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Town of Plaistow - Highway Safety Committee
145 Main Street, Plaistow, NH 03865

PLAISTOW HIGHWAY SAFETY COMMITTEE MINUTES

MEETING DATE- Friday, September 25, 2009

PRESENT- Chief Stephen Savage, *Chairman*; Chief John McArdle, *Vice Chairman*; Sean Fitzgerald, *Town Manager*; Leigh Komornick, *Town Planner*; Ernie Sheltry, *Citizens Representative*; Dave Walker, *Rockingham Planning Commission*; Richard Latham, *Citizens Representative*; and Lisa Withee, *Citizens Representative*;

EXCUSED- Dan Garlington, Highway Department Supervisor; and Michael Dorman, *Building Inspector*

ABSENT- Dan Poliquin, *Selectmen Representative*

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER- 9:40 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT- None.

MINUTES-

Chief Savage asks for motion to accept the minutes of the last meeting on 06/11/09. L. Komornick motions to accept the minutes and E. Sheltry seconds the motion. All in favor, except for L. Withee who sustained.

NEW BUSINESS -

Update from Rockingham Planning Commission on Plaistow Main Street Traffic Calming Study

Chief Savage turns the discussion over to D. Walker for an update.

D. Walker states that the traffic counts are completed but is still waiting to receive the data. Once he receives it they will look at the counts and from those figures will schedule turning counts at the intersections and will make sure we get the a.m. and p.m. peak traffic times as well as Saturday.

D. Walker presents a slide presentation regarding traffic calming techniques that shows the benefits and impacts. It shows what traffic calming is, the impact, benefits, and what costs might be. He would also like the Committee to consider what might work on Main Street and what obstacles there might be. Bullets from the slideshow are as follows:

- Definition of Traffic Calming: Defined as engineering physical changes to the roadway to reduce speed and/or volumes of traffic.
- Items not covered in traffic calming: All-way stops, speed limits, and markings to narrow lanes.

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- Purpose for Traffic Calming: For livability, crime prevention, vehicle safety, and personal safety to name a few.
- Diverse Programs: Shutting off a street, creating speed bumps, traffic circles, and raised intersections.
- Volume & Speed Control: Partial closure of a roadway to cut volume down, creating splitters to force directions, and traffic islands.
- Traffic calming can be applied to new and existing developments.
- Must look at appropriate spacing of slow points.
- Examples of Neighborhood Collector Projects: Neighborhoods control speed and volume by adding islands and rumble strips. Splitter islands can be used to slow traffic down and provide pedestrians a stopping point when crossing the road. Both can work but do not recommend using rumble strips in New England because of the winter weather.

S. Fitzgerald questions what the likelihood is of having a splitter island in front of the Town Hall with DOT regulations.

D. Walker believes it might be possible without opposition, as long as it is done in a safe manner. DOT's concern with medians is who will be responsible for maintaining them and plowing issues. Continues with slide show:

- Provides examples of roads with speed bumps, bump outs, and wider sidewalks that reduce speed.
- Options for calming roadways: Two-way a one-way street, curbside parking, partial "mallings" of a street, which would close it to only pedestrian traffic and emergency vehicles.
- Choosing Right Tools: Need to identify the problem then select and implement a plan to solve it.
- Lessons from Europe: Examples of choosing appropriate design speed, emphasizing street edges, providing ample pre-warning, and combining pedestrian improvements.
- Different Design Speeds: Example is creating wider sidewalks.
- Pre-Warnings: Example is placing rumble strips to give pre-warning to drivers.
- Street Edges: Example is to use trees and curbs to define an edge of the roadway. People tend to drive differently because it narrows the roadway.
- Having a physical entrance sign or object can show a driver they are entering an area or community, which can reduce speed.

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- Providing narrowings in the roadway like placing raised medians or painted unraised medians can reduce speed. Although, raised medians are more controlling, they both work the same.
- Creating bike paths helps slow traffic.
- Safe crossings showing bump outs by the crosswalk providing the pedestrian a shorter distance to cross a road.
- Common Treatment: Raised intersections with bump outs.
- Full Closures: Closing off a roadway entirely, whether completely or to only allow emergency vehicles.
- Half Closures: Road is closed off with only one entry, which works best in a grid network. This calms traffic by cutting the volume down.
- Diagonals Diverters: Closes a street diagonally and only allows pedestrian or bike traffic.
- Median Barriers: Full barriers or barriers with cuts to allow traffic to cross over.
- Forced Turn Islands: Forces people to take right turns and keeps traffic flowing by using only right turns.
- Speed Humps: Generally are 12' to 14' wide and 3" to 4" high. Different curvatures are available. However, they are dropping out of favor.

S. Fitzgerald asks why they are dropping out of favor.

D. Walker states that they provide a rough ride especially for larger vehicles. There is a need to find a balance between annoying drivers and slowing them down. The speed bumps can cause problems for fire trucks and school buses because they can be too high for them.

S. Fitzgerald questions if you can engineer them wider. D. Walker states he will speak about that soon.

R. Latham states that most speed bumps he has seen are raised and asks if there are any speed bumps that are depressed into the roadway.

D. Walker states he has not seen any and believes they would cause a problem on longer vehicles.

D. Walker discusses speed hump options like the rubberized removable speed hump that can be picked up and removed from the road.

C. Savage comments that they can be put at strategic locations on the road to make it undesirable to drive a truck on the road.

S. Fitzgerald questions the cost on the removable speed humps.

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D. Walker states most of the time they are used for a trial period to determine if a permanent speed hump would work.

R. Latham questions what they are made of. D. Walker believes they are made from rubber like a tire with some steel enforcement.

S. Fitzgerald would like to see what they cost. States it might be something to discuss with DOT as an interim.

D. Walker continues with the slideshow:

- Speed Tables: Speed humps that are stretched out to 24', which allows for a gentler ride and with the driver still slowing down. The benefit over a speed hump is that it looks nicer and you can place a crosswalk on top of it. However, you get higher speed than a speed hump and they also cost more than a speed hump.

Chief McArdle questions if they install them over the roadway or dig down into the roadway to install. D. Walker states he is unsure. S. Fitzgerald states he has seen them installed both ways.

D. Walker states that some are easier to plow pending on the design. Showed more examples including signs you can post pre-warning drivers.

- Shows examples of entire intersections that are raised almost to the height of the sidewalk. It is recommended that it is not raised to the actual level of the sidewalk to help any impaired pedestrians.
- Traffic Circles: Shows they are normally done on smaller residential streets. Depending on the types of vehicles using the road the design of the circle will vary.
- Traffic Circle Issues: Can be hazardous to bikes because there is no stopping only yielding but can also be designed to help bicyclist.
- T-Intersections: Can be more complicated because there is no reflection and no incentive for people to slow down. In cases they will curve the road a little bit so everyone has a curve going into it forcing them to slow down as curves tend to cause driver's to slow down.

R. Latham questions the accident statistics in round-a-bouts, how frequent they occur, and if they have increased or decreased once round-a-bouts are installed.

D. Walker states that there are fewer accidents in them than at a stop sign and are usually at lower speed. States you don't get any t-bones or head-on accidents. Has seen accidents reduced by 60%-80% and a decrease in fatal accidents.

R. Latham questions rotaries versus round-a-bouts. D. Walker states the difference is that if you are in a rotary you are yielding to people who are entering and in a round-a-bout it is opposite as you

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yield to people already in it. That States have guides for design and installation of round-a-bouts. D. Walker continues with the slide show:

- Lateral Shifts in Roadways: Assist in slowing down traffic.
- Chicanes: Slow traffic by curving the traffic flow.
- Other Horizontal Measures: Possible combinations such as combining lateral shifts and realigned intersections.
- Use of Street Parking: This with including bump outs will slow traffic down.
- Neckdowns: Assist in reducing the width of the roadway by narrowing all four corners of an intersection to reduce the pedestrian crossing difference. It also reduces the speeds of drivers making turns.
- Chokers: A short section of a roadway that narrows on both sides, to help slow traffic.

Chief Savage states that it appears chokers would be inexpensive to do and also be cosmetic. D. Walker agrees they can beautify an area making it friendlier to pedestrians and less user friendly to drivers.

- One-Lane Chokers: Chokes the road down to one lane so only one direction of traffic can go through at a time. He does not recommend this for Main Street.
- One & Half Lane Chokers: Need to be cautious when choosing the size because drivers don't believe they need to stop if there is enough room.
- Center Islands: Can provide a place for pedestrians to cross when waiting to cross the second half of the roadway and can beautify a roadway. Also it gives the driver a visual feel of the road narrowing. States it might be a good option for Main Street. They provide some beautification, give a resting/safety spot for pedestrians, and narrows the roadway.
- Center Islands Effective on Corners: They get the driver to slow down on a corner, makes it harder for them to speed, and is less comfortable because it gives a feeling that you have less space. Some designs can provide a bike path way through the island.
- Impacts: Stop signs will stop drivers but they will speed up immediately afterwards. Turn restrictions will reduce volume in peak traffic hours.
- Education and Enforcement: Radar units will slow drivers down temporarily but is short term once the radar unit is removed. Police enforcement will only work during the enforcement period.
- Speed Volume Impacts: Partially closed roads will reduce volume by half. A speed table will reduce speed but will not cut volume as much. Speed humps will give you the better decrease in speed.

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Chief Savage questions the size of the portable speed humps. D. Walker states they would be 12' to 14' wide. States with speed humps you can decrease volume by 18%–20% depending upon alternate routes that are available.

D. Walker continues with slide presentation:

- There are cost savings due to the reduction in accidents on the road.
- Presented a slide showing the difference between installations of speed humps in Europe and the U.S. States that by combining options to slow traffic you will get a better effect.

L. Komornick questions if the statistics are equal in Europe and the U.S. D. Walker states not quite due to the varying culture differences.

Chief Savage comments that it appears there is a potential of combining items rather than only using one to slow down traffic.

D. Walker states it depends on the road and the community as to what is acceptable. States that the slide presentation is old but studies showed that property values were increased when making an area more pedestrian friendly. There is evidence coming out now that areas that are mixed use, compact, and more urbanized are seeing much lower drops in property values than in suburban residential areas. Shows a few more slides:

- Emergency Response Issues: Need to look at response times and access to the roadway for emergency vehicles. Communities have developed test courses to see if the emergency vehicles can handle and maintain a good response time with the proposed bump outs or speed humps prior to implementing any of them.

L. Komornick states that the Police and Fire Departments are right off of Main Street and need to use Main Street for calls. Chief McArdle states that they use Main Street 100% on most calls.

D. Walker comments that there will be a need to make sure that Main Street will continue to work for emergency response vehicles, which may limit some options.

R. Latham comments about his concern with raised humps in the winter with plows. Is not sure how effective the raised hump would be in an area with snow. D. Walker states you would need to bring the weather into consideration. They can be made 4" high and now 3"–3 ½" high, which would have to be tested. Suggests looking at surrounding communities to see if they are being utilized elsewhere to take a look at them and see how they are working in this region.

Chief Savage states that the portable ones are seasonal and if you place them strategically down Main Street they may be extremely effective but once you remove them for the winter it might change. States he would be interested to see if any data is available on this.

L. Komornick asks if they are plowable. D. Walker states they could be but you risk destroying them.

R. Latham questions what DOT feels about speed humps. D. Walker states that 10 years ago they would have said no. The DOT is now more apt to consider what the community wants and needs and

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is more likely to work with the community. The DOT would love to turn the road over to the Town but the Town would need to look at the costs in doing so. The Town would have more control over the road which has a lot of benefits. When DOT turns over a road they are required to bring it up to a certain standard and may be something for the Town to think about as a long term approach.

Chief Savage states that if the Town takes over the road, despite the costs, it can set weight limits on the road, and adopt other measures such as no thru trucking.

D. Walker states you have more control over the road but there are yearly costs to maintain the road. Chief Savage questions what it would cost to accept the road. D. Walker states in 2007, it was an average of \$12,000 per mile for yearly maintenance. That there are block grants that can give you back \$1,000 per mile. States the DOT will negotiate what level they will bring the road up to before turning it over.

L. Komornick states that if the Town took the road over and put no thru trucking, the maintenance costs could be reduced with the physical impact on the road being reduced. States it was on the warrant this year to study the impact of what it would cost the town to take over Main Street and questions if we should place it on the warrant again.

D. Walker recommends waiting if it was voted down this year. Might be better to get through this study and talk about what the ideas are for Main Street and see if there is support for the idea. Then, you can get a better idea if you need to take control of the road.

L. Komornick doesn't believe it was a vehement no. That if people understood what was being sought at with the money to study having the road become a Town road providing all the benefits for the Town the thought might have been different.

Chief Savage thinks they also perhaps think in their minds, what are the alternatives in taking over the road and have we fully explored all the half way measures such as round-a-bouts or speed humps, which are less expensive. If these alternatives are done and then don't work then the natural through progression to something different.

D. Walker states that there are few things that are not going to work on Main Street such as full or partial closures of Main Street. However, narrowings or chicanes could work and potentially round-a-bouts. L. Komornick states without a plan showing the impact of a round-a-bout, people will not support it.

D. Walker states that narrowing the roadway and placing raised crosswalks might be feasible.

Chief Savage discusses narrowing the roadway and placing a choker near the railroad tracks could work with other areas that you don't place a choker to allow for vehicle parking. It would contribute to the visual pinching of the roadway, which could slow cars. This could continue this down through Pollard.

D. Walker comments that you might find an area that you would want more extensive calming. You could extend it all the way down but towards Pine Street where you might want a round-a-bout and near the library you might want a more comprehensive stretch of road that is a "Town Center Main Street".

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Chief Savage states you could put chokers down by the Library at strategic spots.

L. Komornick asks what the difference is between a choker and chicane. D. Walker states a chicane narrows the road and diverts it to the side creating an artificial “s” curve and a choker just narrows the road.

L. Komornick thinks there are two focuses of Main Street which are traffic calming and the explosive use of it as a bypass to Route 125. There is a need to look at them and see what we can do to stop its use as a bypass.

D. Walker asks if the signal where you reconnect with Route 125 decreases the volume of traffic. Chief Savage states next month they will be widening Haseltine Avenue, which will promote drivers going to the light and taking a left onto Route 125.

L. Komornick discusses North Avenue and questions how much people use it in the morning and afternoon and states it appears heavier in the afternoon. R. Latham states that when you try to go south down Heseltine Avenue you can be backed up to North Avenue and can cause people to go down North Avenue instead of waiting for the light at Route 125.

E. Sheltry comments about the painted crosswalks and states they won't slow people down much but they make you think. L. Withee states the green gives the drivers a better visual.

D. Walker shows another slide with other options such as placing pillars on the roadways and also a slip hump.

Chief Savage asks about an update on the traffic study.

D. Walker states that due to delays they are not as far along as they anticipated. The data collection is not completed but once they get the traffic count information they will determine when to do turning movement counts, which should be done in the next couple weeks. In the meantime he is trying to move forward on traffic calming and discussing what strategies the Town does and does not want to use.

Chief Savage requests Rockingham Planning Commission send the Board of Selectmen a letter providing them a progress report and copying the committee on it.

ADJOURNMENT-

Chief McArde makes a motion to adjourn, seconded by E. Sheltry, none opposed all in favor. Meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

NEXT MEETING DATE –date and time be determined.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah E. Gibbs
Recording Secretary