

HIGHLIGHT

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Special
Traffic Calming
Edition

The Newsletter of the High Street Hill Association

September 2010

A major traffic calming project is being proposed for our neighborhood. Let's make sure it's done right!

The Town is proposing traffic calming for Pond Avenue and High Street as a response to neighborhood concerns about traffic speed, volume and pedestrian safety. The DPW's Division of Transportation held public meetings on April 8 and July 28 to get input from residents and in mid September the Transportation Board will hold public hearings to finalize plans which will then go before the Board of Selectmen for approval. Whatever the outcome it is very important that we take the time now to address any possible impact and strive for solutions that consider the traffic future of the whole neighborhood.

We would also like to thank the Transportation Division for engaging the neighborhood and listening to our comments. We have been assured that the process as it continues before the Transportation Board will be thorough and that there will be sufficient opportunity for resident input.


Be Careful What You Wish For

For years, the Pill Hill neighborhood had complained about the speed and volume of traffic on Walnut Street, and finally in 2001, after numerous neighborhood input meetings, the town transportation engineers responded with a plan. It was to be the largest and most enthusiastic traffic calming project to date and it included the latest from the traffic calming toolbox -- speed humps, chicanes, neckdowns, bulbouts, alternate-side parking and the mandatory signage.

Depending on whom you talk to now about Walnut Street, the opinions range from "somewhat effective" to "the ruination of a historic street." Despite the planning and input sessions, most residents were surprised by the unintended impact of the sum of the various traffic calming elements. Traffic was indeed slowed, but new problems arose -- the speed humps caused cars to bottom out noisily in the night, the bulbouts and parking spaces now on the south side of the street made exiting from Upland or Irving dangerous, and the number of signs, increased to 113, made for an ugly sight.

To be fair, it did reduce traffic and lower speeds, but was it worth it? One thing was certain, though -- it would be a long time before money would be available to correct any problems. The Town had to move on to other pressing traffic problems in other neighborhoods.

The latest proposal includes the following. For a plan diagram see the "Crosswalk Plan" link on our website: www.highstreethill.org:

- Five raised crosswalks are planned for Pond Avenue between the Brook House and Jamaica Road and would require 12 sets of additional traffic signs similar to this:

- The new four-way stop intersection at High and Allerton Streets would become permanent. A crosswalk will be painted on the north side of the intersection.
- The crosswalk across High Street at the northwest corner of Irving Street may be moved to the southwest corner of Irving Street (a proposed crosswalk at Cumberland was considered unsafe due to limited sightlines).
- A solar-powered speed display board is planned for High Street near Hall Road. Facing southbound traffic, it will remind motorists going down the hill when they are traveling over the posted 30 mph limit.
- Curb extensions on High Street at Highland Road will be installed to provide pedestrians with a shorter crossing distance and to improve visibility for pedestrians. Narrowing the street will also reduce vehicle speed.

So far so good but what about

At a recent meeting of the board of the High Street Hill Association, residents and board members continued the discussion of various aspects of the proposal in depth and came to the conclusion that there are many questions left unanswered. We realize that there may be differing opinions but we feel it is important to take this rare opportunity with the Town to work through these concerns in order to develop the best solutions and avoid wasting money.

Some neighborhood concerns about this traffic calming project are:

This traffic calming affects more than just Pill Hill

This proposal will affect the entire neighborhood. Have the residents of Brook House, the Park condominiums, the Downes Field area, the Veteran's Housing area, and the Point had a chance to voice their input?

How will the raised crosswalks on Pond Ave affect nearby streets?

We need to make sure that any traffic calming measures benefit the whole neighborhood and do not transfer problems to other streets. What is needed is a comprehensive, integrated plan. The Transportation Department has said that the five proposed raised crosswalks on Pond Avenue would increase High Street traffic. Will traffic volume and traffic speed increase on Cumberland and Allerton, too?

Are raised crosswalks really the best solution? If so, are all five necessary?

Have crosswalk stanchions been fully considered as an effective way to provide safe crossing into the park? Perhaps a mix of elements such as a raised crosswalk at the entrances to Pond Avenue at the Brook House and at Jamaica Road could suffice. Or perhaps a speed board? The money saved might be applied to High Street solutions.

Doesn't the top of High Street need traffic calming?

Currently between 5,000 and 5,600 vehicles per day cross the top of High Street. The four-way-stop intersection at High and Allerton Streets has reduced the number of accidents, however accidents still occur. Many vehicles are going so fast that they have trouble stopping at the intersection. Speeding northbound vehicles, and even the #60 bus on occasion, sometimes do not even slow down crossing the intersection.

Is 30 mph a safe speed on the hill between Edgehill and Highland?

With a crosswalk at the bottom of the hill at High Street and Highland Road, the planned speed board will not encourage motorists to drive slower than the posted 30 mph. Likewise, driving north up the hill, where a sign reads "Limit Sight Distance" nothing is being planned to reduce vehicle speeds.

Development on Route 9

How will the new construction and changing traffic patterns at Route 9 and High Street affect traffic volume and speed on neighborhood streets?

ENC Guidelines are coming

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy has received a State grant to study and design consistent crosswalks for the Emerald Necklace park system. Important guidelines will be developed that could be used for our section of this historic park.

Consider the Friends of Leverett Pond statement

The FoLP is requesting that decisions affecting adjacent Brookline roads take into consideration that entrances, signage, crossings be welcoming and fit in with the character of the Park and that traffic calming should make the Park more accessible to pedestrians, and not negatively impact neighborhood streets.

*Please check the Town web calendar for the date
of the next Transportation Board meeting.*