

This document was distributed to council members and read into the record by Dan Schnaidt at the Tuesday, May 10, 2011 Town Council meeting as TCI's response to the "Glastonbury Center 2020 Shared Vision Plan" presented by BFJ Planning.

## **TCI Response to Glastonbury Shared Vision 2020 Report**

On behalf of the Town Center Initiative I'd like to thank the Council and town staff for undertaking this planning process, something TCI has worked hard over the years to encourage. Thanks also to JFP for its fine work. The final report presented tonight offers some excellent recommendations we all hope will make the center of town more attractive, walkable and prosperous.

We strongly endorse the report's recommendations for greater density; for bringing buildings up to the sidewalk; reducing curb cuts and driveways; finding a public-private solution to parking; and for a midblock street between Hebron and Welles

**New Streets** For this new street to attract pedestrians and fully succeed, we believe it needs retail on both sides together with on-street parking. Otherwise you are simply dressing up the status quo. As the opportunities develop, TCI encourages the creation of two new streets, the one proposed and another east of Station 35.

**Street Width** The proposed street cross-sections show 11-14' travel lanes, and we know that 9' will work, and would allow for a complete street with travel lane, parking, bike lane, and wide sidewalks all within the right of way. It would also reduce the traffic speed now posted at 30-35 mph, much too high. Better to post limits at 20-25 mph.

**Parking** We concur with JFP's finding that, "Further addressing the way in which parking is provided and managed in the Town Center will be key to increasing walkability." They make excellent suggestions for shared parking, adding a story to the existing garage in a public-private partnership, and making connections between lots. Adding on-street parking, which was discussed in the workshops, however, didn't make it into the study. It needs to be considered. More on-street parking would reduce the need for surface parking, freeing up land for development. On-street parking also creates a safety buffer for pedestrians and outdoor diners. Strips of lawn which are arguably out of place in the center of town, could easily make way for on-street parking.

Within the limits of its authority we would like to see the Town develop a coherent and efficient parking system in Town Center. It's a complex and challenging problem which calls for additional study in a second phase of planning.

**Business Improvement District** The discussion of a municipal parking facility concludes with a suggestion TCI strongly endorses, "this parking approach could be combined with a business improvement district to assure coordination with the goals of this Shared Vision Plan." Middletown's Mayor Giuliano recently told me the creation of a BID, was critical to their success on Main St. because it created a shared sense of purpose.

**Traffic Improvements** TCI is concerned that a new turn lane from Welles to Main could erode pedestrian comfort. The sequence is not clear, but any new lane should only come after the improvements to traffic flow in the signal phasing project are assessed.

**Mass Transit** Except for an image of a bus shelter there is no mention of mass transit. The study area contains 32 marked bus stops, 4 with shelters, many noncompliant with ADA. These stops are serviced by 25 daily routes. Between 5:30am and 8:40pm a bus passes a stop more than 600 times. As the price of gas increases and more people live and shop in the center, mass transit improvements will be essential to quality of life and relieving traffic. We encourage you to think more about mass transit.

**Bicycle Circulation** Glastonbury Bikeways will have a better understanding, but it seems to us that additional bike connections between New London Turnpike and Main St. to avoid traffic on Main and Hebron are needed. It seems like a bike route should be located along Rankin Road connecting cyclists to the trailhead and Riverfront Park. We do not think that signage alone will make clear how much bicycles were emphasized in this plan, and suggest painting share-roads indicators if we are not able to provide full bike lanes.



**Zoning** The report does not consider form based zoning. Simsbury recently won an award for their master plan which employs a form based code. There is much to be learned from this type of zoning, regardless of whether it is employed. As the process moves to the next steps, we believe form-based codes should be considered, particularly the idea that there are distinct zones, rural, suburban and urban, each with its own sense of place and aesthetic. Glastonbury should have diverse and distinct areas of town rather than a uniform suburban look and feel.

Drive-thrus, although discussed extensively, mostly negatively, in the workshops, did not make it into the report. They undermine pedestrian safety and walkability. The new Town Center District needs to exclude drive-thrus if we want a walkable center.

We also think ground floor retail needs to be discussed as new code is developed. The report recommends 'mixed use' defined as 'retail on ground floor with residential above.' The dictionary definition of retail is: the sale of goods to consumers. Not professional services. In a shopping district, professional offices do not belong in ground floor retail space; they belong upstairs. Middletown and West Hartford are interesting because they only have retail on the ground floor.

**Lighting** The suggested light fixture for the center is the one used at the fountain green. This fixture is not night sky friendly and should be reviewed by the Conservation Commission before becoming the standard. A point-by-point foot candle study of the area should be completed before fixtures and locations are selected. The town should support LEED's exterior light trespass recommendations for all new fixtures. Like the parking study, this could be completed as part of a second phase.

**Historic Preservation** The November 4th presentation had a poster indicating the two federal, two state, and one local historic district that extend into the study area. It would have helped to include these overlay maps in the report.

**Sidewalks** Wide sidewalks are a must if we expect people to come to Town Center and walk around. Narrow sidewalks appropriate to a suburban neighborhood, or a business district such as Glastonbury Blvd, are completely inadequate in a walkable retail district.

If everyone likes the Main Street sidewalk in front of Daybreak, which they do, why not make more of them? We have wide sidewalks in front of 124 Hebron, which then narrow down to single file as you move to Main Street in the proposal. This doesn't make sense to us. At the very least, two parents with strollers need to be able to walk side-by-side. Wide sidewalks should ring the block from Main to Hebron to New London Tpk. to Welles and back to Main.

Consider also the high-growth scenario predicting almost 500K sq. ft. of new residential and 285K sq. ft. of retail and office. Wider sidewalks will be needed. Waiting to build them later will cost more and damage to maturing street trees.

**Crosswalks** There is no focused exploration of crosswalks. While paths within blocks are given significant thought, the connections across streets, especially potential midblock crosswalks, receive little attention.

After significant observation, TCI identified four key locations for crosswalks around the intersection of Hebron and Main. These were places where a large numbers of jaywalkers were observed.



While there are crosswalks in this area, these locations are equally if not more frequently used because of their proximity to major destinations. Pedestrians will continue to cut across traffic and need a safe way to cross.

Cobblestones are suggested for crosswalks. We wonder why cobblestone and not brick? Brick is used in the most iconic sections of the town center, and may better serve ADA requirements, cost effectiveness, and historical relevance.

**Utility Lines** The utility lines are buried on Welles and Rankin. We need to complete the job and bury the lines on Hebron from Main to NLT and on Main from Rankin to Welles. It was not discussed because of the cost, but it should be included in a 10-year vision plan. The utility poles on the north side of Hebron are an eyesore.

Burying the utility lines will also provide street width flexibility to allow for a “complete

street.”

**Design Guidelines for Trees, Shrubs and Seasonal Plantings** We should promote native species in ALL new plantings for sustainability reasons, lower maintenance costs, reduced watering and to support plant and wildlife diversity. Showcasing local native plant species where possible also helps to create our sense of place.

**Summary**

- Wide sidewalks are critical
- More attention to mass transit
- Bury utility lines when improving Hebron Ave. streetscape
- Consider form-based zoning
- Restrict ground floor to retail
- Second-phase studies for parking and lighting
- Investigate Business Improvement District
- Add second new street between Hebron to Welles
- Use native plants

Thanks again for undertaking this project!