

# Downtown reconstruction to enter design phase

## IDEAS DISCUSSED AT PUBLIC HEARING IN SPENCER

BY DAVID DORE  
NEW LEADER STAFF WRITER

SPENCER — People who attended a Dec. 6 public hearing were excited at the possibility of more trees and benches along Main Street (Route 9) in downtown Spencer.

They were less excited, though, about moving Pleasant Street (Route 31) so its intersection with Route 9 is across from Wall Street — especially if it means losing valuable parking spaces.

Half a dozen people joined town officials and representatives from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. in Worcester to discuss the project, which Town Administrator Adam Gaudette said is entering the design phase.

Town Meeting voters approved spending up to \$300,000 for the study, he said, with the hope the town would get \$3.25 million in state and federal funding for construction. The project is eligible, Gaudette said, but the design must be completed first.

VHB employees have looked at traffic counts and signals, accident data, the depth of asphalt on downtown streets and sidewalks.

“It’s strictly all about existing conditions,” said VHB Project Manager Brian Brosnan. “We haven’t put pen to paper yet.”

As part of the process, he explained, the state Department of Transportation must approve the design. That means it must include accommodations for bicyclists, pedestrians, vehicles and handicapped and disabled people.

Shoulders would be created for cyclists, Brosnan said, which would likely mean narrowing sidewalks in certain locations.

“You’re probably going to see a little bit of change in the width of the roadway compared to the width of the sidewalk,” he said.

Brosnan hinted the traffic lights at the intersection of Main and Maple streets and the intersection of Main, Pleasant, Elm and Wall streets could be synchronized.

VHB traffic engineer Matthew

Chase said the current traffic light configuration has caused “a lot of rear-end collisions” over the last five years. His study “didn’t see a high crash rate” at the Maple Street and Pleasant Street intersections, he said, but a “significant number of crashes” in between along Main Street.

There have been four instances of pedestrians being struck as they crossed Main Street at Mechanic Street, Chase said. An 85-year-old woman died in July 2007 when she was struck by a dump truck while crossing in front of the Price Chopper entrance.

As part of the design process, Chase said, VHB must determine if a relocated Pleasant Street intersection is a good location for a rotary and if nearby streets should be made one way.

Gaudette said the relocation of Pleasant Street was suggested because of the “staggered” traffic signals at Wall and Elm streets and the “very difficult” turning radius for trucks and buses taking a right

turn from Main Street to Pleasant Street.

But, a couple of people in the audience mentioned, moving Pleasant Street would eliminate some of the spaces in the Sovereign Bank-owned parking lot across from the Richard Sugden Library.

The town’s 2003 Master Plan calls for the Town of Spencer to buy the lot, which it now leases from the bank.

Other ideas floated at last week’s hearing included turning Wall Street into either a dead end street or one-way street, keeping the “chirping” pedestrian signals at Maple Street and Pleasant Street, building a parking garage, moving one of the entrances into the Price Chopper shopping plaza so the crosswalk at Mechanic Street could be moved and not on a hill, keeping the right turn lane from Main Street to Pleasant Street, putting in a crosswalk between the library and the town parking lot, either burying utility lines or moving them behind buildings, and raising

the road bed of Main Street to eliminate the double sidewalk issue (although it would steepen the approach from Elm Street and Wall Street to Main Street).

Audience members liked the idea of planting trees and installing decorative lighting and park benches downtown. Parks and Recreation Commission Co-Chairman William Shemeth III wondered if his board would be responsible for maintenance.

Shemeth, also a member of the Disability Commission, asked if that panel could be involved in the design process to ensure there are no accessibility issues.

Gaudette said another public hearing would be held once 25 percent of the design is completed, possibly in the spring. He added it would be four or five years before construction starts.

*David Dore may be reached at (508) 909-4140, or by e-mail at ddore@stonebridgepress.com.*