

Minutes
Saugatuck Steering Committee
Transit Oriented Development (SSCTOD)
Master Plan
Special Meeting

Monday, November 27, 2017

Town Hall Room 201/201A – 8:00 AM

Note: The audio of the entire meeting was recorded and can be made available by request.

Subcommittee members in attendance: Co-Chair Craig Schiavone, Mary Young, Sam Levenson, Francis Henkel. Ian Warburg, Bob Iannacone, Members of the public: Don Bergmann, Morley Boyd

Pete Ratkiewich, Town Engineer stated that the Dept. of Public Works had been holding off on Local Transportation Capital Improvement (LoTCIP) funding of \$700K for repairs to the roadway. He was looking for guidance on whether to continue with the implementation. The project for roadway improvements extends from Saugatuck to Railroad Place with the section from Saugatuck to Bridge being in the worst condition.

Seth Shapiro of Barton Partners reviewed how Saugatuck got to where it is now. The area developed before the automobile. Adding roads for cars sacrificed area for sidewalks.

He stated that the fear of development is palpable with good reason, he feels, as bad urban design that includes large buildings with “bad” first floor space can be found in Saugatuck and in other parts of Westport, remnants of poor or no planning.

Seth urged that the goal of this plan is to develop good design since we now know better. The words “transit” and “development” cause negative reactions. His understanding is that what people want to try to create is a village.

Seth returned to the Design Principles defined for this project highlighting that “*Reduc(ing) the appearance of parking as primary land use*” is a key phrase. He suggested joining both the transit aspect and the desire for a village like feel to add to the goal of the project being to create a “transit oriented village”.

Changes to the Plan

- Treadwell Saugatuck Riverside intersection as a gateway.

The area needs more than just sidewalks. An alternative design was presented showing full coverage of the intersection with textured pavement to signal entrance to a new area. The change would have no effect on traffic flow.

John Plante of Langan Engineering discussed returning to the idea of a roundabout to improve traffic flow and allow for a left turn from Saugatuck onto Treadwell. He stated that roundabouts make traffic flow more efficiently, but because traffic doesn't stop pedestrian crossing is more challenging. Roundabouts can be costly, may be more disruptive and sometimes create the need for land acquisition to construct. Despite these drawbacks, the benefit to traffic flow warrants that this option stay on the table.

- Railroad Place block

The plan shows increased business parking. Some of the spaces would be back in angled spaces because this method of parking is safer for bikes and pedestrians. The bump out where Riverside intersects with Charles Street was removed due to the importance of the right turn onto Charles Street. The plan returned to parallel parking in front of Tutti's slightly reducing the additional business spaces. Timing for these spaces is important to allow AM train traffic to flow. At the Rizzuto's site access to the site at the intersection was removed for improved safety. The Barton Partners team showed visualizations of Strofolino Park, the parking deck and the view down Riverside Avenue from Charles Street toward the station.

Financial Feasibility

Todd Poole of 4ward Planning analyzed development scenarios for financial feasibility. The scenarios ranged from 36,000 – 51,000 square feet of retail space, 20,000-35,000 square feet of office space and from 150-200 residential units developed over a 10 year horizon. The cost of this low level of density is perhaps not financially feasible. The team posed the question, "Why has the second GBD/S development not been built?". Among the possibilities is that the parking is too expensive to build

Could you build these scenarios and would they yield an appropriate return? The model of the least dense scenario on the Railroad block yielded a Levered IRR of 4.9%. For the Button Factory property the cost of the land might make this development uneconomic. The low intensity of development must be balanced against the high cost of construction. The land value must be compared to the project cost.

Takeaways: The projected rate of return for these development scenarios would not support the public realm improvements contemplated. Todd suggests a mechanism called a Tax Increment Financing, (TIF), a mechanism to bond for future revenue for improvements based on the expected incremental increase in taxes.

Zoning Changes

The team discussed whether zoning incentives would be sufficient to spur public realm improvements. They conclude that even that additional density would not be

enough of an incentive to allow for substantial contribution to public realm improvements.

Zoning recommendation: The GBD/S zone is recommend on certain additional parcels and two Village District Overlays, one for the center and one for the edge, are proposed.

The consultant team observes that the zoning regulations does not permit the reconstruction of many of the structures currently in Saugatuck. Barton Partners promotes the following revisions to the GDB/S regulations:

- remove the minimum lot size criteria
- increase in permitted building coverage
- increase permitted building footprint
- narrow the side and rear setbacks.
- remove the Floor Area Ratio requirement

The team is working to promote a form based code. Form based standards include build to lines regulating building placement, maximum setbacks of 12-18 feet, massing and form, facades where storefronts are required, landscaping,

Traffic/Transport Analysis

John Plante of Langan Engineering reviewed the constraints of the district. No widening can happen because there is limited right of way. Transportation demand management is the key.

He emphasized the needed to reduce the number of cars in the area and he classified cars that are in Saugatuck because they belong to those who live here, or those who park her and commute, or those who cut through when traffic is bad on I-95 and those who come to visit the area. He supports improved transit connectivity, improved means of multi-modal transit, policies and incentives to remove single trip cars from the traffic. He encourages increasing awareness to support changes in the choices that transit users make. The contemplated development could add only 2-4% increase in traffic, but solving the traffic problem requires work on several fronts. He discussed the following:

- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies such as increasing awareness, promoting incentives with employers to increase mass transit usage, and increased parking fees are important.
- Design features that encourage mass transit use (shelters, bike lanes and racks), Jitney services improvements, Improvement to bus service, incentives to encourage employers to promote mass transit use.
- Improvements that inhibit cut through traffic by limiting movements made when trying to cut through Saugatuck to discourage traffic trying to bypass slow traffic on I-95.

Balancing these efforts with improvements required of developers is important to allow the developer to afford the cost of the construction.

Cost of Public Realm Improvements

Michael Hunton, of Langan Engineering estimated Phase I of the streetscape at \$3.1-3.4 million, not including drainage improvements. The Riverside/Saugatuck/Treadwell intersection estimate is \$790,000 with the roundabout, and \$610,000 without it.

Phase 2 and Phase 3 estimates will form part of the Dec. 19th draft final report.

Discussion

Marty Fox expressed a concern about how to increase use of transit since the shuttles are already frequent and convenient. He noted that habit formation for using transit use could change people's behavior.

Cathy Walsh asked what restrictions are in place to limit big boxes. Peter Gold noted that parking permits require about a 15 month wait and 1/3 are out of towners. He agrees that the plan could increase the cost as there are 2.5 permits per space. This suggests that the cost is too low.

Matt asked about bike lanes. Seth indicated that they are hard to do since there is limited ROW. They discussed how if there is no parking from the bridge to the station during rush hours that then there is area for bikes.

He addressed Tax Increment Financing noting that the proposal for residential units does not approach the maximum development capacity; therefore, one can expect a rise in assessments to pay off the bond.

Regarding the GBD/S and the village overlay district, he asked what role historic preservation would play in those standards.

Pippa Bell Ader spoke to encourage EV charging stations, green roofs and to support the implementation of the quick cheaper improvements in order to encourage residents so that they can see and support change.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.