

To: Juliet Walker (City of Portsmouth)
From: Kyle James & Phil Goff (Alta Planning + Design)
Date: October 3, 2019 (updated October 8, 2019)
Re: Elwyn Park Sidewalk Feasibility Study – Public Meeting Notes

Intro

This memo documents the feedback received at the neighborhood public meeting for the Elwyn Park Sidewalk Feasibility Study on October 1, 2019 at Dondero School’s library from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM. Following a brief presentation and question/answer session, attendees were encouraged to visit three stations set up around the room. The first station provided an opportunity to talk about what was working well with existing conditions, what opportunities existed for improvements, and whether or not projects proposed in past planning efforts were still relevant and desired. The second station provided an opportunity to discuss the City’s Complete Street Guidelines and the toolkit of safety measures that are available to be installed in Elwyn Park. The third station provided a high-level discussion about neighborhood priorities.

Figure 1: Group discussion at Prioritization input station



A total of 27 neighborhood residents attended the meeting, in addition to the five City employees and two consultants. **Table 1** contains resident feedback collected during the question and answer session following the end of the presentation and at the three stations. Below is a summary of the comments.

Local Character

Residents expressed a desire to maintain the existing character of the neighborhood. Some defined the character as large front yards and wide streets, kids playing in the street, or old-growth trees. One of the largest concerns expressed about any proposed infrastructural changes was a fear that the neighborhood would lose its suburban feel and become too urbanized.

Safety

Safety concerns were the most cited reason for why residents would consider making a change to the neighborhood's transportation network. Concerns were mostly limited to excess motor vehicle speeds at neighborhood entrances along Hoover, Hartford, and Wilson, as well as along the length of McKinley. Residents also expressed some concern about creating greater separation between motor vehicles and pedestrians within the immediate vicinity of Dondero School.

Sidewalks

While strong opposition to sidewalks was expressed by a few residents, the majority of meeting attendees expressed a willingness to support selective installation of sidewalks along one side of the street if there are justifiable reasons for its installation (i.e., excess speeds, high pedestrian usage, sight distance issues/ low visibility, etc.) and that it has minimal impact of adjacent properties. A desire to learn more about how installation of sidewalks have impacted other neighborhoods and similar project goals, such as safety, was also noted. Recently installed sidewalks on Aldrich Road and the existing sidewalks within The Woodlands were both discussed as potential case studies. One resident expressed interest in the design of the sidewalk curb, preferring a design that would allow people walking and bicycling to transition from the street to the sidewalk more easily. In general, meeting attendees expressed an openness to reducing some on-street parking on one side of the road to accommodate sidewalks, if needed.

Maintenance

Responsibilities for winter maintenance and slip/fall liability associated with new sidewalks was inquired about following the meeting presentation. Peter Rice, the director of Public Works, noted at the meeting that State law requires the City to provide snow removal on sidewalks, and the City's liability policy covers sidewalks. Adjacent property would not be responsible for snow removal or liability related to any new sidewalks in Elwyn Park.

Future Engagement

A desire to increase the percent of residents in the neighborhood that were aware of and likely to attend the public meetings for the sidewalk feasibility study was expressed. One attendee expressed that mailed notifications of the meeting would be useful, and that the neighborhood had a Facebook page.

Following the presentation at the beginning of the meeting, one attendee also expressed a desire to use a meeting format that would allow one attendee to hear feedback from all other attendees.

Table 1: Meeting Comments

Section	Comment/Question
<p>Post Presentation Q&A</p>	<p>Elwyn Park was originally developed to provide housing for shipyard employees.</p>
	<p>Will proposed sidewalks be built in the roadway right of way or on private property?</p>
	<p>The sidewalk feasibility study is a waste of time.</p>
	<p>Does the scope of the study include Elwyn Road?</p>
	<p>If speed humps were implemented, would they be temporary or permanent? Would they damage snow plows?</p>
	<p>Are the potential traffic impacts of the condo development along Route 1 being incorporated into this study?</p>
	<p>Previously proposed projects would represent a radical change to the aesthetic character of the neighborhood; the topic is emotionally charged and you should ask yourself: do you want the proposed change in front of your house?</p>
	<p>There is a lack of communication from the City about the project; if the City can send out bills to every house by mail, they can send out letters about the project and the meeting to encourage greater attendance.</p>
	<p>The City's bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly policies conflict with Elwyn Park's character.</p>
	<p>The presence of a sidewalk curb increases the risk of tripping.</p>
	<p>Implementation of sidewalks means that residents will be responsible for shoveling the new sidewalks near their houses; this is expensive. The City is responsible for sidewalk snow clearance under State law.</p>
	<p>Middle school students walk to the bus stop at McKinley and Van Buren between 7:00 AM and 7:10 AM; that is too early for me to wake up to clear the sidewalk in front of my house.</p>
	<p>Who is liable for injuries on the sidewalks and who pays for maintenance of the sidewalks? The City's liability policy would cover any new sidewalks in Elwyn Park.</p>
	<p>Who will pay for the changes? Will taxes go up?</p>
	<p>We don't need sidewalks.</p>
	<p>I see the street as a place for children to play; however, the number of children who do play in the street has decreased over time.</p>
<p>There is no need for change to the street infrastructure; instead we just need parents to look out for their kids and to make sure they are following the rules of the road.</p>	

Section	Comment/Question
	There is no history of crashes in Elwyn Park.
	How would a proposed sidewalk or bicycle lane affect parking?
	I am uncomfortable driving on a street with bollards and stripes; I find these things distracting to look at which makes the roadway more dangerous.
	The previously proposed sidewalk projects were developed out of an extended public process ten years ago.
	I am worried about breaking the meeting into smaller groups because I think it will limit dialogue among neighbors.
Station #1: Existing Conditions & Previously Proposed Projects	Wilson is a good route to walk to Market Basket
	Need sidewalk on the south side of Elwyn Rd
	The traffic movement heading from Wilson to Polk is tough
	Focus sidewalks near the school
	Focus traffic calming within the whole neighborhood
	Many kids live along Taft near Garfield
	Would like to see existing sidewalk on Taft extended to McKinley
	Sight line issue at Harding and Tyler
	Look at safety issues at McKinley and Taylor
	Concerned about road being too narrow for sidewalk at Truman and Harding
	Speeding issues on Hoover east of Route 1
	Traffic calming needed on McKinley east of Route 1 (but sidewalk is not needed)
	Speed humps needed on Harding between Elwyn Rd and the school
	McKinley/Taylor intersection is a potential roundabout location
	Middle and high school bus stops: McKinley at Van Buren, Hartford (east) at Gamester, and Hartford (west) at Gamester
Station #2: Complete Street Toolkit	Need something to slow speeds on McKinley but not speed humps
	Bicycle lanes may be appropriate on connector roads
	Street lighting is desired (e.g., FW Hartford)
	Traffic speeds: 20 mph throughout the neighborhood
	Taft/Garfield to Dondero – Consider sidewalks, these are primary routes to school; connect to existing
	Harding – No sidewalk, too narrow
	Lack of compliance at existing stop signs (Garfield)

Section	Comment/Question
	Wilson – dangerous (speeding), sidewalk to Route 1
	Snow storage along road, concern about how sidewalks would further constrain snow storage
	Sidewalks change character
	Bike lanes not necessary generally but might be good on certain roads
	Runners at night
	McKinley – sidewalks OK if they don't impact anyone, no trees, only on one-side, but bike lanes not needed
	Work with property owners to provide parking on their site
	Raised structures are preferred for higher speed roads (e.g., McKinley, routes to school)
	If we slow speeds – no need for sidewalks
	Van Buren/McKinley intersection should be priority for “choking”
	One sidewalk on one side is fine
	No bump-outs (plowing issue)
	Look to Woodlands
	Speeding is biggest issues
	Consider using electronic speed signs
	Don't urbanize the area
	Polk – could we reduce pavement width?
	Generally – look at reducing unnecessary wide streets – stormwater management
	Elwyn Pond estate – look at improving drainage capacity
	Sidewalk on south side of Elwyn Rd.
	Multi-use path on one side – wherever it works
Station #3: Priorities	I live on Taft Road where I don't see anyone walking; stuff near school makes sense
	Elwyn Park's character includes big yards and wide streets. Worried about changing that character (urbanizing) through additional paved surfaces (hardscaping).
	OK with traffic calming (slow roads)
	I see a few kids walking on Adams
	Traffic is worst on McKinley, Van Buren, and into the Woodlands
	Kids bike to the park

Section	Comment/Question
	A bigger concern than safety issues while walking along the street is kids playing in the street (basketball)
	When I bike with my kids in the neighborhood, my biggest concern is that drivers can't see them ahead of bends in the road
	Traffic calming is more of a concern
	Drivers are distracted because of cellphones and texting
	The striped pedestrian lanes feel like a joke on the busier streets
	I would walk on a sidewalk if it was there
	I wanted sidewalks on McKinley 40 years ago when my kids were going to Dondero School, but it is no longer an immediate concern
	A slanted curb would be helpful for kids to bike into the grass/onto the sidewalk when cars are approaching
	Sidewalks are not necessary on every street
	In favor of sidewalks on a single side of the street, like in The Woodlands
	Still want to be able to park on the street (OK with not being able to park directly in front of my house)
	I like to bike into Portsmouth with my kids; sharrows in the neighborhood would be OK but bike lanes don't seem necessary; Elwyn Road is a different story because everyone is texting
	Speed control is needed on McKinley; perhaps speed humps between stop signs
	Not worried about the costs of implementation; Elwyn Park should get their's.
	Biggest safety concerns are on McKinley, Rt. 1, and Wilson near the light (neighborhood entrances are an issue)
	People drive 60 mph on Harding
	Need dialogue; stop signs just appeared and we didn't know why
	I have no aesthetic problem with sidewalks, I just need to know the justification as to why they are being built. Traffic engineering has focused more on the psyche of drivers but does traffic calming work? What's the evidence? Has it been working on Middle Street? Worried that some traffic calming treatments create a confusing roadway.
	Younger elementary students don't walk alone to school; they are escorted by their parents
	Before infrastructure changes are made, awareness campaigns, educational campaigns, and law enforcement should be considered; these would be more cost effective

Section	Comment/Question
	There are many distracted drivers flying down Harding
	What are the facts? What are the hard numbers? How do we remove emotion from the conversation?
	On McKinley, my priority is reducing speeds but without using a speed hump ("I'm all in on safety")
	I have 2 young kids; I walk and bike everywhere, but I avoid McKinley
	But your kids will get older and then you will be less concerned.
	True, but there will always be young kids in the neighborhood, whether they're mine or not
	If we make the roads safer, more kids will go outside and play
	Is the average age of the neighborhood increasing? Is the number of kids increasing or the number of senior citizens?
	A large number of senior citizens will be looking to sell their houses soon. A big motivator is the current housing market.
	Would like to see a sidewalk on one side of McKinley, especially near Garfield
	Don't see a lot of kids walking
	Need to cut back vegetation at the informal path to Dondero School; it would get more use if was nicer
	Aldridge is an example of a roadway in which sidewalks have slowed traffic
	Would the speeds humps be removed in the winter? If so, that seems like it defeats the purpose.
	Our neighborhood's character is less about wide roadways and more about our trees
	I lean slightly towards safety in terms of priorities
	Impact on taxes would be a concern
	Elwyn Park has a neighborhood Facebook page
	I love hearing kids playing out in the street