

Town of Sharon Planning Board

Minutes of 6/18/20

Sharon Community Center

Planning Board Members

Rob Maidman, Chair	Pasqualino Pannone
Kai Yu, Vice Chair	Peter O'Cain, Town Engineer
Shannon McLaughlin, Clerk	
David Blaszkowsky	

Other Attendees:

Kevin Weber, Tree Warden

DOT Engineer Scott Bruso, P.E.

Peg Arguimbau, Conservation Commission

David Grasfield, Historical Commission

Various neighbors through ZOOM

Meeting Initiation

Chair Maidman called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

Meeting Minutes

Mr. Pannone moved to accept the minutes of 5/28/20 and Mr. Yu seconded the motion. The Board voted 4-0-1 in favor of approval.

Maskwonicut Scenic Road Public Hearing

The Public Hearing for the Maskwonicut Road Public Hearing began when Mr. Yu read the Public Hearing notice. Ms. McLaughlin moved to open the hearing and Mr. Pannone seconded the motion. The Committee voted 5-0-0 to open the hearing.

Scott Bruso, P.E. from Weston and Sampson is the MassDot Design Consultant. Mr. Bruso made the presentation of the Maskwonicut Bridge Replacement Project and potential removal of trees and stone walls affected by the project. A new bridge is proposed to be constructed, after numerous electric strikes caused a fire in 2014 that caused structural damage that lead to MassDOT closing the bridge.

Proposed tree removals include:

27 Maskwonicut: 20" Maple,

27 Maskwonicut: 12" Hemlock,

31 Maskwonicut: 8" Hemlock,

31 Maskwonicut: 10" Maple,

34 Maskwonicut: 10" White Pine

57 Maskwonicut: 40" Ash

Stone Walls to be removed and rebuilt, if required after final design are as follows: 27 Maskwonicut, 31 Maskwonicut, and 57 Maskwonicut

Stone walls to be removed: 31 Maskwonicut

Ms. McLaughlin asked if all tree removals are necessary. Mr. Bruso replied that some roots would be affected due to the construction. He is airing on the side of caution and proposed work on the root systems. They will replace exactly what is there to the greatest extent possible.

Mr. Blaszkowsky asked if the stone walls were historical and Mr. Bruso said they were not historical. Mr. Blaszkowsky also asked what measures would be put in place for safety mechanisms. Mr. Bruso said improved stopping distance should help with travel. It will be a safer road segment for what is being corrected.

Mr. Pannone said he does not see the sidewalks connecting in the drawings. What is the purpose? Mr. Bruso said the purpose as part of the Mass Dot initiative is safe passage across the bridge. The project is limited to the bridge. Mr. Pannone asked if you can do something to stop the speed via an elevation. Mr. O'Cain said that installation of speed tables will cause noise and the locations and numbers would need to be approved by all the impacted abutters.

Mr. O'Cain commented that MassDot is paying for the bridge and MassDOT design requirements are required to be followed, unless the DOT approves exceptions from their requirements. Design exceptions can be requested, if the residents do not want something but the final say lies with MassDOT. There are limitations to providing exceptions because of safety considerations. Mr. Pannone requested that any residents who have a mirror on a tree to exit their homes contact Mr. Bruso.

Mr. Yu asked how wide the sidewalk is and do designs change based on the expected speed limit. Mr. Bruso said the designs are based on the existing speed and the sidewalk is to be 6 feet wide.

Mr. O'Cain commented that we need a traffic study after the project is complete and will determine options to be taken to address traffic calming issues.

Mr. Maidman asked if they have investigated with the police and fire departments how response time for emergencies will be affected if the bridge is not replaced. Mr. O'Cain said there could be an increase in response time depending on the location of the emergency.

Mr. Maidman asked Mr. Weber if he looked at the proposed trees to be removed and what their health is. Mr. Weber said at 27 Maskwonicut the larger maple had rot and decay. Nothing hazardous. He will try to scale back as the project unfolds, especially the ash tree.

Mr. Maidman asked Mr. Grasfield of the Historical Commission for his opinion and Mr. Grasfield said he would like to see walls and trees left intact where possible.

Mr. Maidman asked if the sidewalk was obligatory or optional to the design and Mr. Bruso said it was obligatory by MassDOT standards.

Peg Arguimbau from the Conservation Commission asked Mr. Bruso to give the Conservation Commission a description of the green areas to be altered as well as the brook.

Mr. Haskins of 30 Maskwonicut asked if we are putting the cart before the horse when there are abutter concerns other than trees. Mr. O'Cain commented that there will be a public hearing for the 100% plan. The PB meeting tonight is a Scenic Road hearing about trees and walls and that's what the Board needs to vote on. This is the maximum amount of disturbance being discussed tonight. Mr. Bruso said there will be an informational meeting in July to allow additional comments to MassDOT.

Ms. McLaughlin said the Planning Board authority is limited to talking about tree removal and removing historical stone walls. Residents' concerns should be heard. Mr. Pannone agreed with Ms. McLaughlin. Mr. O'Cain said the Road Commissioners in the Town of Sharon are the Select Board members, not the Planning Board. If the residents do not want the road to be continued as an accepted Town way by constructing the bridge, then the roadway would be legally discontinued and the Town would not be responsible for roadway maintenance and a Town Meeting vote would be required.

Michael Gray of 26 Maskwonicut asked if it means the road is accessible if scenic. What does scenic road mean? Andrea Gray said to leave the trees intact as that is the beauty of the street.

Mr. Yu said that Chapter 325 of the Bylaw says scenic road designation makes it more difficult to alter aesthetics or historic features. What's at issue is whether the road is protected as a scenic road. The question for the Board is to vote whether the trees should or should not be removed. Valerie Ordway of 54 Richards Avenue said she has had her street impacted since the bridge closed and wants the bridge reconstructed.

Chris Robb of 25 Richards Avenue said he has experienced property damage. He thinks there is a wide support of the bridge replacement in the neighborhood.

Mr. Blaszkowsky said we are having a meeting that is a piece of a larger hole. It would be helpful for abutters and townspeople to see the greater picture to see the satisfaction of the interested parties.

Various comments from the abutters included concerns for tree removal, requests for delays, stone wall protection, concerns that removing trees will allow for more accidents as the trees are a resource for street and safety. Many said the street is dangerous.

Mr. Yu asked Mr. Weber the ages of the trees. Mr. Weber said it's hard to determine but the white pine is 40 – 50 years old and the hemlock is 30 – 40 years old. The ash is well over 100 years old.

Mr. Weber said they will try to do what they can to replace trees after the project is complete.

Mr. O'Cain said this is not a Town Meeting process. This is a roadway repair that is why the bridge is being rebuilt. We have a responsibility to maintain roadways. Discontinuance opens up the town to litigation. Unless the vote at Town Meeting is to discontinue the roadway, the Town has an obligation to fix/maintain the roads. Mr. O'Cain said this has been an open process. He agrees Maskwonicut is a busy street. He will sit down and discuss mitigations like speed tables.

Mr. O'Cain said the width of some of the road is 17 feet wide and 20 in other places.

At 27/31 Maskwonicut, Mr. O'Cain is trying to get an exception to save the trees.

Mr. Pannone said we need to slow down the street.

Mr. O'Cain said Mr. Bruso works for MassDot. It is up to the police to slow down traffic.

Mr. Maidman said Mr. O'Cain provides technical background.

Mr. Gray asked what the Planning Board do. He suggested making a bike path, access trails, make it pedestrian accessible. Mr. Pannone said the notion of the Planning Board is forward looking process. We spent two years putting together a Master PI which addresses sustainability, walkability, conservation, hiking paths all of which is identified in the Master Plan. The Conservation Commission just finished their Master Plan.

Additional abutter comments include the bridge should have a sidewalk, bridge size to big, out of scope and character with the rest of the street, nature of the street will change making it more dangerous.

All Planning Board members agreed to move forward and close the hearing. Mr. Maidman moved to close the Public Hearing. Mr. Blaszkowsky seconded the motion. The Board voted 5-0-0 to close the hearing.

Mr. Pannone moved to approve the scenic road removal of trees as mentioned in the meeting and removal of stone walls conditional on approval of 100% construction documents. He said he is concerned with safety issues and wants it addressed more clearly. Mr. Blaszkowsky seconded the motion and the Board voted 5-0 in favor of approval.

Future Agenda Topics

Review of Post Office Square Design Guidelines

Discussion on the need for a Town Planner

Future Scheduled Meetings

7/9, 7/30

Adjournment

The Board voted 5-0-0 to adjourn the meeting at 9:30 PM.