

Agenda
Town of Skowhegan
Village Partnership Initiative Meeting
3:30 P.M.
Tuesday, February 13, 2024
Municipal Building – Council Room

Project Coordination team Members:

David Bucknam – Interim Town Manager
Kristina Cannon – Main Street Skowhegan
Jason Finley – Road Commissioner
Steven Govoni – Selectman
Joel Greenwood – KVCOG/Planner
Marty Rooney – MDOT
Matt Drost – MDOT
Tony Grande – VHB
Jenn Conley – VHB
Jason Ready - VHB

Committee Members:

Erin Binghalib – KVCAP Representative
Jessica Brown – MSAD #54 Representative
David Bucknam – Police Chief
Peter Carrier – Trucking Industry Representative
Derek Chretien – Planning Board Representative
Kate Drummond – Somerset Woods Trustees Representative
Stephen Gould
Mike Lambke
Kimberly Leo
Ambrose McCarthy – Veteran Representative
Donald Skillings
Todd Smith – Selectman
Amanda White
Chad Whitemore

Call Meeting to order.

1. Discussion and decision to approve the meeting minutes from the following Meetings:

July 11, 2023
September 12, 2023

2. Discussion and decision to choose a second bridge option to recommend to the Selectmen.

pedestrian scale, shaded bridge.

- › Marty called for feedback on the alternatives for the public input portion of the study.
 - Erin Bingham brought up quantitative economic development data and asked if this could be provided.
 - Kristina Cannon also asked for economic development data, and referenced Augusta and Waterville. VHB will provide discussions within the report.
- › Mike Lambke brought up safety and accessibility on North Avenue with the alternatives.
- › There was a discussion on single lanes, angled parking, pedestrian level enjoyment of downtown shops and businesses, and wayfinding.
- › Joel asked about other alternatives to the potential "roundabout" at the Route 2/201/Main intersection.
 - Additional lanes would need to be considered to increase capacity.
- › The schedule was announced for an Open House on July 31 from 4:30 to 7 pm.
 - All alternatives will be considered, with visuals for pedestrian level alternatives.
 - Several spaces for short presentations/discussions will be set up as opposed to a formal presentation to a larger group.
 - A mailer for the September meeting needs immediate action.
- › A public meeting in September will be held, and the Select Board will be invited. The Community Center would be a good location for this meeting.
- › Kristina brought up the Town's trails project, which will also be included and presented at the Open House.
- › The deadline for Committee feedback is July 18, 2023, COB after an email from Tony to the entire Committee.
- › A follow up action is to confirm if VHB has the March 20 PDR plans for the signalized intersection.

Skowhegan VPI – Summary of Alternatives and Preliminary Recommendations



Preliminary Study Team Recommended Alternatives:

Alternatives will continue to be refined with Committee and Public Input. The recommendations below are based upon available transportation data, Public Input via the Survey, Open House and discussion at prior VPI Committee Meetings.

- **2-way traffic on Madison Avenue** from Commercial/Elm to Water (*further study required*).
 - Eliminates the need for most NB vehicles to circulate through the triangle on Water and Commercial Streets.
 - Would provide traffic calming through multiple High Crash Locations and reduce truck traffic, weaving, and congestion through the Downtown area.
 - Given the physical limitations of the Madison Ave/Water Street intersection, further study is required to understand lane configurations, parking, and overall impacts.
- **A 2nd Bridge to the Downtown at North Avenue/Route 150** provides a major transportation benefit and compliments other recommendations (*further study required*).
 - Moves significant ‘through’ traffic out of the downtown, including heavy truck traffic.
 - Would reduce traffic congestion and delay on the MCS bridge.
 - Reduces volume and congestion at key downtown intersections, improving safety bicycle and pedestrian safety/comfort levels.
 - Further study required to understand bridge design elements, lane configurations, parking, and overall impacts.
 - Would provide economic development improvements for reduced area congestion and delay.
 - Could have impacts to Veterans Memorial Park and other properties.
- **Area Bicycle and Pedestrian improvements** including enhanced crosswalks, expanded sidewalks, bicycle accommodations and wayfinding for parking, etc.
 - Can provide enhanced safety benefits with separation of roadway users.
 - Increased walkability and connectivity to Town Trails Plan and Riverfront Improvements.
 - Could increase property values, attract more visitors to local businesses, and attract new businesses.
 - Wider sidewalks could provide opportunities for outdoor activities including outdoor dining, seating, etc.
- **Single Lane Water Street** with options to expand sidewalks and/or bike lanes (Assuming Madison Ave was converted to two-way traffic).
 - Provides acceptable traffic LOS and bike/ped safety/comfort benefits.
 - Would provide more bicycle/pedestrian amenities, or storefront expansion into public space/street furniture.
 - Provides traffic calming benefits and shortens crossing distance for pedestrians.

Skowhegan VPI – Summary of Alternatives and Preliminary Recommendations



- May improve roadway aesthetics with increased foot traffic and economic development.
- Provides more separation for pedestrians and attracts more walkers Downtown.
- **Intersection improvements at 2/201/Main St**
 - A multi-lane roundabout does not appear feasible due to steep grade and property impacts (further study required).
 - If feasible, a roundabout would provide the greatest vehicle delay improvement.
 - Further study is needed to determine feasibility, footprint of required capacity improvements, and related property impacts.
 - Degree and type of improvements at this intersection will be tied to the decision on adding a second bridge. We are asking Skowhegan to decide on a second river crossing before looking deeper into this location as type of improvements and subsequent impacts are different with/ without a bridge.
- **Route 201 (Madison Ave) Road Diet north of High Street**
 - Would involve reducing from four lanes (2 lanes in each direction) to three lanes (1 lane in each direction with a center two-way left-turn lane) and reallocating space for other uses such as bike lanes or wider sidewalks. This can help calm traffic, reduce speeding, and improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Road diet appears feasible.
 - Would help to calm traffic, reduce speeds, and improve safety.
 - Can encourage more people to walk or bike, leading to a more vibrant and active community.
 - Would allow safer turns into area businesses.
- **Main Street at Heather Street and Fairview Avenue**
 - Road reconfiguration to simplify the diverging road paths.
 - Would provide a shorter pedestrian crossing distance.
 - Possible greenspace addition to the existing park.
 - Would provide a gateway to Skowhegan.
- **Route 201 at Jewett Street**
 - Consider an additional lane on Jewett Street to allow dedicated left and right turn lanes from Jewett Street onto Route 201.
 - Crosswalk through intersection.
 - Signalize Park Street approach to intersection.

Common Themes of Recommendations

- Traffic safety and calming – potential for improved safety and reduced speeding, creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Accessibility and walkability – wider sidewalks, bike lanes, and improved pedestrian infrastructure can attract more foot traffic and promote a healthier and more active lifestyle.

Skowhegan VPI – Summary of Alternatives and Preliminary Recommendations



- Aesthetics and community appeal – narrowing streets, enhancing the overall appearance, and fostering a sense of community can make Skowhegan more attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses.
- Economic impacts – increased foot traffic, improved business visibility, potential property value appreciation, job creation, and increased tourism and visitor spending.

Other Alternatives/Considerations

- Two-way Water Street and Two-Way Commercial Street provides acceptable traffic LOS and bike/ped safety & comfort benefits.
 - Would require traffic signal or mini-roundabout at Water/Commercial/Court.
 - Would require traffic signal at Water/Madison.

Additional Suggestions

- Pair of One-Way Bridges: modify the existing Margaret Chase Smith (MCS) bridge and proposed downtown bridge (at North Avenue) to operate as a pair of one-way bridges. For example, the MCS bridge may operate only in the southbound direction while the new proposed downtown bridge would allow only northbound vehicles.
 - Advantage of second bridge for routing lost, must always choose a certain bridge.
 - Trips across the river may increase in time and distance.
 - May worsen pedestrian and bicycle comfort.
 - May concentrate/funnel drivers to existing poor performing intersections.
- Court Street Bicycle Accommodations:
 - Provides connectivity with the proposed Skowhegan Trails Plan.
 - Could consider restricting/eliminating parking.
 - Could consider changing to one-lane one-way traffic (likely NB Only) to accommodate bikes.
 - May also need to consider a contra-flow bike lane (bikes allowed to travel against traffic SB).
 - Could also leave as is and add signage and pavement markings to “Share the Road”.
 - Consider sidewalk improvements to accommodate more pedestrians for Trail use.
- Redesignate Route 2 traffic to encourage traffic out of Downtown:
 - Consider designating High Street as Route 2.
 - This may include a short one-way section on Water Street, in the vicinity of the High Street intersection.
 - This would reduce the number of vehicles and trucks using Commercial Street and other High Crash Location areas.

Skowhegan VPI – Summary of Alternatives and Preliminary Recommendations



- Single Lane Commercial Street – as a result, could provide an opportunity to go to a single-lane and provide more opportunities for bicycle/pedestrian amenities, additional parking, or storefront expansion into public space/street furniture, etc.



Meeting Notes

Date: 9/12/23 Notes Taken By: VHB
Place: Skowhegan Municipal Building Re: Skowhegan VPI
Project No.: 55672.00 VPI Committee Meeting #4

Attendees:

Committee: Kristina Cannon, Chad Whittemore, Peter Carrier, Mike Lambke, Amanda White, Derek Chretien, Tom McCarthy, Kate Drummond, Don Skillings, Steve Gould, Jessica Brown, Kim Leo, Erin Bingham, Joel Greenwood
Town: Christine Almand, Todd Smith, Steve Govoni, David Bucknam, Jason Finley
MaineDOT: Marty Rooney, Matt Drost
VHB: Tony Grande, Jason Ready

Agenda:

- Welcome, Introductions, Notes
 - TAC / VPI Committee Members
 - Approve VPI Meeting Notes
- Project Update
 - Updated Parking Survey Results (8/22/23)
 - Review Comments from Open House
 - Review Alternatives
 - Review Recommendations
 - Economic Discussion of Alternatives
- Input from Committee Members
- Public Meeting (Oct.)
 - Confirm Date / Format
 - Mailer / Location (Community Center)
- Wrap Up / Action Items

Meeting Notes

Tony welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked if there were comments on the previous meeting notes, with no comments provided. There was some discussion on possible next meeting dates. A brief presentation updated the committee on the study, including comments from the Open House and results from the parking survey from 8/22/23. The survey findings generally confirmed the results from February and showed that there does not appear to be a lack of parking in downtown Skowhegan.

Tony then reviewed the alternatives and findings. Based on the handout provided to Committee members.

A question was asked if four individual bridges – an additional river crossing adjacent to the existing Margaret Chase Smith (MCS) bridges – would be considered redundant and meet the Purpose and Need.

Marty answered that it may be difficult to move forward with that proposal as it would require acquiring all of the historic buildings / historic district to the East of 201 to the north of the MCS bridges. It would probably mean a long process in which the state would have to prove that there is no other viable alternative. Other discussions mentioned the difference between these impacts and residential impacts anticipated for a downtown bridge. It was noted that historic buildings have protection that other buildings and parcels do not have. As any of these alternatives would necessitate federal participation, MaineDOT would need to ensure that the proper process was being followed. A recommendation that would involve taking that many historic buildings may not meet the purpose and need of the study,

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provide redundancy, or minimize impacts. Joel Greenwood specifically mentioned that he would not be comfortable with historic building impacts adjacent/within the downtown. Also, MaineDOT has not considered this type of improvement (multiple historic building impacts). The committee could certainly make this recommendation and the study team can explore the extent to which this could be feasible but otherwise this alternative is not being carried forward into detailed analysis.

A question was asked about the proposed traffic signal at Commercial Street and Elm Street. The project would include some bumpouts / curb extensions.

A question was asked about access to the downtown businesses with respect to a 2-way Madison alternative without a southbound left turn lane from Madison Ave onto Water Street.

On-street parking would remain, access would also remain from the municipal parking lot north of Commercial Street. Among other solutions, wayfinding signage to the parking and the downtown businesses would be provided in advance to direct vehicles to the municipal parking lot via High Street, and also to Court Street and Patten Court to access parking along the river.

A question was asked if the 2nd bridge recommendation would be independent or contingent on other recommendations. A 2nd bridge recommendation would have benefits by itself and could be made independently of other alternatives, as it would provide redundancy and meet the study purpose and need, improving traffic delay and bike/ped comfort.

The committee recommended that VHB provide scope and fee proposal for additional alternatives to consider, as discussed. These include:

- > Evaluation of one-way MCS bridges (SB only) and one-way new downtown river crossing (NB only),
- > Evaluate one-way MCS bridges (SB Only) and two-way new river crossing,
- > Designate High Street as Route 2 beginning at the intersection of Water Street

A question was asked why VHB would not just be able to provide alternative analysis using existing data. VHB responded that a regional model would be needed to understand where traffic would be directed, as the alternatives could substantially change where drivers may travel to reach their destination, whereas the existing data is using the assumption of a downtown bridge.

As a result of the new alternatives discussed, another VPI Committee meeting will be scheduled prior to the next public meeting, which will now be delayed. For next steps, VHB will work with MaineDOT to determine the scope of work needed to complete the additional alternatives analysis, estimate how long it will take, and determine if additional fee is required to complete this work.

Note, subsequent to the meeting an estimate was developed for this additional analysis and the Town has opted to reduce the existing scope, where possible, to accommodate the additional analysis.