



**TOWN COUNCIL
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING
SEPTEMBER 9, 2024**

APPROVED MINUTES

1) CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Black-Burke called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Present: Mayor Nuchette Black-Burke, Deputy Mayor Darleen Klase, Councilor Mary Armstrong, Councilor Ronald Eleveld, Councilor Ojala Naeem, Councilor William Pelkey, Councilor Leroy Smith (virtual), and Councilor Walker

Absent: Councilor Kristin Gluck Hoffman

Staff: Suzanne Choate, Town Engineer and Patrick McMahon, Director of Economic Development

Guests: Bill Anderson, Highway Team Lead, and Charlie Baker, PE, PTOE, Senior Traffic Engineer from VHB

2) PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED BROAD STREET ROAD DIET PROJECT

Town Manager Souza gave an overview of the project and went over the possible choices that the Town Council has to move this project forward. He stated that staff is looking at the Town Council to narrow down and develop a preferred concept based upon the concepts that will be provided this evening. Ideally, we'd like to have that in the October/November time frame so we can provide specific design direction to our consulting engineers.

Town Manager Souza gave a background of the project.

Mr. Baker, PE, PTOE, Senior Traffic Engineer from VHB and Mr. Anderson, Highway Team Lead from VHB gave a more detailed outline of the project and explained its suggested concept plans. They gave examples of what other towns have done and how successful they have been with their road diets.

Councilor Pelkey said for the intersection of Palisado (the three way for the main roads), southbound on Palisado are we changing the lanes because right now there are two. Is that going to be one? There's nothing there and that would necessitate a change if we didn't do anything with the roundabouts. Mr. Baker stated that yes there is currently two lanes that will be transitioned into one lane at the intersection of Palisado and Broad Street.



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Councilor Naeem asked if we did any study analysis to understand the demand for what parking might look like at full capacity and what the parking demands are currently? Mr. McMahon stated there have been interns in the past that counted all the parking spaces in downtown. There are a significant amount of parking spaces available although most of them are behind the buildings. That's something that we might have to look at in the long term on how we connect some of the parking behind the buildings as well as get the signage to get people there. We do have enough parking available in the town center to satisfy the businesses. If we could get additional parking on Broad Street, that might be beneficial instead of it being in the back of the buildings. That option would only be available to add it to the town green side of the street.

Councilor Naeem asked how many spaces it would be if we added parking on the town green side. Mr. McMahon said it would be 34 spaces.

Deputy Mayor Klase wanted to clarify if we go with option three which does not add parking to the west side, we would not have 34 additional spots correct? Town Manager Souza said that was correct. Deputy Mayor Klase said there was enough parking behind the buildings and the current parking that exists for the businesses on that side of the street and the town green would not be touched correct. And that gives us a bike lane on both sides, correct? Town Manager Souza said that was correct.

Deputy Mayor Klase asked if the bike lane is protected at all? Town Manager Souza said it would be striped. That's one of the considerations we are looking at is what is the most effective way to slow the traffic down. He explained what complete streets are and stated that is what the town has been trying to balance. The other objective is to have convenient parking for the additional activities that happen in the town center, not just for the businesses. The option that has no parking on the town green side, which would leave the curb line on both sides of the street at the same exact spot, there would be 34 less additional parking spaces. Depending on how the configuration of the west side goes, that can be anywhere from 26 to 35 spaces could be added on the west side. The differential is how we treat the space in front of Geissler's supermarket.

Mayor Black-Burke said from what the Town Manager Souza said, there would be no bump outs right. Town Manager Souza said there'd be no bump outs on the town green side if it was simply a bike lane and then the travel lane and turn lane.

Deputy Mayor Klase said we have no bike lanes on Palisado Avenue or Route 75 that go into the town center anyway, right? Town Manager Souza said that was correct. Deputy Mayor Klase then said even if we were to do a rotary construction on those two roads, we would have to widen those roads to put bike lanes there, correct? Town Manager Souza said not necessarily. We've had conversations with residents and property owners south of Sycamore Street on RT 159 regarding the speeding on Broad Street. Vehicles continue to speed north and southbound along that corridor. We've had conversations with the CT State Department of Transportation and they have done some initial traffic studies to look at if there is any other way of being able



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to narrow down the section of Windsor Avenue south of Sycamore Street as a way to slow traffic down. If that would come to fruition, there would then be the ability to add bike lanes to the south without dramatically changing the curb lines which would come to the center.

Councilor Armstrong asked have we monitored bicycle traffic? Town Manager Souza said we don't have specific counts on bicycle traffic, but it's relatively low.

Councilor Naeem said the work that goes into this will take a few years. There are more apartments coming online in this area that could result in more bike traffic.

Councilor Eleveld asked if there are any current rules of parking on Broad Street from the library to the north green? He believes you can park all the way down to Ace Hardware on the west side and he doesn't believe there are any signs on the east side that say you can't park there. Town Manager Souza stated that at one time there were restrictions for the rush hour period along with limitations on the east side of the town green as well.

Councilor Eleveld stated currently since there's no restriction to parking, you can park there, but we only see parking in the vicinity of The Bean at this time. So, the question becomes will we rebuild the road at approximately \$7 million for one business that has all the parking as all the other businesses have parking behind them. One of the issues he's had from day one is that someone in the apartments on the other side of the railroad tracks or the condos has a medical emergency at the same time that the highway is shut down, we will end up with loads of cars in the town center and the ambulance will have no way to get back there easily.

Town Manager Souza said for the handful of times that I-91 is partially shut down or congested because of an incident on the highway, today we do not have enough road way. Regardless of what the Town Council and community decides to go forward with, we will still have that environment when that occurs. Those situations do occur but they are less frequent than the folks that live in town center and need to cross Windsor Avenue in a safe fashion or other folks that we're trying to draw to the town center, be them residents or visitors. That is what we are trying to plan for and design for is that every day use is in a safe manner.

Councilor Eleveld stated it's nice to have bike lanes but they currently lead to nowhere. You can't go down Palisado Avenue down a bike lane as there is none, you can't go up Poquonock Avenue as there is not a bike lane and you can't go up Bloomfield Avenue as there isn't a bike lane there either. But the town does have some streets that come off of Broad Street that you can bike on. If we go forward with the plan, he'd like it to have parking on both sides, single lanes and no bike path. He does not want to the town to touch the town green.

Councilor Pelkey said the focus has been on Broad Street and the potential for roundabouts. What he's curious about is if we've put any study or thought of what will happen on Preston Street in the neighborhood behind all these businesses. He knows that people will start using the back streets if it is too slow in the center. He wants to make sure we've at least thought these



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things through as they cannot be easily undone. Mr. McMahon stated that the plan does mention the possibility, if necessary, of some traffic management at the beginning portions of each of those roadways. On Maple and Elm Streets, there could be in the future design elements like the bump outs, if necessary, down a road, if it became a problem.

Councilor Pelkey asked if there would be a plan to have some money put aside for something like that or would that be a future ask? Where would the monies come from? Town Manager Souza said we'd include that as the program got refined. We would maybe include neck downs or a vertical change, a speed table at an intersection would be relatively inexpensive unless we had to get into storm drainage. That would be included in any cost proposal.

Councilor Naeem said she is in favor of bike lanes. As Councilor Eleveld shared, there are no connect points as of now that is true, but we are talking about the roads of our future. It's important that if we want to drive more business into the center of town that we start building our town from there to connect those things. Bike lanes have the opportunity, especially with all the apartments coming online in the area, to drive traffic into the businesses into the center of town. She is in support of that. She believes the CT Department of Transportation (DOT) had put out some policy where there is a requirement to add bike lanes to state roads as they are repaired. That might address some of the connector points that we are talking about over the course of time. She asked Mr. Anderson if he could give an update on that. Mr. Anderson said the DOT is making efforts for a complete streets initiative and while they're not requiring bike lanes, they are all required to at least consider it. They want to make bike lanes the default and if you don't want to add bike lanes, you need to provide justification for it.

Councilor Naeem said of the three options we are looking at, there is an option on the table where there are bike lanes without taking space from the town green. Adding bike lanes does not mean that we are taking away space from the town green.

Deputy Mayor Klase has a question about option #3 where you take no land from the town green, which she is an advocate of, and you put in bike lanes. Are the islands made as small as they possibly can be to give us room for the bike lanes? Can you have parking and make those islands smaller on the east side? Mr. Anderson said unfortunately they cannot do that as the width of the medians is dictated by the need for the left turn lanes at the intersections. There isn't enough of a gap between the intersection to narrow them in some places.

Deputy Mayor Klase stated all the cost estimates that she's seen have been \$4.1 million or \$4.8 million being the highest. Is that correct? How did we get to \$7 million? Town Manager Souza said the \$4.1 million without any roundabout consideration and then the option that would relocate and widen the curb on the town green side is the \$4.8 million. The roundabouts are an estimate of \$1 million if two roundabouts are to be constructed. Deputy Mayor Klase then said some of these we already used some state money for, correct? Town Manager Souza said yes at this time we have been allocated \$1.2 million in state funding with \$1 million being allocated towards construction and the \$200,000 is for design work. We also received an allocation from the federal government of \$3 million.



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Deputy Mayor Klase said she has heard from constituents that the speed is fast on Broad Street and even if you hit the light to cross the street at the cross walk, many people don't slow down.

Mayor Black-Burke stated that this conversation began because we wanted to move traffic through the center of town. We have a couple of options to move traffic through versus our traffic being backed up or stalled. She is in favor of bike lanes but wants to bring back to the forefront that this is a process to help move traffic not to make it be slowed down in any shape or form. No matter which way you move there will always be traffic coming into our town, but with the turn lanes and the roundabouts, we'll be able to move traffic differently. She'd rather not touch the town green, and she hopes it doesn't come to that. She would like the town to maintain the current parking that we have.

Councilor Walker said traffic calming is getting more prevalent. You can see this in Hartford. It didn't start in the center of town. He saw the traffic calming efforts that were made in Wilson where we went from two lanes to one. Then we ran into the unexpected problems of school buses. One of the biggest concerns he has, along with other people in the town, for center of town is pedestrian safety. He wants to make sure that he understands the concept of what we are going to do with traffic calming. We want to slow traffic down, and by doing that the idea would be to get vehicles to pull over and spend time in the shops in the center of town. When there is an issue with I-91, it is something to consider. How do you get emergency vehicles through? Particularly a ladder truck. We haven't spoken about the roundabout issue yet.

Mayor Black-Burke said that this prompts two different pieces. Ladder trucks were touched on at another community meeting and how they have difficulty getting through a roundabout. It's calming as well as moving traffic because you need to have a good balance of both.

Councilor Pelkey asked if the nature of the parking is going to be parallel or will it be angled? Mr. Anderson said it would be parallel parking.

Councilor Naeem said the Town Manager had mentioned the federal and state funds that we received. Do we have any time restraints on those? Mr. McMahon said there is no specific time frame that has been given to him during his conversations with the DOT.

Mr. Anderson went over how roundabouts work, their design for large vehicles, such as a ladder truck versus a larger truck, and the design goal to help with the speeding.

Councilor Walker said if he heard Mr. Anderson correctly, you said in the roundabout scenarios, pedestrians would only have to cross one lane of traffic in either direction. Could you elaborate on that? Mr. Anderson stated it's a two stage crossing. He gave an example of a pedestrian walking and stated that the person can cross the roundabout and can stop at the island (refuge) in the center of the roundabout (first stage) before proceeding further or can continue on (the second stage). You only need to wait for a gap in traffic in one direction before you get to the island and then you can wait for a gap to cross the second time.



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Councilor Armstrong asked what Mr. Anderson meant when he said ‘refuge’. Mr. Anderson said it’s the island space between the two travel lanes. It would be a minimum 8 foot width so there would be plenty of space where a pedestrian can stand there safely outside of vehicle traffic. Mr. Baker added that is not required that you stand there and wait, but it’s an opportunity for the people coming from the other direction to wait for the gap to cross.

Councilor Eleveld stated that what he sees on the screen as opposed to the map that is in the Council packet is different. He explained the difference. His version looked like a more dangerous configuration than that which was on the big screen and it might be tougher for those trying to cross. He explained that many people do not know how to use a roundabout in the U.S. He asked which design is more likely to be the one we’ll be using? Town Manager Souza said that in the Council packet the map that is there is an initial concept that VHB did. The one that is showing on the screen is after some feedback from the CT DOT.

Councilor Eleveld said he likes the idea of the roundabouts. He thinks it might be a challenge for those who live in the new apartments as the only option they have is to go north or south around the circle. He asked if we are leaving all those side streets around the roundabout open and available for use or will some of those be closed or modified? Mr. Anderson said they are not looking to close anything.

Councilor Naeem wanted more clarification as to where the roundabouts would be going in. She asked if Mr. Anderson could reiterate how roundabouts are more efficient than traffic lights. Mr. Anderson said they did a traffic modeling with both the traffic signals and the roundabouts. The traffic signals are already operating efficiently. They also analyzed the roundabouts and they were all less than a 10 second delay on average per vehicle to make it through the intersection. Both forms of traffic control work well, but the roundabouts are a little more efficient.

Councilor Pelkey said as it is conceptualized right now, we have that small little parking lot by the bank and the package store that still remains on street parking and it still has the normal access it’s just a matter of now you can only turn right and leave right, correct? Mr. Anderson said yes.

Councilor Walker said he is still concerned with pedestrians trying to cross the streets. Looking at everything that’s being offered, including the fact that Mr. Anderson said that at the roundabout, there is no pedestrian waiting or allowing for vehicles and drivers to know that there are pedestrians waiting. He is not sure that any of the concepts have fully addressed providing better safety for people that are crossing in the center of town. He’s hoping at the next presentation, or at the next follow up that there will be more thought given to what can be done. If you put the roundabouts in and you eliminate where Broad meets Palisado and Bloomfield Avenue, you eliminate pedestrian crossings there. Secondly, a lot of this is geared towards high density housing and traffic patterns and volumes will change at some point. Whatever we do needs to have long term planning.



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Councilor Smith said his observation is that the issue is about advertently promoting these large SUVs because these have become much larger than they were. The problem is not so much to do with speeding. When an accident occurs it usually involves a larger vehicle which has a higher rate of having a dangerous outcome versus a smaller vehicle. He thought there was a proposal to do some diagonal parking. How is that going to work with these large vehicles backing out of these diagonal parking spots? How is that going to fit into the whole design? It seems like something along this line needs to be addressed. So, it's not only about speeding but about the type of vehicles as well. We need to look at both sides.

Councilor Naeem addressed the safety concerns of the roundabouts. If we don't have a roundabout and have a traffic light there, and there are vehicles coming going straight or turning, and it's a green light, they are going at the full speed they are going to go. The roundabout forces them to slow down. That immediately reduces the risk of the severity of pedestrian safety. The first slide that was shown showed how many deaths per 10 people there were based on speeding. That roundabout is going to force you to slow down to about 20 MPH. Ultimately, that is much safer. There are studies out there that pedestrian traffic is much, much safer with roundabouts than it is with traffic signals. Feel free to check them out in Glastonbury and Hartford. Mr. McMahon clarified that in the plans there is only parallel parking that is provided. There is no diagonal parking.

Mayor Black-Burke said the next steps is to have a conversation once again at one of the Town Council meetings. Town Manager Souza said that staff could have a public information meeting in the tail end of this month or October, depending on how schedules work. The hope would be that at the first meeting in November, that the Council will determine what the preferred concept will be. That would allow our consulting engineers to construct a final design. If the Town Council wants to have the roundabouts, we would likely need to have additional funds. When we got the grant from the State of \$200,000, roundabouts had not been in the mix at that point. Roundabouts came in after some comments from the last year or so. The goal would be able to (over the winter into early spring) have designs with final status and final cost estimates. Next summer, the summer of 2025, there will be some discussion with the Town Council relative to overall project funding authorization. This will require a referendum.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the medians and the refuge stop area, would they be wide enough to create a stagger system to run all the way through? Mr. Anderson said the current concept does not show that but that could be considered. Many times, that is safer. We haven't yet done that in the concept stage, but again it could be considered. There would be enough room to do that.

Councilor Pelkey asked if we were to do these roundabouts, is any land being taken or is it still largely within the town with slivers taken from here and there? Mr. McMahon said for one portion, the portion that we transferred to Founder's Square, we may need to take it back, in order to fit it. That's what happens when plans develop.



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Councilor Walker said some of them have seen multiple versions of the plan. Diagonal parking was part of one of the concept designs. We have to make sure that whatever we do, we can go back and correct it if need be. As an example, West Hartford had to readjust some of their road diet stuff.

Town Manager Souza outlined the next steps once more.

3) ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Councilor Eleveld and seconded by Councilor Armstrong to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Motion Passed 8-0-0 (Councilor Gluck Hoffman absent)

Respectfully Submitted,

Helene M. Albert
Recording Secretary