

**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
BUREAU OF HIGHWAY DESIGN**

MEETING REPORT

PROJECT: WALPOLE-CHARLESTOWN 14747
(NH 12, Road improvements from NH12A in Charlestown south approximately 2.7 miles to Main Street in Walpole.)

DATE OF MEETING: October 10, 2007

LOCATION OF MEETING: Silsby Library/Municipal Building, Charlestown, NH

ATTENDED BY: DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Bill Oldenburg, Chief of Preliminary Design
Don Lyford, Project Manager
C.R. Willeke, Preliminary Design
Jon Evans, Bureau of Environment

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Nate Miller, UVLSRPC
Christine Walker, UVLSRPC
Fred Poisson, Charlestown Planning Board
William Sullivan, Charlestown Economic Development Authority
Aare Ilves, Charlestown Citizen Representative
Debra Livingston, Fall Mountain Regional School District
Jon LeClair, Charlestown Selectboard
Richard Holmes, Charlestown Conservation Commission
Bruce Putnam, Charlestown Business Representative and Highway Advisory Board
(Absent) Robert Beaudry, Charlestown Business Representative
Albert St. Pierre, Charlestown Citizen Representative
David Edkins, Charlestown Planning and Zoning Administrator
Eric Lutz, UVLSRPC Commissioner (Charlestown)
Keith Weed, Charlestown Highway Superintendent
Ed Smith, Charlestown Police Chief
Sharon Francis, Connecticut River Joint Commissions
Tim Garceau, Southwest Region Planning Commission
Patrick Kiniry, North Walpole Village Commissioners
Jim Terrell, Walpole Selectboard Designee
(Absent) Jeff Miller, Walpole Planning Board
Marcia Galloway, Walpole Conservation Commission
Donald Lennon, Walpole Business Representative
(Absent) Ken Alton, *Trans Canada Corporation*

OTHERS

Elizabeth Martin, Eagle Times

SUBJECT: Project Advisory Committee Meeting #1

NOTES ON MEETING:

Don Lyford (Project Manager, NHDOT) opened the meeting by welcoming the committee members to the Project Advisory Committee meeting. Don explained that the purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the project and the Context Sensitive Solutions process to members of the Committee. Following an introduction of the Department staff, self-introductions of the Project Advisory Committee were made.

Bill Oldenburg of (Chief of Preliminary Design, NHDOT) discussed the project's history acknowledging the project originated from a recommendation of the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission Transportation Advisory Committee in the early 1990s, and was subsequently included in the Ten-Year Plan. Bill stated that the original scope of the project was to reconstruct NH Route 12 from its intersection with Route 12A to the Charlestown/Walpole Town Line. However, the safety issues that necessitated the project do not end at the Walpole Town Line. As a result, the project was extended to include the section of NH Route 12 from the Walpole Town Line to Main Street in North Walpole. Bill noted that the description of the project in the Ten-Year Plan, "remove concrete base, add shoulders, upgrade drainage", does not describe the challenging constraints associated with the project that necessitated the CSS Planning Process. The existing road parallels an active rail line, both of which are close to the Connecticut River. Recently, slope stability issues have surfaced in areas along the Connecticut River bank. The slope stability issues threaten the existing roadway and the road's proximity to the active rail line has resulted in significant safety hazards. Recently, there was an incident between an Amtrak train and an automobile on this stretch of roadway. Bill explained that the current configuration of Route 12 and the rail line, and the Connecticut River may necessitate the relocation of the existing roadway, railroad, or both.

Bill Oldenburg provided an overview of the project's timeline. The Preliminary Design phase (which includes the CSS process) is scheduled to take between 12-18 months, ending with a public hearing on the preliminary design near the end of 2008. The Final Design phase will take place from 2008-2009, and right-of-way and permits will be secured during this period. Funds have been programmed in the Ten-Year Plan to relocate the existing railroad beginning in 2010, with roadway construction beginning in 2013. Bill Oldenburg continued by giving an outline of the CSS approach. He noted that CSS is a consensus building process, which allows early and continuous input from the community and the project stakeholders to create a project which is an asset to the community and best balances transportation needs with the resources in the project area. CSS is defined as "a collaborative interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility." Bill highlighted the recent change in NHDOT philosophy towards a more balanced approach between the safety, uniformity, and mobility needs of the traveling public with the historical, community values, and environmental aspects of the potentially affected area. CSS relies on sound engineering and design with effective community outreach and stakeholder involvement.

Bill explained that NHDOT has seen a number of successes by applying Context Sensitive Solutions principles to projects throughout the state. The rehabilitation of NH 108 in Durham, NH 47 in Frankestown, NH 112 in Easton-Woodstock, and recent projects in Greenfield and Meredith have been successful applications of Context Sensitive Solutions. Bill continued by describing the public participation process and key steps in the CSS process.

- Holding a “Public Workshop”
- Reaching consensus on a problem statement
- Reaching consensus on a vision statement
- Developing and concurring on screening criteria
- Brainstorming and screening alternatives
- Reaching consensus on a Preferred Alternative

Once a preferred alternative has been identified, a formal Public Hearing to procure approval for the project layout is held. Bill provided an overview of “Placemaking”, one of the fundamental concepts of Context Sensitive Solutions. Bill noted that analyzing the uses and activities, comfort and image, access and linkages, and sociability of places helps to more easily and effectively identify the problems associated with the transportation system.

Nate Miller provided an overview of the Project Advisory Committee’s role in the CSS process. He commented that Advisory Committee members are expected to represent and act as a liaison to their community. The Advisory Committee will provide guidance for the NHDOT Design Team, including determining the problems, the vision, and developing alternatives for the future of Route 12 in Charlestown and North Walpole. Nate referred to the Draft Public Involvement Plan for the project, and provided an overview of the plan’s contents. Nate noted that the “Project Lead Team” consists of himself, Bill Oldenburg (NHDOT Chief of Preliminary Design), Don Lyford (NHDOT Project Manager), C.R. Willeke (NHDOT Design Engineer), and Jon Evans (NHDOT Environmental Manager). Nate explained that his role in the process will be to facilitate the dialog between the NHDOT and the Project Advisory Committee, and noted that the Project Advisory Committee is comprised of a wide cross-section of Town Officials, abutters, business owners, and interested community leaders. NHDOT representatives from the Project Lead Team will be available at all Project Advisory Committee meetings to provide technical guidance to the Committee.

Nate Miller explained that the next step in the process will be to hold a Public Workshop. Nate acknowledged the problems associated with conducting a “traditional” Placemaking exercise on a three-mile stretch of highway. As a result, the Project Lead Team is discussing a number of different methods of gauging the corridor’s performance at the Public Workshop, including a modified Place Audit and visual preference survey. The goal of the Public Workshop will be to begin identifying the problems and opportunities associated with the reconstruction of Route 12, and work toward developing problem and vision statements for the project. Nate noted that the Project Lead team would formulate an agenda for the Committee to review prior to the public workshop.

Bill Oldenburg outlined a schedule for completion of the CSS process. Meetings are slated to occur bi-monthly, and it is anticipated that the CSS process will include 6-8 meetings, leading toward a public hearing in December 2008. Bill explained that the Committee would be given a “homework assignment” for the next meeting. The homework assignment has three tasks: 1) Distribute public workshop flyers; 2) Think of the problems you see with the area; and 3) Attend the Public Workshop. Bill Oldenburg then opened the meeting to questions and comments.

Questions and Comments:

- It was asked whether a site visit were anticipated during the Public Workshop. Bill Oldenburg responded that a site visit was not anticipated because the project area is three miles long, and presents a number of safety concerns. However, Nate Miller noted that other techniques may be considered, including a videotape of the project area to provide participants with a virtual driving tour of Route 12.
- It was noted that the portion of Route 12 between Charlestown village and NH 12A was also a concern to the Town of Charlestown. Don Lyford explained that there is no current project in the Ten-Year Plan to address this section of Route 12. However, the knowledge gained through this CSS process could be very useful in planning the eventual reconstruction of that portion of the roadway.
- It was noted that the participation of the New England Central Railroad will be very important in this process. Don Lyford advised that NHDOT was working to secure the railroad's involvement on the Project Advisory Committee.
- It was suggested that the Connecticut River Record (published by the Keene Sentinel) should be included in the Public Involvement Plan's media list.
- The Project Advisory Committee agreed that meetings should take place bi-monthly, on the 2nd Wednesday. It was agreed that the Public Workshop will be held December 12th at 6:00 PM, preferably in the Community Room of the Silsby Library/Municipal Building in Charlestown.

Submitted by:

Nathan Miller
UVLSRPC