committee had not considered prior to its February report to council. Expanding the scope of work in this manner will allow the town to take advantage of the opportunity to have concrete work done at a lower cost because crews are already working in town, and bring all sidewalks and paths in town up to a state of good repair.

A resident raised a question concerning tree roots as a cause of sidewalk problems. Mr. Beall explained the town's case-by-case approach, which distinguishes between low-value (e.g., pear) and high-value (e.g., elm) street trees and schedules maintenance accordingly.

A resident noted that sidewalk deterioration is frequently related to stormwater, which should be addressed as a cause, and cited Sheridan and Tuckerman as examples. A committee member noted that the proposed paving and new infrastructure work at this time is confined to areas already disturbed by WSSC, which constrains the ability to change or reduce stormwater flows in areas where that's a particular problem.

Mr. Beall noted that under the proposed scope of work, nearly the entire system of park paths will be repaved.

Ms. Wells moved to approve the proposed sidewalk and path repairs in the 6/7 Projects Summary. Mr. Stephen seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Category 2, Streets

The committee's February recommendations to council reflected a fundamental commitment to bring all streets in town up to the same standard, as well as a desire to take advantage of the opportunity presented by repaving work to add physical traffic calming features if that could be done cost effectively.

The 6/7 Projects Summary includes two sites not explicitly considered in the committee's February report: the Mews, and 42 Ave.

Mr. Beall explained the work proposed for the Mews, which amounts to a relatively minor repair of a small area of that street.

Mr. Brosch objected to the proposal to unpave 42nd Ave. as costly and unnecessary. A resident asked why the project had even been proposed. A committee member noted that it came as a recommendation by the town trees, parks, and environment committee, and presented environmental benefits. Discussion followed concerning the tree committee's recommendation, benefits (principally related to increasing permeable surface area), costs, consequences for traffic patterns, engineering difficulties and consequences for pedestrian safety of changing the curb radius at Sheridan and Queens Chapel Rd. to better accommodate turning traffic. It was

noted that this project will be one of the subjects of a public hearing on new sidewalks/street, presently scheduled for July 15, 2019.

Mr. Stephen moved to exempt the 42nd Ave. site from the committee's review here, because of the pending July hearing. Mr. Brosch seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

A resident raised a question concerning the two proposed mini-traffic circles, in particular the cost (\$100,000 total). Mr. Schultz noted that the committee's February recommendation had included a cost estimate of \$15,000 per circle, which was a maximum based on Federal Highway Administration guidelines, and that the estimate in the 6/7 Projects Summary, which has been circulating in town for some time, would indeed be an irrational expense. In fact, the FHWA guidelines suggest that the probably cost for building mini-circles in asphalt streets would be considerably lower. The discrepancy seems to be the result of a misunderstanding concerning what was recommended: a small (e.g., 6' diameter) island in the intersection intended to slow traffic by presenting an obstacle in the road that deflects vehicles sideways, forcing them to slow down.

A resident noted that he had been skeptical of the idea, but after visiting the site, testing it with his minivan, and reading some of the voluminous literature available, he was forced to conclude that it really was not absurd. He also noted, however, that other alterations to the street design at the proposed sites, such as reducing the curb radius, could perhaps achieve similar effects.

Ms. Wells moved to reduce the cost estimate in the 6/7 Projects Summary to \$30,000, and stipulate that it was intended to cover mini-traffic circles or comparable measures. Mr. Stephen seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Mr. Brosch asked Mr. Beall to explain the estimated cost of \$694,000 for Queens Chapel Rd., and in particular what part of these costs were to cover sidewalks. Mr. Beall noted that because of a miscommunication an earlier estimate to council had included the cost of replacing all sidewalk on one side of QCR with ADA-compliant 5' sidewalk, but that that had since been corrected. The proposed work as it now stand envisions replacing only sidewalk in a state of disrepair, amounting to 10% to 15% of the total on both sides of the road. In addition, the cost estimate covers curb-and-gutter, driveway aprons, handicapped ramps, and repaving the roadway, including the cost of rectifying the problems for stormwater flow at some intersections created by the fact that the roadbeds of QCR and some intersecting streets are different heights.

Ms. Wells moved to approve the proposed streets work in the 6/7 Projects Summary, but exempting the 42nd Ave. site and reducing the cost ceiling for traffic circles to \$30,000. Mr. Stephen seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Category 3, New sidewalk

All the sites in this category will also be subjects of a public hearing presently scheduled for July 15, 2019.

Virtually all the work proposed is in three sites—the 4200 block of Underwood, Clagett-Pineway, and College Heights Drive between Wells Run and Woodberry—and intended to fill holes in the pedestrian connections between Adelphi Rd. and that area of town, UPES, and Baltimore Ave. and College Park/UMd.

A resident noted that the proposed sidewalk route on Underwood toward UPES would entail a pedestrian crossing at Beechwood, which is a busy intersection in the morning and afternoon and maybe too dangerous for children.

A resident said that he doubted the work proposed for Underwood could be accomplished from an engineering point of view, and that the number of mature street trees that would have to be removed was concerning. He did not agree that the project was justified.

Mr. Brosch said that the sidewalk proposed for the block of Clagett-Pineway between Woodberry and Clagett was unnecessary, based on current pedestrian traffic, and should be removed from the proposal.

A resident noted that the new sidewalk on Clagett-Pineway, as proposed, would not slow traffic, which he viewed as the real problem. Mr. Stephen commented that the town can and should do more on traffic calming and take a wider view of that issue, and that that part of the town streets network was of particular concern. He suggested that any further recommendation from the committee concerning new sidewalk along Clagett-Pineway explicitly note that that was not intended to directly contribute to traffic calming, in contrast to the new sidewalk proposed for College Heights Drive. Ms. Verrill concurred.

Mr. Brosch distributed a photo of a street near Brookland/CUA showing a bike lane separated from traffic lanes by collapsible plastic bollards and parking curbs, and bordered on the other side by a pedestrian sidewalk separated from the road by a curb and planting strip. He suggested that something like that bike lane would be a less expensive and preferable way to provide a pedestrian walkway on College Heights Drive and narrow the roadway there.

Ms. Verrill moved to approve the proposed new sidewalk work in the 6/7 Projects Summary, noting that the sidewalk on Clagett-Pineway is intended to promote pedestrian connectivity and not to calm traffic. Ms. Wells seconded. Motion carried 4-1 (Brosch opposed).

The committee agreed to defer prioritization of sites and projects, against the event that circumstances arising during actual construction force additional decisions to forego some of the work envisioned in the current plan, to the council as a whole.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Submitted by Joe Schultz, Chair