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Friday, July 20, 2012

## Plans presented for Main Street reconstruction

BY DAVID DORE  
NEW LEADER STAFF WRITER

SPENCER — People who attended a couple of meetings at Memorial Town Hall Tuesday, July 10 were presented with three options for reconstructing the downtown portion of Main Street (Route 9).

They picked Option B, which would upgrade Main Street to current standards, move Pleasant Street (Route 31) so its entrance is across from Wall Street, give traf-

fic turning from Route 9 westbound onto Pleasant Street its own turning lane to make it easier for large trucks to make the swing, synchronize the traffic lights at the Pleasant Street and Maple Street intersections, and keep almost all of the parking along Route 9. The top 4 inches of asphalt would be removed and replaced, and the entrance and exits from the Price

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# Preferred option calls for moving intersection with Pleasant Street

## PLANS

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Chopper parking lot onto Main Street would become a single entrance and exit.

One of the rejected ideas, Option A, was what Brian Brosnan from the Worcester office of Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., called the "status quo option." It would have kept the current configuration of Main and Pleasant streets, but widened the travel lanes to 11 feet and put in shoulders that are at least 4 feet wide. One problem, Brosnan said, is that "we lost quite a bit of parking" along Main Street. In fact, all of the parking between Wall Street and Mechanic Street, except for a handful of spaces across from the Price Chopper entrance, would have disappeared.

The other rejected option called for a roundabout at the intersection of Main, Pleasant and Wall streets, similar to the one in front of Union Station in Worcester. There would be no need for a traffic signal, Brosnan

said.

"Everybody has a yield condition, and that improves the flow of traffic," he noted. "From a horizontal standpoint, this works."

But, according to Brosnan, about 14,000 square feet of land owned by Sovereign Bank — including the park where the Massasoit Hotel once stood — would have been taken for the roundabout and a relocated Pleasant Street. (Option B would affect about 9,000 square feet of the bank's land, including the park.) The traffic lights at Maple Street would be improved. Retaining walls would be needed to make the area flat enough for a roundabout; Brosnan said that could cost a few hundred thousand dollars. It was also possible the Kenwood Diner would have to move if Option C were approved, he said.

Brosnan seemed to agree with the audience in preferring Option B.

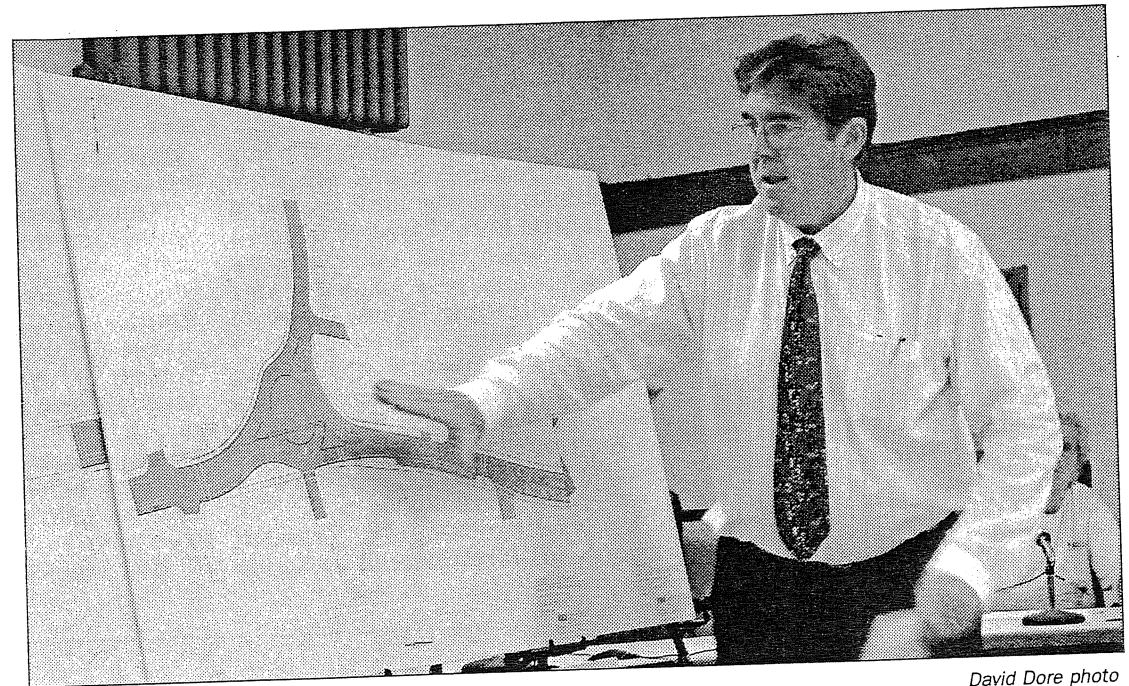
"Personally, I think this does the most justice to the downtown area," he said. "I think that by keeping the status quo we really don't solve all of the problems that are down there,

and a roundabout — it's a good concept, it's a good idea in concept, and we had to flesh it out as part of our process with MassDOT, but if it doesn't work it doesn't work."

No matter what option was chosen, the crosswalk at Mechanic Street — which now sits almost at the bottom of the hill in front of May Nails and Kaboodle Pizzeria and Grille — would move to the other side of the intersection. That has been the location of serious — and, in at least one case, fatal — accidents over the years.

With Option B, Brosnan said, one or two parking spaces would be lost by moving the crosswalk.

The purpose of the two July 10 meetings — one in the afternoon, the other at



David Dore photo

Brian Brosnan from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., in Worcester explains one of the options presented at a meeting the afternoon of Tuesday, July 10 on the reconstruction of Main Street (Route 9) in downtown Spencer.

night — was for VHB and town officials to present conceptual designs for improving downtown and get comments from residents and business owners. About two dozen people attended the afternoon session. A workshop was held in December to present research, analysis, design parameters and preliminary concepts.

Town Administrator Adam Gaudette said the next steps are to have a public hearing on the "preferred option" and move forward with plans until they reach the 25 percent phase. Among the items to be considered in the 25 percent plans will be using the newly created area next to the Sugden Block when Pleasant Street is moved and handicap parking for each of the businesses in the area. The state Department of Transportation will have to approve the plans.

"Earliest we would say is 2015 to get a shovel in the ground," he said.

The town is paying for the design with unspent money from previous budgets (also known as free cash) and Chapter 90 highway aid from the state. The town would also pay to acquire rights of way that might be needed during construction. In return, Gaudette said, the town would be eligible for funding from the federal government distributed by

the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission.

Because the project is getting federal money, Utilities and Facilities Superintendent Steven Tyler said, it must demonstrate improvements in safety and air quality and consider all modes of transportation, such as pedestrians, bicycles and public transit.

Reconstructing Main Street is part of a larger rehabilitation of the downtown area dating back several years. Most of Maple Street (Route 31) has been redone, the town got two grants totaling \$1.2 million for housing rehabilitation and a \$100,000 grant toward the redesign of Mechanic Street from Main Street to Cherry Street, and a downtown marketing study was completed.

Selectmen and Spencer officials believe the Main Street project is "obviously is a main priority," Gaudette said. "Downtown is the crossroads of 9 and 31. Most of our retail and commercial activity goes on here. People walk to shop here ... probably that stretch we have identified as the most important stretch."

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