

Meeting Minutes:

PROJECT TITLE: Downtown Main Street Study and Concepts Alternatives

Client Project No: -
Minutes Dated: 11/3/2023

MJ Project No: 19126.00
Meeting Date: 11/3/2023
Meeting Time: 8:30 AM

SUBJECT: Business Listening Session

A. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

1. This business listening session took place at the Natick Community Senior Center where consultants, town officials, and local business owners met to discuss the upcoming Downtown Main Street project. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit input from the business owners on what they see are existing problems and challenges and what they feel are potential opportunities for improvement.
2. The Town and McFarland Johnson, Inc. (MJ) provided an overview of the existing roadway conditions at each segment. From there, the room broke out into three groups of 5 to 6 people. Each group had 30 minutes to discuss existing problems and challenges, then later presented those findings to the entire group. The same groups were provided 30 minutes to discuss potential opportunities for improvements. Each group reported their findings to the entire group.
3. MJ aggregated the responses from each group and the following are the results of the two breakout sessions where each topic was scored from 1 - 3 on a scale of how important that topic is. 3 being the most important and 1 being the least important. These scores are based on the number of groups that had the same or similar item.

Attachments:

- Table of Existing Problems and Challenges
- Table of Potential Opportunities and Solutions

These minutes dated 11/3/2023 have been prepared by McFarland Johnson, to provide a summary of the discussions held on 11/3/2023. These meeting minutes will be recorded as correct and considered accurate and complete unless written notice of exceptions to these minutes is provided to the office of the Engineer within two (2) weeks of the date of issuance.

Existing Problems and Challenges

Theme	Problems/Challenges	Score	Comments
Aesthetics	Insufficient Lighting	2	Many side streets and back alleys were not well lit. There was also a concern of the lighting not being consistent.
Aesthetics	Lack of gateway into town	1	See also discussion about speeds and blind crosswalk at South Avenue. There was a feeling that there is no clear transition into the Downtown area for motor vehicles.
Aesthetics	Poor downtown aesthetics	1	Many owners complained about the lack of consistency with the aesthetics in downtown.
Total Aesthetics Score		4	
Bicycle Accessibility	Lack of bicycle accommodation project wide	3	Many owners believed improving bicycle accommodation is a priority.
Total Bicycle Accessibility Score		3	
Parking	Parking Capacity	2	Insufficient parking capacity in the downtown.
Parking	Lack of free short-term parking	2	Many customers need parking for quick errands and there are no short term parking spaces available.
Parking	Lack of long-term parking nearby	1	There are several people who need to park downtown for 8 hours, and there is nowhere for them to park.
Parking	There should be a better location for deliveries in downtown segment.	1	A business owner felt that Adams Street did not provide parking for delivery trucks.
Parking	Too many parking spaces around the common.	1	A business owner would prefer if the parking spaces were gone, and there was a crosswalk added at this location.
Total Parking Score		7	
Pedestrian Accessibility	Blind Crosswalk at South Avenue	3	Many drivers cannot see pedestrians who are trying to cross due to curvature of roadway and parking. See also speeding.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Sidewalk too narrow on segments 2,3, and 5	2	
Pedestrian Accessibility	Many pedestrians do not use crosswalk in segment 3.	2	Many pedestrians cross at Pond Street and do not use the crosswalk at Central or the mid-block crossing south of Pond Street.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Lack of ADA compliant and smooth sidewalks within the study area	1	
Total Pedestrian Accessibility Score		8	

Existing Problems and Challenges

Theme	Problems/Challenges	Score	Comments
Safety	Insufficient Lighting	2	Many side streets and back alleys were not well lit. There was also a concern of the lighting not being consistent.
Safety	Speeding vehicles	2	The area of concern is vehicles coming from the north into the downtown. See also the discussion about the blind crosswalk at South Avenue and lack of transition to the downtown area.
Safety	Blind Crosswalk at South Avenue	1	Many drivers cannot see pedestrians who are trying to cross due to curvature of roadway and parking. See also speeding.
Safety	Lack of gateway into town	1	See also discussion about speeds and blind crosswalk at South Avenue. There was a feeling that there is no clear transition into the Downtown area for motor vehicles.
Safety	Angled parking	1	Some business owners believed backing out of the head-on parking was unsafe.
Safety	Too many driveways onto South Main Street on segment 2	1	Business owners complained about safety while exiting driveways directly onto South Main Street. Some suggested having driveways that connect to Kimball Court.
Total Safety Score		8	
Traffic Operations	Traffic backups for right turn movements/lack of right turn lanes	2	There were many discussions regarding traffic build up downtown. Right-turns at Main and Central came up often.
Traffic Operations	Traffic Operation	2	Heavy traffic through downtown and at the intersection with East Central
Traffic Operations	Pond street traffic blocks South Main Street	2	Vehicles taking left turns out of Pond Street block South Main Street.
Traffic Operations	Left turns out of side street cause traffic build up.	1	It is difficult to take left turns off side streets and that backs up the side street traffic.
Total Traffic Operations Score		7	
Wayfinding	Wayfinding to parking and amenities	3	Some business owners did not believe parking capacity was an issue, but finding the parking was the issue. There is a lack of clear wayfinding to available parking.
Total Wayfinding Score		3	

Potential Opportunities and/or Solutions

Theme	Opportunities/Solutions	Score	Comments
Aesthetics	Improve aesthetics (make it historical and consistent)	2	General agreement that the aesthetic should incorporate the history of the town. Lighting, trash bins, furniture, and keeping the brick were examples of what owners wanted.
Aesthetics	Allow outdoor dining/markets	2	Owners think outdoor dining would make downtown Natick more appealing.
Aesthetics	Lighting (welcoming/inviting)	2	Business owners wish the street lighting was more aesthetically pleasing.
Aesthetics	Well thought out street furniture placement	2	Placement of streetscape elements should consider aesthetics and functionality. For example, the current benches are placed in non desirable locations. Owners would like to see them facing the businesses, or looking up/down the street.
Aesthetics	More space for art/sculptures (parklets/common area)	2	There is currently no specific place for art, but making it available is important for some owners. They brought up an idea of using students' art.
Aesthetics	Landscape, softscape, plantings	1	More green landscaping and providing a variety of different types of plantings
Aesthetics	Banners	1	For example, banners on light poles and larger banners spanning the width of the road
Aesthetics	Underground utilities	1	Placing utilities underground along the project will help with aesthetics and provide more space for pedestrians and bicycles
Bicycle Accessibility	Bicycle bypass	2	Can a bypass for through bicyclists be developed so that they can avoid having to bicycle through the downtown?
Bicycle Accessibility	Bike lane from Central Street to South Avenue.	1	
Bicycle Accessibility	Bike racks downtown	1	Providing bike racks would promote more bicycle use and traffic into the downtown which could help support local businesses.
Other	Identify other towns with similar situations and concepts	2	Hudson, Salem, Westborough, Amherst, Arlington and Concord were mentioned as examples of downtowns to look at as examples. This will help with ideas for what can be done in Natick.
Other	More seating at the common	1	Some owners believed there was not enough seating at the Common.
Other	Close segments 2 and 3 for farmers market	2	Street closing on weekends was a suggestion from several owners. There can be signage for parking located across the downtown area.

Potential Opportunities and/or Solutions

Theme	Opportunities/Solutions	Score	Comments
Parking	Replace angled parking spaces with parallel parking spaces	1	This would help with <u>perceived</u> improved safety and ease of use.
Parking	Add more parking at the library (specifically for library users)	1	A business owner did not appreciate that the library parking was used up by police cars and other vehicles that are not involved with the library.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Flashing crosswalk at South Avenue	3	Having a flashing crosswalk would slow down traffic coming from north and help the pedestrians crossing.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Relocated crosswalk at South Avenue	3	Consider moving the crosswalk to the south side of Union Court.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Wider sidewalks/ bump outs	3	Many business owners wish there were opportunities for outdoor dining, and wider sidewalks would allow this.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Raised crosswalks/speed humps	2	A business owner preferred if there were raised crosswalks at some of the busy crossings. Another owner mentioned having speed bumps.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Transit integration	1	Business owners want to integrate the ongoing MBTA project with the downtown project.
Pedestrian Accessibility	Add a perpendicular crosswalk at Pond Street.	1	This will help with people randomly crossing Main Street in Segment 3.
Safety	More signage for drivers to slow down as they enter downtown segment.	2	Add speed limit signs or add signs that say "Historical Natick Downtown" to influence drivers to slow down.
Safety	Reduce the number of driveways in Segment 3 and 4	1	Safety for business owners leaving their business a concern. A couple business owners suggested having the driveways exit to Kimball Court instead right on to Main Street.
Safety	Improve Kimball Court to provide access to commercial properties on South Main	1	This would help reduce driveway openings onto South Main Street
Safety	Add a perpendicular crosswalk at Pond Street.	1	This will help with people randomly crossing Main Street in Segment 3.
Safety	Replace angled parking spaces with parallel parking spaces	1	A business owner would prefer this alternative. However, this may not improve safety.

Potential Oppurtunities and/or Solutions

Theme	Oppurtunities/Solutions	Score	Comments
Traffic Operations	Bypass traffic (Washington Street and East Street) with proper signage	2	Some business owners wish there was alternate routes to reduce traffic. Include informational signage for drivers.
Traffic Operations	Increased right-turn accessibility at Central Street intersection	2	Some business owners would like to be able to make right turns on red.
Traffic Operations	"Don't Block the Box" at Main Street and Pond Street intersection.	2	Many owners believed that drivers did not stop at the current stop line that is located in that location now. They believe this will give Pond Street drivers easier accessibility.
Traffic Operations	More signage for drivers to slow down as they enter downtown segment.	2	Add speed limit signs or add signs that say "Historical Natick Downtown" to influence drivers to slow down.
Traffic Operations	Reduce driveways	1	Safety for business owners leaving their business a concern. A couple business owners suggested having the driveways exit to Kimball Court instead right on to Main Street.
Traffic Operations	Improve traffic flow	1	Many complaints of congestion trying to get through downtown.
Traffic Operations	Transit integration	1	Business owners want to integrate MBTA project with the downtown project.
Wayfinding	Improved wayfinding	3	This includes for parking, pedestrians, and general signage.
Wayfinding	Parking information signs	1	There would be information on parking displayed somewhere, to help route drivers to one of the parking lots near downtown.
Wayfinding	Signage guidelines downtown (zoning for business signs)	1	Business owners want the signs to be consistent. Also would like business signs to be allowed to be mounted perpendicular to building face to improve visibility.
Wayfinding	Traffic wayfinding	1	Business owners want better signage for vehicles.