



June 13, 2013

To: Terry Whalen  
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Town of Chatham

Through: Joe SanClemente  
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Project Manager

From: Nathaniel Curtis  
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Public Involvement Specialist

RE: **West Chatham Roadway Design Project**  
**Office Hours: April 10<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**Summary Memo**

## Overview

The West Chatham Roadway Design Project is being undertaken by the Town of Chatham in coordination with Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), specifically Highway Division District 5, and the Cape Cod Commission. The project addresses Route 28 in West Chatham between George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road. The goal of the work is to develop a design for the improvement of this section of Route 28 and bring this design through the MassDOT design process, including the 25% design public hearing, and ultimately to Plans, Specifications and Estimate (PS&E) drawings which can be used to bid the work for construction. The concept submitted to MassDOT in a Project Initiation Form (PIF) in July of 2011 is being used as a starting point for this process. It should be noted that the PIF concept is not set in stone and is expected to change to greater or lesser extent based on the results of data collection expected for June of 2013 and commentary received from the community through the public involvement process. Such changes are a normal part of a design process undertaken in coordination with MassDOT.

As part of the public involvement process for the West Chatham Roadway Design Project, the Town of Chatham and its consultant team have undertaken various efforts to solicit input from the community. The major components of this process include public information meetings, briefings to local officials, a project website which explains the project and includes documentation about it, responding to written comments and questions received and the office hours conversations summarized in this memorandum. The purpose of the office hours were to provide Chatham community members with an opportunity to meet with the project team's public involvement specialist in a conversational, one-on-one setting outside the of the unique pressures exerted by a standard public information meeting.

## Executive Summary

Among participants, awareness is generally high with regard to the difference between the West Chatham Roadway Design Project and the Route 28 Corridor Visioning Exercise. Some participants reminded the project's public involvement specialist of the significance of making sure that the two projects are coordinated and do not operate at cross purposes. In addition, participants generally showed a high awareness of the components of the July 2011 PIF though some confusion existed to the nature of a roundabout and its difference from a traditional rotary.

Those who spoke in favor of the PIF concept tended to do so from the standpoint of calming traffic, taking West Chatham which today has the feeling of a strip mall and turning it into a village center, and welcoming bicycles and pedestrians to use the businesses in West Chatham. Those who spoke against the concept tended to do so from the perspective that the Town's PIF is an excessive solution to a seasonal problem, fears about gridlocked traffic, concerns about access to businesses during and after construction, and a resistance to see any additional right-of-way acquired by the Town.

When asked about the number one thing they would change about Route 28 in West Chatham as it is today, two major themes emerged. The first of these is that they would prefer this section of Route 28 to be greener and friendlier to bicycles and pedestrians. The other change many participants would like to see is an easier, safer exit from George Ryder Road onto Route 28, particularly when turning left to head towards the center of Chatham.

When asked what single thing they would keep about West Chatham as it is today, local businesses rose to the top of participants' lists. Even those who stated that this section of Route 28, as it exists today, has a strip-mall/highway feel to it, view the businesses along Route 28, by and large, as worthwhile and important to the community. Several participants underscored their belief that the two-way left-turn lane makes these businesses viable through providing adequate access to them.

Generally speaking, participants who belong to a civic organization agree with the position their organization has taken with regard to the Town's PIF concept. Only one group of participants was not in agreement with their organization's view. Several others did not belong to a civic organization or belonged to a civic organization which had not taken a stand with regard to the PIF concept.

The final question asked of participants was an "anything else" question designed to solicit thoughts that participants had not already been able to share through the preceding parts of the conversation. As such, themes related to this question were more difficult to identify. Nonetheless a few overarching ideas did emerge including improving pedestrian and bicycle accommodations, taking a long-term view of potential improvements to the Route 28 corridor, ensuring that local business is not harmed by any changes to Route 28 in West Chatham, and to provide public information meetings that have a sense of forward momentum.

## Methodology

Conversations for the office hours were loosely guided by a seven question protocol developed by the consultant team's public involvement specialist and approved by the Town of Chatham. While visitors to the office hours were allowed to discuss whatever topic they chose and in the order they wished to do so, the protocol's goal was to provide a general framework and structure for conversations to allow for the analysis of trends summarized in this document. The protocol was made available through the project website in advance of the office hours to allow community members to organize their thoughts in advance of their conversation with the project's public involvement specialist.

Office hours were held at the Community Center at 702 Main Street in Chatham on April 10 (10:00AM to 4:30PM), April 16 (10:00AM to 4:30PM) and April 25 (2:00PM to 8:30PM). Community members were alerted to the upcoming office hours in the following ways:

- In the initial press release regarding the first public information meeting of the design phase. This item appeared in Chatham's local newspaper in March 2013;
- At the initial public information meeting for the design phase of the project, held in April 2013;
- Via an email burst to the project's stakeholder database, sent in April 2013; and,
- Materials posted at the Town Hall, Community Center and Town Offices Annex.

Members of the community who communicated with the project team immediately before and during the office hours were encouraged to participate. Individuals who contacted the project team in the days immediately following the office hours were offered the opportunity to participate by telephone. Ultimately, over the course of

the three sessions listed above, 19 people spoke with the project's public involvement specialist over the course of 13 interviews.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, conversations at office hours were designed to last around a half hour based on the protocol. This was done to ensure that everyone who wanted to speak to the project's public involvement specialist would have an opportunity to do so in a timely manner. Community members were able to schedule themselves for a conversation via email, telephone, or signing up on a sheet attached to the door of the room in which the meetings were held. As participants self-selected to be part of the office hours process, the results summarized herein should be considered directionally important though not statistically significant.

## Detailed Discussion

The following section discusses responses provided by participants in the office hours in detail by question.

### Questions 1 and 2

The first two questions of the protocol were designed to be "warm-up" questions, easing participants into the conversation, while confirming their basic understanding of the project. Question one addressed whether participants knew about the two projects currently addressing Route 28 in Chatham while question two asked if they were familiar with the components of the concept outlined in the Town's July 2011 PIF. Awareness of the two projects and the components of the PIF were high. One participant expressed concern that the Town, Cape Cod Commission and Consultant team were coordinating their separate but overlapping efforts on Route 28, but was reassured when told that the communication was in fact taking place. A different participant indicated that he had not been previously aware of the all of the components of the PIF prior to hearing them read during the conversation, but was generally aware of the project.

### Question 3

The third question consisted of several parts. It asked participants how they felt about the concept articulated in the PIF, elements of that they liked or didn't like, whether they had ever changed their opinion about the concept and if so, what had influenced them to make that change. Generally speaking, participants indicated that they had either always been in favor of or against the PIF concept. Only one indicated that she had changed her view of the PIF concept after attending the initial public information meeting on April 4<sup>th</sup>, going from opposition to support. Participants who spoke positively about the concept universally favored it in its entirety without choosing among the several component parts though one suggested that increased attention be paid to pedestrian crossings. Those who spoke in favor of the concept tended to focus their commentary on the following projected benefits:

- The removal of the two-way left turn lane would create a village center atmosphere in West Chatham as opposed to the current "strip mall along the highway feel" of the area;
- The removal of the two-way left turn lane would undo roadway accommodations for the big box stores that were projected for this section of Route 28 thirty years ago, but which generally have not appeared with the exception of the Ocean State Job Lot;
- Removal of the two-way left-turn lane would make it easier to make left turns out of driveways and streets entering Route 28 by ending the "double threat;"<sup>2</sup>
- That the two-way left-turn lane is a relic of 1950's and 60's era planning that prioritized moving cars quickly above all else;
- That similar changes have worked in other communities and would work in Chatham;
- Welcoming cyclists and pedestrians into the concentration of businesses along this section of Route 28 would benefit local merchants; and,

<sup>1</sup> While the conversations were generally one-on-one, two groups attended as did several couples.

<sup>2</sup> Double threat is a condition wherein a vehicle attempting to cross two lanes of oncoming traffic traveling in the same direction has to deal with the possibility of, for example, the vehicle in the right lane yielding, but the one in the left lane failing to do so resulting in an accident or near miss between the turning vehicle and the one in the left lane.

- Slowing traffic speeds in the area between George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road will improve safety and harmonize this section of Route 28 with the abutting sections.

Those who spoke against the concept generally stated that some modest improvements to Route 28 between George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road would be appropriate. The ones most frequently mentioned were increased pedestrian friendliness through the installation of a sidewalk on the road's south side where one is not currently present and increased greenery to soften the road's current highway appearance. Only one participant suggested that the section of Route 28 under discussion needs no changes of any sort. Common concerns of participants who spoke against the PIF concept included:

- The idea that the changes outlined in the PIF concept are "excessive," in that they are solutions too large and too far-reaching for the modest-to-minor problems that they intended to fix. An example of this was the idea, voiced by several participants, that as there is relatively little pedestrian and bicycle activity in the corridor today, additional accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians are in all likelihood not needed and a potential waste of money. Also suggested was the idea that the proposed solutions are only being developed to address problems that exist during July and August;
- The Town has plans to increase retail and residential density in West Chatham without expecting other sections of Chatham to "carry their fair share;"
- Concerns over access to businesses along the corridor. This concern was often expressed as the idea that if the two-way left-turn lane is removed summertime tourist traffic will avoid the area due to gridlock or be unable to turn into businesses along this section of Route 28 and simply bypass them. One participant indicated significant concern over whether the deflection islands associated with the proposed roundabout would make it difficult for customers to enter and exit his business. Some participants, though certainly not all indicated that they might feel differently if empirical data showed that the corridor could operate effectively with two lanes only;
- Concerns that emergency vehicles will not be able to traverse the area effectively with only two lanes and heavy traffic;
- Concern over the idea of potential property takings, particularly in the area of the proposed roundabout. The idea of a signal at this location was offered several times as addressing issues associated with exiting George Ryder Road without requiring the acquisition of additional right-of-way by the Town;
- The belief that roundabouts, though different from rotaries, are inherently unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians;
- The belief that the planning process which preceded the current design process did not reflect the will of Chatham residents and the PIF concept is being forced on the community by the current members of the Board of Selectmen; and
- The feeling that the Town conducted the recently-completed sewer project without adequate regard for impacts to local businesses and that a similar situation would be encountered during implementation of the Town's PIF concept or a variant of it.

It is worth noting that some participants who stated that they were against the PIF concept did so in part on the basis of the idea that the intersection of Route 28 George Ryder Road would become a rotary. When the difference between a traditional rotary and the proposed roundabout was explained, and it was noted that the roundabout would be designed to accommodate commercial trucks, fire equipment and vehicles towing boat or equipment trailers, there seemed to be some softening of opposition, though in none of the conversations did opposition entirely cease based on this clarification.

#### Question 4

Question five addressed the public involvement process associated with the planning phase and participants' impressions of it. Participants' comments on the prior outreach effort were as is to be expected with a process where a choice has been made and one group approves of it while another does not. Generally speaking, participants who voiced approval of the Town's concept plan generally felt that the public outreach conducted during the planning process was strong while those expressing disapproval of the PIF concept felt outreach had been weak. One participant stated that while the public involvement process was strong there are "many opinionated people in Chatham," who simply chose not to listen and then blamed the process. This split was not however entirely universal and both PIF supporters and opponents noted ways in which the planning phase

outreach could have been better. Generally speaking the more negative statements regarding the process corresponded to stronger negative feelings about the PIF concept.

Themes regarding how the planning period outreach could have been improved included the following:

- The process was not responsive to what was actually said in public information meetings;
- The petition requesting that the two-way left turn lane be kept has been ignored;
- The Town's consultant took a high-handed, rigid approach and expected that community members would automatically follow his suggestions based on his many years of experience in the field;
- The Town's consultant was "wishy-washy" and presented so many potential options for consideration that community members became confused, frustrated and ultimately gave up on the process;
- The Town's consultant showed potential options which were completely inappropriate to Chatham such as double left turn lanes and signalized intersections with signals on "urban" style mast arms;
- Meetings were amateurish and produced cartoonish results so completely out of touch with existing conditions that people could not "see themselves" in the modeled future conditions;
- When suggestions made by community members were dismissed by the consultant or the Town, adequate reasons for the dismissal were never provided, "things just disappeared;" and
- The idea that every public information meeting was by and large a repeat of the one that preceded it and that no real progress was ever made or if made, shared with the community and/or crowd control at meetings was ineffectual making it difficult to demonstrate the progress made.

The most negative statement about the process came from a group of individuals who suggested that the planning phase consultant had offered improvements to Route 28 in West Chatham that had been much more in alignment with residents' wishes, but that after having done so, the consultant had been fired for failing to carry out the wishes of the Board of Selectmen.

#### Question 5

Question five asked participants about what they would change about Route 28 between George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road. The most common theme among both those who voice opinions for and against the PIF concept is that they would change the roadway to be more pedestrian and bicycle friendly, greener with more trees and grass and less pavement and provide other streetscape improvements that would make the center of West Chatham feel more like a village center. Another broadly shared theme was the idea that exiting George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road is difficult and dangerous and should be made safer. The intersection of George Ryder Road and Route 28 was particularly noted for poor sight lines that make it difficult for vehicles traveling eastbound to see vehicles attempting to exit the side street and head east towards Chatham center. A number of participants suggested this could be achieved as well with a signal as with a roundabout and with fewer impacts to abutting properties. Generally speaking, participants in favor of the PIF concept also noted that they would prefer to see lower speeds on this section of Route 28 and that the best way to accomplish this would be through a "road diet" that narrowed the roadway through the removal of the two-way left-turn lane.

#### Question 6

Question six asked participants what they would keep about Route 28 between George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road. The major theme in response to this question is that outside of the current businesses, which were frequently noted as useful, significant establishments, there is very little to recommend this section of Route 28 as it is currently configured. Several participants suggested that it is the one section of Chatham that looks like a strip mall and that the area should be upgraded while preserving the businesses already resident there. Ease of access to local businesses and effective passage of traffic were also noted as important to maintain under any future conditions. Several participants also specifically stated that the two-way left-turn should be kept as imperative to maintaining efficient traffic operations and access to businesses.

#### Question 7

Question seven asked participants if they were a member of a neighborhood group or civic organization and if so whether they agreed with that group's position on the PIF concept if one had been taken. While not all participants were aligned with a civic group, generally speaking if they were members, they agreed with the position taken by their organization. Several participants were members of local civic organizations which were not concerned with the West Chatham Roadway Design Project such as the Great Hills Association. One

participant indicated that he is a member of the West Chatham Association and the West Chatham Village and Business Association and stated that he is uncomfortable with the way both groups arrived at their opposing positions on the PIF concept. Two participants indicated that they are members of the West Chatham Association but feel that the two-way left-turn lane should be removed because they have seen similar “road diets” work well in other states.

### Question 8

Question 8, the final question, asked participants to tell the project’s public involvement specialist the number one important thing in their mind with regard to the job. As such common themes were harder to pin down and responses to this question varied broadly. A few themes which did emerge included the following:

- Improve bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on Route 28;
- Try to get beyond “opinions” and “town politics” and focus on what’s best for the town in the long-term;
- Protect local businesses; and,
- Keep meetings moving and be clear about what is to be achieved in them.

Other responses to this question include the following:

- Attempt to present designs in a way that show “win-win” conditions for people on both sides of the Town’s PIF concept;
- The Route 28 West Chatham Roadway Design Project is positive and has good long-term implications if people can be made to accept a change;
- Concern that the roundabout design is unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians;
- Concern over impacts to local businesses and the potential for land-takings;
- Reduce the amount of pavement on the section of Route 28 under design;
- Keep the two-way left-turn lane;
- Lower speeds;
- Belief that the Town has spent and is spending too much money on consultants;
- The importance of coordinating the West Chatham Roadway Design Project and the Route 28 Corridor Visioning exercise; and
- The importance of making sure that Route 28 between George Ryder and Barnhill Roads match its abutting sections to help traffic move smoothly, but calmly.

## **Recommendations**

In his response to question 8, one participant commented that “everyone wants to be agreeable,” but that to date the choices that have led to the Town’s PIF concept have been articulated in an “either/or” fashion which has caused community members to become polarized as either entirely for or entirely against what is in that document. This stands in contrast to the fact that while a few participants wish to see West Chatham remain either entirely or nearly exactly as it is today, participants generally agreed that West Chatham Center would be a more vibrant place if it were greener, had calmer traffic, less pavement and was more welcoming to pedestrians and bicycles. There is also general agreement that the businesses of West Chatham are valuable to the community and should be protected during any future construction and part of the long-term future in any redesign of the corridor.

In light of these commonalities, HSH recommends that:

- The Town and consultant team continue to underscore that the PIF concept is a starting point, not what will be taken through 25% design and through PS&E (final construction drawings);
- The Town and consultant team continue to underscore the process to get to a 25% design and that pre-25% design materials will be presented publicly before going to a formal MassDOT public hearing. As part of that process, new, detailed empirical data will be gathered about the section of Route 28 under design. If that data requires that, for example, some kind of left-turning accommodation be maintained on Route 28 between George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road, then the consultant team and Town will be led by the information gathered and amend the PIF concept accordingly. Some participants who expressed reservations about the PIF concept indicated that they would be more amenable to it if data were to show that it was in fact a workable solution;

- The public involvement process should be as transparent as possible and if an idea or element of the project is dismissed, the reason for that dismissal should be laid out clearly. To date, HSH has provided community members with a view into the workings of the project by creating a project website, posting all materials associated with the public involvement process to date to that site, and making the many emails exchanged between the project's public involvement specialist and local residents available as an appendix to the meeting minutes of the April 4<sup>th</sup> public information meeting. As the process moves forward, HSH will continue to update the website with materials from the public involvement process such as presentations, minutes, and emails between community members and the project. Data collected to inform the project will be made available via the website as well. As HSH works with the community and Town staff to develop and refine options for Route 28 in West Chatham, we will show clearly through our presentations at public information meetings where ideas have come from and if they are dismissed, why this has taken place;
- Public information meetings should feel cumulative to those who attend them. Where the project has been should be clearly visible, but the focus should be on moving forward. The 25% design process should play out as it normally does, but should do so with as much speed as possible to provide the community with an understanding that progress is being made. In our presentations to the community, HSH will work to ensure that the focus of materials is on next steps and decisions to be made rather than rehashing what is already known. Residents or stakeholders coming to the project fresh and without prior knowledge will be respectfully directed to the project website and the public involvement specialist for an "off-line" grounding in knowledge about the project. Once the data collection for the project is complete, HSH will return to Chatham to share these findings in late summer or early fall of, most likely August or September, and will thereafter maintain inasmuch as is possible the schedule laid out in the public involvement plan;
- As the 25% design proceeds, the plan evolved by the Town and consultant team should focus as much as possible on areas of commonality: calming traffic, providing safe entrance onto Route 28 from George Ryder Road and Barnhill Road, greening West Chatham Center, reducing the amount of pavement in the area and making the area more friendly to bicycles and pedestrians; and,
- Businesses along Route 28 are important, not only to their owners and operators, but to customers from across the community. As the design process continues, provision of long-term access to businesses should be given significant attention. As the design process nears its conclusion and a design is generally finalized, a detailed construction management plan to preserve access to businesses during construction should be developed with input from owners and operators.

## Appendix A: Office Hours Guide Protocol

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Chatham Address:</b>	
<b>Affiliation:</b>	

1. There are 2 processes currently going on that address Route 28 in the Town of Chatham. One is the Route 28 Corridor Visioning exercise which deals with land use all along the corridor from Crowell Road to the Harwich town line. This project is being conducted by the Town of Chatham and the CCC. The other project is the Route 28 Intersection Improvements project which deals with the Route 28 roadway from George Ryder Road to Barn Hill Road. This project is being conducted by Howard/Stein-Hudson under the direction of the Town of Chatham. Were you aware that there are two projects, which while related, are separate and distinct?
2. Are you aware that at this time, the Town of Chatham has identified a plan for the section of Route 28 which, in alignment with the Town's comprehensive plan, proposes to:
  - a. Reduce the road's cross section
  - b. Lower traffic speeds
  - c. Improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations
  - d. Improve intersection safety and function:
    - i. Signalizing Route 28/Barn Hill Road
    - ii. Converting Route 28/George Ryder Road/George Ryder Road South into a modern roundabout
  - e. Clarify access to local businesses through consolidation of curb cuts and elimination of the 2-way left turn lane.
  - f. Improve landscape/streetscape
3. How do you feel about the plan articulated above? What elements do you like? What elements don't you like? Have you ever changed your opinion about the plan articulated above? If so, when did you change your mind and what influenced you to do so?
4. The plan identified in question 2 came about through a multi-year planning process conducted by the Town of Chatham. What were your impressions of that process? What elements of that process would you say were strong? Which were not?
5. If you could change any one thing about the section of Route 28 being addressed by this project, what would it be and why?
6. If you could keep any one thing the same about the section of Route 28 being addressed by this project, what would it be and why?
7. As we embark on this project with the Town of Chatham, if you could tell me just one thing, what would it be?