

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

Thursday, October 12, 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, Ward French, Sam Levenson, Matt Mandel, Francis Henkel. Ian Warburg, Bob I., Members of the public: Don Bergmann, Carolanne Curry

Craig Schiavone stated the reason for this meeting is to compile questions for the consultants concerning the committee's issues and concerns regarding the implications of Barton Partner's proposal particularly with respect to traffic. Mary Young phrased her perception of the sentiment suggesting the committee thinks they like the vision, but they want to understand the potential impacts of the proposal.

Peter Gold opined that traffic congestion in Saugatuck is due in large part to cut through traffic. He asked how can we remove traffic from the roads? How can we find ways to make the cost in travel time to cut through equal to or more than staying on 95. He suggested the town might prohibit left turns from Sherwood Island Connector to Greens Farms Rd. and to prohibit right turns onto Nyala Farms. He asserted that this will force cut through people to go up to the Post Road. He suggested that this change will not affect east bound Westporters. He supported others' suggestions for additional stop signs on Greens Farms Rd. to inhibit those who would cut through coming from Exit 19.

There was clarification that this might be at rush hours only. Some feedback received that the residents of Greens Farms and the police were not in favor of these modifications to traffic patterns. The suggestion was made that perhaps the idea was not fully understood.

Observation was shared that traffic on Imperial is also a contributing factor. Understanding all the sources of cut through traffic is important to address the issue of cut through traffic.

Suggestion for Barton Partners: Make recommendations focused on ways to mitigate cut through traffic. Review the traffic studies consulted at beginning of process and evaluate the conclusions those studies came to.

Ward French offered his opinion that the group still has not defined what he called “the sum total of what our vision is for Saugatuck.” He would like to get into the weeds of the parts that would make up that vision, but doesn’t feel the group has yet defined the overall vision.

Mary Young contributed that the WestCOG’s Phase 2 of the Railroad Parking Study includes a corridor study of the Post Road from East Main to Route 33. An alternative that might serve the TOD study might be a corridor study to connect Main Street to the train station. Peter Gold points out that a recent survey of 1700 respondents found little support for the connection from Main Street area to the train station. The use of the shuttle is by those commuting into Westport.

It was noted that the meeting scheduled for Tuesday, October 17, 2017 is slated to address how the zoning regulations would be modified to implement the vision of the master plan.

Craig urged the group to focus on the task at hand, that being providing feedback on the proposal provided by Barton Partners.

The concern about the density of residential uses proposed by Barton partners was raised. Part of the work is to find the balance between Saugatuck as the transit hub that it currently is, a feature that supports the property values in Westport, and the density that the area can support in a village setting; balance between the needs of the current commuters and the residents of Saugatuck, present and future.

There was a request for an analysis of the prior traffic studies consulted and a evaluation of how this proposed design supports the traffic we know exists.

Creating Saugatuck as a village may come at the expense of Saugatuck functioning as a traffic hub. The importance of ensuring that the area functions for the commuters is critical to Westporters.

Peter Gold provided a number of specific suggestions regarding traffic and transit:

- Providing a bus between the Sherwood Island Connector lot to Greens Farms Train station to eliminate some traffic.
- Add a dedicated bus lane on Greens Farms Rd. to promote parking at the commuter lot and taking a bus to Saugatuck Station.
- Questioned whether we are designing for the entire community or just the rush hours of the day. Referred to concerns during redesign of Lot 1 that were resolved through compromise.
- Bump outs proposed on Charles Street are worth reconsidering because we are trying to create a village.

- Designing ways to reduce cut through traffic would shorten the trip for commuters by keeping those who cut through on I-95.
- Saugatuck Ave could be one-way south in the morning and one-way north in the evening. This might smooth the commute by doubling the volume of potential traffic.

Maximum parking requirements are a good suggestion.

- For cars owned by new residents, they could be allowed to park a second car in Lot 8 over night.
- Supported the idea of a parking deck

The members urged that all the studies be coordinated. The WestCOG Phase 2 contains a study that has yet to be completed.

Members questioned the 4ward Planning estimate of the quantity of housing that could be absorbed and the smaller proportion of that that has been proposed. What about the capacity of the infrastructure to absorb the proposed additional density.

Matt requested that Barton Partners help the members to understand the basis for the design choices made and help the members to evaluate the pros and cons of the design choices they considered.

Members expressed concern over whether the design will work for both commuters and also to create a village. Ward French reiterated his belief that the group has yet to express a shared vision.

Ward expressed his vision of a return to the village he has seen Saugatuck be in the past. He stated that we have a lot of information, but what we are lacking is the vision by which to evaluate the pieces. Consensus is important to the success of the project. Purpose of this meeting is to seek consensus on the proposed phased plan put forward by Barton Partners.

Ward noted that this forum is a good opportunity to have a frank and open discussion with about nine of the full committee consisting of about twelve members. Sam Levenson suggested that the committee pick up the pace a bit in working out the details of the plan, but concurred that a unifying vision is lacking.

Ward described his history beginning in 1968 as a small child commuting from Weston with his mother to bring his father to the train station and extending to being a long time resident of Saugatuck. It was a family area with a wonderful market that was affordable to live in. It was based around a community of people. Traffic has ruined some aspects of Saugatuck. Some aspects are better than before, he noted. He was involved in bringing the Saugatuck Rowing Club to Saugatuck and promoted a water related use that would upgrade the experience of the water. The lobster fishery and the commercial Gault operation that was waning.

He expressed his desire for the heart and soul of the place to be considered. His vision involves "a lot less asphalt;, a lot more green, a lot more sidewalks, fewer curb cuts. He liked the design of the south side of the station that improves circulation. He believes that the plan should limit the addition of parking spots. He likes the idea of an efficient one story parking deck and would like to change "the sea of cars and the mile of roof tops" that are the current entrance to Saugatuck. He likes some of the Gateway entry ideas. Some people want it to be an efficient hub. I used to be that when it served the local community. His perception is that it is the outside influences have been the principle change. To create a village focusing on what is working is what is important. Concerned about the impact of the large number of new units being built in Norwalk and the potential for development nearby on Hiawatha Road. His vision is not to build a transportation hub, but to create more of a village.

Peter noted a direct correlation between more parking and less bus ridership. Suggested that the parking should be held steady for commuters and allow only enough additional parking for those who would live there in order to promote transit use by more commuters.

Don noted the name Gateway for Westport illuminates the purpose discussed here.

The group determined that a second meeting for discussion would be held on Monday, October 16, 2017 at 8 am.