

Merchant Round Table

Meeting Minutes

November 30th, 2010

Morning and Evening Meetings

NOTE TO MERCHANTS: The e-mail master list needs to be updated in order for you to receive these minutes and announcements in the future. A team will be going around collecting the info. If we miss you, just send a note to Gerry at Littleriverorientalrugs@msn.com to be added to the list.

Shop Hop: Donna from “Bead It” reported that the Shop Hop was a success and lots of advertising brought in many shoppers. About 30 stores participated. Please e-mail Donna with comments: donna@beadit.biz

Midnight Merriment: Jessica summarized the evening events and mentioned that there would not be any hayrides this year in response to requests from some merchants. Trees in the Enchanted Forest were available for sponsors.

Open Discussion –Re-Thinking Main Street:

The majority of time in both meetings was devoted to a discussion on merchant views and questions concerning the Re-Thinking Main Street project. The three areas of focus based on merchant input were: Parking, Construction and Empirical data / studies published for cities that have gone through similar renewals. **Paper copies of 8 handouts and studies were available for attendees. This material can be found on the Main Street Concord web site www.mainstreetconcord.com.**

After Chris provided a short introduction on parking updates, he opened the floor to questions.

CONCERNS from both meetings are summarized here:

1. Flow and volume of traffic if the 3 lane configuration is adopted in final proposal. Travel time from Storrs to Storrs Street Intersections.
2. Longer vehicles are sticking out of existing spaces forcing drivers in right lanes to move into left lanes.
3. Traffic back-up at Center and Main Street intersection. Turning East on to Bridge Street.
4. Daytime truck deliveries in 3 lane configuration.
5. Lost Parking spaces.
6. Turning issues at Pleasant and Main Street Intersection. Crosswalk configuration.
7. Cross walks and Pedestrian safety.
8. High traffic speed of vehicles going through downtown.
9. Need for completion of Storrs Street extension to Horseshoe Pond to reduce Main Street traffic.
10. Parking tickets upset the downtown shopping customer experience.
11. Free parking for employees to get them off Main Street parking.
12. Time line to get proposal to City Council.
13. Long term parking solution needed as stores reopen with more employees downtown.
14. Bicycle Lanes.
15. Police enforcement of violations concerning u-turns, illegal right turns at red lights, high traffic speed and lack of stopping for pedestrians in crosswalks is needed.
16. Snow removal and snow banks. Older people climbing over snow banks to put ticket on dashboard.
17. Content of Final proposal to City Council.
18. Sizing and number of Bus Stops, Loading Zones in proposal.
19. Status of signed petition going forward.
20. Impact on taxes.

Concerns were addressed in both meetings by Chris, Jessica and Jennifer. Here is a summary of the answers and possible actions going forward:

Although counterintuitive, the three lane configuration handles traffic more efficiently and reduces back ups caused by vehicles taking left turns on Main Street. This configuration has been adopted in hundreds of downtown areas across the country. According to local studies, the travel times during busy traffic periods in morning and evening for the same volume of traffic will increase about 35 seconds between both Storrs Street intersections going North and about 60 seconds going South. This will also slow down traffic on average about 6 mph between the two intersections.

The three lane proposal also recommends changes at the Pleasant and Main Street intersection. The parallel parking spaces on the West side of Main Street would be eliminated to allow vehicles turning right to queue and the diagonal crosswalks would be eliminated. This change would allow the traffic light cycle to be reduced by about 17 seconds from today's delay.

The three lane proposal allows for a different angle of parking to 60 degrees and a longer space. Adding in the 2 feet of space between the travel lane and the parking space will allow parked cars to back out in a safer manner. The longer spaces will better accommodate the longer trucks and reduce infringement on travel lanes.

Daytime deliveries could be handled with the loading zones and hand carts, earlier deliveries before traffic builds up and with better design of alley ways. Some of these measures have already been put in practice by some of the restaurant owners and others. In some cases, the vendors have been changed to meet the new delivery demands.

Street maintenance of trees, etc. is part of the annual City Budget process so there are no guarantees that the city would properly maintain foliage after installation. Downtown needs to be represented at Council every year to ensure the interests of the District remain paramount to its success and that maintenance is included.

The lane configuration at the Main Street and Center Street intersection remains as a four lane configuration so there will be no impact on the back up concerns for Northbound cars turning on to Bridge Street. In fact, the parking space proposal could allow for a longer approach lane for right turns and reduce the current back up situation.

The proposal recommends pedestrian crosswalk "bump outs" that would extend to the rear of the car space. This allows a pedestrian to stand in the bump out area safely and be seen by motorists before they get to the crosswalk areas. This will reduce the sudden surprises to motorists of pedestrians walking into the street at the current crosswalks.

Chris explained that in the design of the three lane proposal, the optimum space for loading zones, bus stops, bump outs, intersection turning radii, benches, etc. were incorporated in the plan. This resulted in the reduction of the 32 parking spaces on North Main Street. After hearing that parking was so important to the merchants, a review of the design and reduction of space allowed for the loading zones, bus stops, etc. was incorporated in the plan, the loss of parking spaces on North Main Street is now 1- 3 depending on which set of criteria are used.

Bicycle lanes are not part of the Re-Thinking Main Street plans. The preferred bicycle route is currently incorporated on other streets to reduce the risk of accidents with parked cars backing out into travel lanes.

The possibility of heated sidewalks could address the snow bank issues that we have today. While the number of snow days varies each year, the winter of 2008-2009 had 17 days. We had only a few snow days in 2009-2010.

Conversation about getting employees to use the garages and not park on Main Street led into suggestions to provide free parking in the garages or at a new parking facility. Adding to the existing garages or another deck over the Legislature parking facility on Storrs Street was suggested. It was asked of the merchants that if spaces for employees could be made available for fees of \$200 per year would they purchase the spaces. The response was a loud YES. This led into the need to extend Storrs Street to Horseshoe Pond. While a plan did recommend this a long time ago, there are some barriers as the rail line is the designated high speed train corridor that may or may not get built in the future.

As with any improvement in real estate or neighborhoods, property taxes would be likely be impacted. It is hoped that increased revenue would more than offset any tax issues.

Jessica and Jennifer explained that there is no new date to meet with the City Council at this time. The December 2010 meeting agenda no longer includes any time for the proposal. They also explained that in the final presentation, the three lane proposal will be included as the preference of the 1,000 people who responded to questions at the meetings last summer. If there is a different proposal resulting from merchant input, then that proposal will also be included in the presentation. It was emphasized that all of the presentations are aimed at concept only and no final designs are possible without City Council approval to move forward and associated funding. City budget funding does get voted on in June, 2011 and Federal Funding requests need to be submitted in a similar timeframe.

Jessica also informed the merchants that she and others had met with merchants in Littleton, NH to ask their views on recent renewal projects that impacted their businesses. Although there were a few horror stories (sewer line break), the overall opinion by all of the merchants is that it was a good project and “yes, they would do it again”.

Jessica also offered an opportunity for any interested Concord merchants to meet with the Littleton businesses and hear what experiences they endured and how they handled daily, weekly communications with city officials and contractors. They can also provide insight on how they handled shopping disruptions, etc. A sign up sheet was passed around for interested merchants and as of today, 13 have signed up to visit Littleton in early 2011. If you would like to attend, please contact Jessica at 226.2150.

It was estimated that the Concord project would be in several phases over several seasons including a trial phase where traffic lane lines would be repainted to reflect the proposal design. Utility relocation and upgrading may impact the timelines as more detailed plans are developed if the City approves the concept proposals.

One of the petition sponsors explained that one of the objectives of the petition was intended to slow down the process and get more details before a proposal to City Council. The objective of the petition to get more input into the parking issues has been met with the information provided at the meeting. A representative from the City stated that the petition will be referenced in the presentations to the City Council as part of any proposal representing Merchant’s concerns.

Speed Islands, roundabouts and other suggestions were mentioned during the meetings that are not being addressed in these minutes. If these items get included in more detail as the plans unfold, we will provide more details in future meeting minutes.

Thanks to Bruce for providing the meeting space and refreshments and to those who participated in these meetings. We invite all who could not attend to provide your ideas and concerns via e-mails to Main Street Concord or Concord 20/20. Be sure to visit the web site for all of the study materials and a new Question and Answer section that is being added to the Main Street web site. In this effort, any of your questions about Re-thinking Concord and the associated answers will be available for all to review.

Please review all of the materials now available on the web. Another meeting to continue the discussion will be held in January, 2011. From all of the Merchant Round Table Hosts, the staff at Main Street Concord and Concord 20/20, we wish you a profitable and joyous Holiday Season.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 25, 2011.

Please contact one of the hosts with any questions.

Your Merchants Round Table hosts: Gerry Carrier, Little River Oriental Rugs - 225-5512 / Gerry & Donna Mark and Sue Phillips, Caring Gifts - 228-8496/ Art & Janet Learned , Things Are Cooking - 225-8377 / Sue McCoo, Capitol Craftsman - 224-6166