

TOWN OF SWANTON

MINUTES

SPECIAL INFORMATIONAL HEARING

SIDEWALK FEASIBILITY STUDY

Wednesday, April 6, 2016 @ 7:00 p.m.

Reg Beliveau, Village Manager; Yaasha Wheeler, Secretary; Patrick & Peter Cross, Cross Consulting Engineers; Chris Leach and Eugene Labombard, Village Trustees; Henry Lambert, Swanton Enhancement Project; Dan Billado, Selectman; Tom Benton, St. Albans Messenger; Jim Cota, VTrans; Glenn Gurwitt; David Jescavage, Town Administrator; Elizabeth Nance; Andy Larocque; Linda Wirts; Mary Metayer; Ron Kilburn; Shawn Cheney.

Mr. Jescavage opened the hearing at 6:05 p.m. He explained that the Village and Town applied for a grant for a feasibility study for two sidewalks, one to run along First Street from McDonald's/Maplefields to MVU and another to run along South River Street from the existing sidewalk north of Lake Street to the historical museum/pedestrian bridge.

Peter Cross, of Cross Consulting Engineers, explained the contracts. The scoping report was funded through VTrans, and they were in the initial phases of the project, with three public meetings total before the report would be issues. Right now, they were in the process of gathering information and evaluating. They would also consider alternative locations for the sidewalks, land use along the use, right-of-way issues, utility conflicts, natural resource concerns, and more. Two archaeology consultants and one historical consultant would be part of the evaluation. The alternatives would be part of the report.

He showed a slide depicting the South River Street route and a slide depicting the First Street Route. He opened up the floor to concerns and questions.

SOUTH RIVER STREET

For South River Street, the sidewalk was shown for the west side, because that was the side the houses were on and was further from the river. The sidewalk would cross the highway at some point and connect to the bridge. A few potential issues he foresaw was that some houses were close to the road, there were trees in the way, and there was little to no drainage.

Andy Larocque pointed out that the existing sidewalk was along the river side of the road, so the sidewalk would require another crossing. "I don't know if people want the convenience of losing their yard to the sidewalk, versus having a sidewalk on the other side

of the street.” Daniel Billado felt that having the sidewalk on the house side of the road made the most sense for convenience’s sake. Mr. Cross said that the historical significance of the houses would be considered as well and pointed out a few houses that were close to the road.

Ronald Kilburn said that the river side would be the better side because he was concerned about people pushing baby carriages and riding bicycles across so many driveways, whereas a sidewalk on the river side would allow for uninterrupted travel and scenic view.

Henry Lambert asked if it would be a bike path or recreation trail; Mr. Cross replied that the project had been presented to him as a sidewalk. Reginald Beliveau said that, at one time, the Town/Village had considered a trail extending from the Rail Trail and going along River Lane.

Glenn Gurwitt asked if there would be a green belt between the road and the sidewalk. Mr. Cross agreed that there would be a 5-8 foot wide green belt, with a 5-foot-wide sidewalk. Bethany Remmers, NRPC, said that a greenbelt was preferred because of separation from traffic and ability to deal with snow. Mr. Cross added that it also helped with drainage. Jim Cota (District 8 VTrans) said that there were a number of bonds/paving when crossing each driveway, which would not be a problem on the river side. Mr. Cross agreed, adding that there was water coming off the street toward the river on the river side.

Linda Wirts asked why there had been a request for the sidewalk in this particular location. Dan Billado explained that since the bridge and depot and recreation trail were in that area, the Trustees and Selectboard were concerned with pedestrian safety along South River Street. Mr. Cross summarized that this was proposed to connect the Rail Trail to the Village. Mary Metayer could picture the river side being more desirable because it was closer to the bridge and rail trail, and less disruptive to homeowners.

FIRST STREET

This project was more of a challenge because it was longer, with higher traffic volume, higher pedestrian volume, and some drainage issues. There was also some wetlands. For now, the sidewalk was considered for the side of the road on which MVU was located. The right-of-way was narrow, yet the road was wide, so there was not much space. The sidewalk would cross Frontage Road, the on-ramp for the interstate, some driveways, the town garage.

On the other side of the street, there were fewer driveways to cross, but there would have to be a crosswalk to reach MVU. Chris Leach, Village Trustee, said that there had been some thoughts of cutting across Frontage Road to MVU. Mr. Cross showed the location of the existing path through the woods, which was used by a number of the kids; that would be up to the Trustees and Selectboard to consider as an alternative. That would probably be less expensive to build as well. Chris Leach felt it may be the safest route. Shawn Cheney added that the existing path was not monitored, whereas a sidewalk would be more visible, but

the existing path was quicker and “cleaner.” Dan Billado said that the sidewalk up to MVU would enhance the properties for connectivity to the Village.

Andy Larocque explained that the house next to the town garage was his, and explained that some fill would be needed because the area was not level. Water pools where the sidewalk was proposed and he was concerned about the drainage affecting water in his basement. Reginald Beliveau said that the Village had done a preliminary study for a water-line extension to MVU from the school to Waugh Farm Road and believed the line would go up that side of the road. Mr. Cross said that sidewalks can be built over waterlines.

Henry Lambert was concerned about the crosswalks over the on-ramp or off-ramp, which seemed to pose some safety hazards; the crossing would have to be very visible. Did Mr. Cross envision putting the sidewalk behind the piers or closer to the roadway? Mr. Cross explained that it was “tight” close to the road, but was a grade challenge behind the pier.

Glen Gurwitt said that, as a biker, he has learned to avoid the on-ramps and off-ramps at all costs, because motorists did not pay attention to him, even when he had the right-of-way. It was noted that the speed limit was 35 mph through that area. Elizabeth Nance asked how much traffic used those ramps, and Mr. Cross said that they would do some counts to consider the traffic. Ms. Nance asked if a stop light could be considered for the on or off ramp. Mr. Cross explained how signal warrants evaluated whether or not the area should be considered for a stop light, and said it could be looked at.

Eugene Labombard pointed out that the snow from the sidewalks would likely go toward the house side, rather than the street side, of the sidewalks. Reginald Beliveau noted that some people turn right to go to Champlain Farms in order to make a left turn toward town. Jim Cota mentioned “traffic calming,” which he described as a “variety of solutions that help people slow down through the village,” such as striping the edges. Reginald Beliveau explained how an island could affect traffic. Bethany Remmers said that a sidewalk was view as traffic calming as well.

Mr. Cross offered a form by which people could submit further comments. Cross Consulting Engineers would move forward with evaluating alternatives and would meet with both legislative bodies, and later hold more hearings for public input.

Shawn Cheney said he would rather walk along South River Street aesthetically, but was not certain it was realistic because of the steepness of the bank. People would have to cross the street anyway once they got to the train bridge. Mr. Cross that the bridge would have a designated crosswalk. Ron Kilburn suggested surveying the owners to see which side they preferred.

Mr. Cross summed up that there was drainage issues on either side. Elizabeth Nance asked if the sidewalk could be built up. Mr. Cross responded that a walkway could be made out of pressure-treated lumber to allow for drainage to the river.

Reginald Beliveau detailed the scope of the upcoming major paving project in the Village. He said there would be appropriate signs, space for bikers, and more safety possibilities.

Mr. Cross closed the hearing at 6:54 p.m.