

# MEETING MINUTES

## WILLOW ROAD STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING (Meeting #14)

March 3, 2008

Attached are meeting minutes from the Steering Committee Team Meeting for the Willow Road Context-Sensitive Enhancement Plan held February 28, 2008 at the Village Hall in Northfield.

### Steering Committee Members

	<u>Absent</u>	<u>Present</u>
Ken Behles, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
John Birkinbine, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Peter Fischer, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Fred Gougler, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Becky Hurley, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
Mark Kurensky, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
Ian Sherman, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
Scott Turban, Village of Northfield	<u>X</u>	_____

### Alternates

Carolyn Kurtz, Village of Winnetka	<u>X</u>	_____
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### Staff Liaisons

Stacy Sigman, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Steve Saunders, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
Doug Williams, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>

### Consultants

Scott Freres, The Lakota Group	_____	<u>X</u>
Daniel Grove, The Lakota Group	_____	<u>X</u>
Kevin Clark, The Lakota Group	<u>X</u>	_____
Mike Kerr, Christopher Burke Engineering	_____	<u>X</u>

### Additional Participants

Richard Kates, Resident, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
Jeffery Liss, Resident, Village of Winnetka	_____	<u>X</u>
Ervin Hobson, Resident, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Margaret R. Parcels, Resident, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Chris Clark, Resident, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Ted Greene, Resident, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
Terry Gottlieb, Resident, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>
John S. Kemper, Resident, Village of Northfield	_____	<u>X</u>

## **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

- Lakota distributed meeting minutes for Steering Committee meeting #13. John Birkinbine motioned to adopt, and Ken Behles seconded the motion. Ken Behles asked for a revision to the minutes and read a proposed revision. No other changes were identified. Vote was taken to approve the minutes as amended and motion passed.

## **OPENING COMMITTEE COMMENTS**

- Becky Hurley indicated that Scott Turban was not able to participate in the meeting due to personal reasons. She then overviewed the agenda and timeline for the meeting, and emphasized that there was a lot of discussion to get through in this last meeting. She asked if there were any other Committee comments before starting the content of the meeting.
- Fred Gougler asked how the Committee should take in the public opinion that was heard throughout the process. There was some Committee discussion, but the agreement was that public input should be balanced with each Committee member's own judgment.

## **DISCUSSION/REVIEW OF ROAD CORRIDOR FROM THE RIVER BRIDGE TO WAUKEGAN**

- Daniel Grove overviewed the decisions remaining on the Corridor that are not affected by the quantity or configuration of lanes:
  - Treatment of Eaton and Dickens Streets, whether to maintain access, or close and create cul-de-sacs.
  - Treatment of Bracken Lane, whether to maintain access, or close and reroute traffic onto Jeffery Street.
  - Treatment of Old Willow, whether to maintain limited access out of Old Willow onto Willow Road, or to close.
  - Pedestrian enhancement treatments of Sunset Ridge and Wagner intersections including bollard/barriers, pedestrian countdown timers, defined crosswalks, and thermoplastic decorative paving in the intersection.
- Stacy Sigman commented that in the previous study, emergency vehicle access was maintained at the end of the cul-de-sacs and should be reflected in this plan.
- Peter Fischer raised the issue of Bracken Lane and indicated, that while he is a resident on Bracken Lane and believes it is not the popular opinion, he feels that access onto Willow Road should be closed. He stated that throughout the process, limiting vehicular access to improve Corridor safety was applied in other locations, and should be applied here for consistency.
  - The Committee discussed the idea, and that it would only require an incremental condemnation of an existing easement, to allow for additional users.
  - Mark Kurensky suggested that it be treated like the suggested alterations to the Edens, that the graphic reflect the recommendation to close Bracken off, but that the text identify that it needs further study.
  - Ken Behles also suggested that some sort of graphic be included in the report to indicate the proposed reroute.

- Mike Kerr raised the issue of Old Willow. He indicated that if it was to be kept open, as a right-out only, it should be shown as more of a 90 degree angle with Willow Road. He also indicated that it would be more successful and likely to be adopted by IDOT if it was done in tandem with a four-lane configuration.
  - The Committee briefly discussed the idea, with general consensus being to close access, that similar to the Bracken Lane discussion this was a Corridor-wide policy issue to close access and clean-up the roadway.
  - Fred Gougler and Mike Kerr discussed that in the previous 1999 process, it was an IDOT demand to close it.
- **The Committee recommended the following:**


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  - In general, access from between Willow Road and Churchill Street, Dickens Street, Eaton Street, Bracken Lane and Old Willow Road be closed for safety and security, and that further engineering study be conducted to finalize and test the design.
  - All designs should accommodate emergency vehicle access
  - At Churchill, the design should attempt to replace on-street parking.
  - At Bracken, the preferred design is to remove access completely, and if this is not possible, then the intersection should be redesigned for safer turning movements.
  - At Old Willow, the preferred design is to remove access completely, and if this is not possible, the intersection should be designed to only allow right-out movements.
- Daniel Grove gave an overview of the multi-use path system for the Corridor.
  - John Birkinbine stated that the key juncture of the path system, the underpass between Willow and Clarkson parks, is the most likely to get cut if budgets are tight.
  - Ken Behles encouraged that there be a fallback solution for bringing the path system over the Skokie Lagoons, in case a new bridge is not possible. Scott Freres indicated that the existing vehicular bridge should be modified to have a barrier separating vehicular traffic from the multi-use path, and that would be the back-up plan
- Becky Hurley asked the Committee if they had any comments on the pedestrian safety ideas, or if they were generally supported.
  - Peter Fischer indicated he still had concerns that pedestrian countdown timers at school intersections would become a game for children. Steve Saunders noted that the timing on these signals could be programmed with additional time past when the countdown finished to allow pedestrians to clear the intersection.
  - Stacy Sigman stated she was concerned with showing the pedestrian path pulled into Willow Park, that the park district has specific plans for the park, and the alignment may be too aggressive. Stacy suggested that the path be brought closer to the road right-of-way.
- Fred Gougler indicated that this is an advisory committee, and the plan will still need to go through Phase 1 engineering, so there are many small details that will be resolved as a part of that process over a number of years.
- Scott Freres asked the Committee when they would like to see this plan move forward and be implemented.

- John Birkinbine commented that the Village of Northfield was ready to move forward on the 1999 plan, which would have been in the ground by now. So the Village would like to see any plan to come out of this process be implemented as soon as possible
- The Committee generally agreed.
- Fred Gougler commented that the Committee has never talked about the costs of the proposed improvements in this plan, and the Committee discussed how this was not in the scope of this planning study, but it was instead IDOT's responsibility to estimate costs after engineering and further study.
- Steve Saunders stated that the Village of Winnetka is ready to move into Phase 1 Engineering on their portion of Willow Road, with a goal of 2011 construction, and will be using the results of this study as a input into that process.
- Daniel Grove then gave an overview of the Concept A layout for Willow Road from Sunset Ridge to the pedestrian underpass. This plan included a typical two-lane cross-section with curb and gutter, and a four-lane cross-section at the intersections with one through-lane in each direction, one dedicated left-hand turn lane and one dedicated right-hand turn lane.
  - Doug Williams asked the two engineers if they had any concerns.
    - Steve Saunders commented that the lane widths, 13' lanes with a 5' striped asphalt shoulder, might encourage "daredevil" shoulder riding.
    - Mike Kerr commented that the lane configuration may be refined, but the key thing the Committee should understand is that in a two lane configuration, there cannot be two – 12' lanes, that additional width is needed for emergency vehicles to pass.
  - Becky Hurley asked the engineers to comment on how this plan addresses mobility, capacity, vehicular safety and pedestrian safety.
    - Mike Kerr commented that the plan provides improved mobility, but capacity would be slightly decreased due to the dedicated left-turn phase. He indicated that he believed, based on the similarities to the 1999 plan, this plan should have a mild decrease in rear-end vehicular accidents, and an increased reduction in turning accidents. Finally, while it is hard to quantify, he thought that the increased pedestrian safety features would mitigate any small increase in the width of pedestrian crossings, so he believed that this plan was safer for pedestrians than the existing conditions.
    - Steve Saunders indicated that he concurred with Mike's assessment. He also noted that the west-bound taper should be curbed and not striped for vehicular safety.
  - Becky Hurley then asked the engineers to comment on what they think IDOT's view of this plan would be.
    - Mike Kerr stated that IDOT approved the previous plan, and because this one was not drastically different, he thought they would be okay with it.

- Steve Saunders commented that because the plan does not provide for an increase in capacity, he thought IDOT might have some problems with it, that addressing capacity would make the plan more persuasive to IDOT.
  - Peter Fischer asked the engineers if they thought IDOT's use of the Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) process would make IDOT more likely to accept a plan that does not accommodate increased capacity.
  - Mike Kerr indicated that he felt that IDOT's key road improvement goals were paramount, and that CSS was secondary. Therefore, if IDOT was concerned with capacity, the CSS process would not overturn that.
- Daniel Grove then gave an overview of the Concept B layout for Willow Road from Sunset Ridge to the pedestrian underpass. This plan included a typical four-lane cross-section with curb and gutter, and a five-lane cross-section at the intersections with two through-lanes in each direction and one dedicated left-hand turn lane.
  - Doug Williams asked again for any concerns the engineers might have.
    - Steve Saunders questioned the 4' striped median.
    - Scott Freres commented that instead of having four 12' lanes, there were four 11' lanes and a 4' median. This median provided additional separation between oncoming vehicles and the narrower lanes would encourage slower traffic.
  - Becky Hurley again asked the engineers to comment on how this plan addresses mobility, capacity, vehicular safety and pedestrian safety.
    - Mike Kerr commented that mobility and capacity would be increased. Rear-end and turning accidents would both be reduced. Finally, while again hard to quantify, he believed that pedestrian safety would be improved over existing conditions. Because Concept B has more pavement than Concept A, he did not feel it was safer for pedestrians than Concept A.
    - Steve Saunders indicated he concurred with Mike's assessment, and added that he thought with no lane tapers in this section, that sideswipe accidents would be reduced.
  - Becky Hurley again asked the engineers to comment on what they think IDOT's view of this plan would be.
    - Mike Kerr commented that he felt IDOT would prefer the added capacity of Concept B.
- The Committee then discussed the potential effect of Concept B on the speed of the traffic. Steve Saunders commented that in free-flow conditions, there may be increased speed.
- The Committee also discussed the effects on intersection level of service for each of these concepts. Mike Kerr recounted from memory what he believed the time savings would be at Wagner and Sunset Ridge if a four-lane plan was implemented. Doug Williams asked Mike if the study took into account any traffic currently using an alternate route that may shift back to Willow Road if improved. Mike indicated that their study used CATS data, and did not use a regional model.

- The Committee discussed the other regional impacts of Willow Road, including additional burden put on Winnetka Avenue as an alternate route, and the use of Lake Street to Patriot Drive to Willow Road as another alternate.
- Fred Gougler asked about the lane widths of the two plans, and why Concept B did not have 13' lanes like Concept A. He indicated he was concerned with an increased danger of head-on collisions with Concept B, and that he was not convinced that narrower lanes would slow down drivers.
  - Stacy Sigman asked if the extra lanes in Concept B takes away from the feeling of tightness created by the 11' lanes, therefore negating any traffic slowing/calming potential.
  - Scott Freres commented that it is not just the width of the overall road, but also the proximity of the cars in other lanes that influences the desire to slow.
  - Mike Kerr commented that 11' lanes are not uncommon in the region, so Committee members should not be concerned about them as part of the design.
  - Fred Gougler asked if there was a safer four-lane design, possibly with a raised median.
- Becky Hurley asked the engineers which Concept had better mobility.
  - Steve Saunders commented that the left turns at Whittier and Chapel Hill would be more difficult in Concept B due to the extra lane of travel to cross. Other than that, he thought that Concept B would feel better, from a mobility standpoint, to most drivers.
- To move the discussion forward, Ken Behles suggested that the Committee analyze the intersections in each concept with respect to the first design principle of safety, then address the five other design principles. He offered his analysis for the intersections, which was that a narrower crossing/less lanes to cross was clearly better for pedestrian safety. The difference between the two intersections was 8' of width and one extra lane. He asked the Committee if that difference was outside of the threshold of comfort for pedestrian safety.
- Peter Fischer commented that he was already concerned with going from a three-lane to a four-lane intersection, but he was open to it because the lanes could be narrowed and mobility would be improved. He did not feel this choice was down to a four or five lane intersection, and that a three-lane cross-section could include narrower lanes and improvements. His decision to support a four-lane cross-section was to make a concession, but the five-lane cross-section added too much extra pavement, as well as the potential for additional speed, and he would not be comfortable supporting it.
- John Birkinbine indicated that he was very concerned about the northern most westbound through lane. He indicated that a car in the southern through lane could block visibility to the northern lane for a pedestrian crossing north on the east side of the intersection. He added that this is the type of situation that occurs on Willow Road east of Waukegan Road, and has led to fatalities in the past.
- Mark Kurensky summarized his feelings for supporting Concept B. He indicated that the plan needed a balance of safety, the ability to support growth of the Northfield Downtown, and also have traction with IDOT, and that he believed Concept B accomplished those things.

- Becky Hurley added that the Plan the Committee recommends needs to be a persuasive plan with the ability to get implemented.
- Ian Sherman summarized his support for Concept B. He commented that he is an evidence-based person, and that he thinks IDOT will never approve a two-lane plan. He agreed that safety is an incredibly important issue, but that the engineers believe that either plan is safer than what is out there today. Concept B is only an 8' increase in width over Concept A. The CSS approach is valuable, but the plan needs to still meet basic requirements, including addressing the need for increased capacity. He indicated that he believes addressing capacity is the only way to get the state to fund the underpass and other improvements.
- Becky Hurley commented that she felt Northfield was in a tough situation. Because it is located on one of the few area roads providing access to both the Tollway and the Edens, it is being asked to contribute to the solution of a regional traffic problem. She stated that if Northfield is expected to “host” a widened Willow Road, then it ought to be left substantially better off in the end. This would mean being sure the road includes the improvements the Committee has discussed. Those improvements are also important to Winnetka residents, both for adult residents and for the many Winnetka children who use the Northfield parks.
- John Birkinbine commented on Ian Sherman’s statement saying that he thought that IDOT approving the 1999 plan is evidence that they could approve a two/three-lane plan today. He indicated that from his perspective, it was the politicians and not IDOT that stopped that plan from being implemented.
- Peter Fischer stated that he felt the Committee was comparing apples and oranges when talking about Concepts A and B. That any enhancements applied to Concept B to make it safer could be applied to Concept A to make it safer still. Also, that IDOT is not just a transportation authority, but a political creature as well, receiving outside pressure. Northfield and Winnetka could push back. He indicated that he feels that it is not worth compromising safety to save seconds on a drive. That he believes that the idea of capacity in the Corridor is only an illusion that really should be addressed regionally.
- Steve Saunders commented that he felt it is unfair to say IDOT would never approve two-lanes, but it may be harder to get all the extra amenities and enhancements with a two-lane plan.
- Fred Gougler added that from his experience going through the 1999 plan, that IDOT does listen and can be sensitive to local issues.
- Becky Hurley mentioned that she heard rumors of IDOT forcing undesired road improvements on a community, and she believed the example was Route 22, and asked if anyone on the Committee could comment.
- John Birkinbine stated that he was at a meeting where IDOT threatened Northfield with this type of action, and IDOT referred to Route 22. Peter Fischer and Doug Williams both commented that they were at that meeting as well and heard those comments, but that it may just be threats because IDOT would, politically, not want an ugly road.

- Becky Hurley noted that the Committee had reached a lot of consensus, and generated a lot of information for the report, but asked the group how they wanted to bring resolution to the issue of lanes.
  - Ken Behles mentioned that he thought it would be hard to establish consensus. He restated that whatever solution was to move forward needs to meet the five core principles, and he believes that could happen with four-lanes, but he did not think that direction would get consensus. He asked the group how the recommendation should be structured.
  - Becky Hurley offered that there seems to be a choice if a unanimous decision cannot be reached.
    - One option would be to structure the report to strongly present the “85%” the Committee has reached agreement on, and simply present the debate about the remaining “15%”, being the issue of lanes in the stretch of the road not already four lanes.
    - The second option is that the Committee could simply vote on the remaining “15%” and just present the winning plan or plans in the report.
    - The third option is for the Committee to vote and then invite individual committee members to write explanatory statements or opinions, agreeing or disagreeing in whole or in part with each other, like the Supreme Court does with its opinions.
  - Fred Gougler commented that the value of the Committee is the thought and discussion that occurred on the issues. His belief was to frame the report as an advisory study and highlight the consensus, the discussion, and the issues.
  - John Birkinbine agreed that he felt this was the best approach.
  - Peter Fischer recommended that the report not present alternate plans, but instead discuss the options.
  - Scott Freres cautioned the Committee that without a clear direction, the report would leave the decision open, which would give power to other agencies. He recommended that it would be better to have a direction shown in the plan with language about the disagreement.
  - The Committee discussed the idea of a vote on the issue, but agreed not to take a vote, but to present the two sides in the text.
- The Committee then discussed the steps needed for finalizing the plan and report before going in front of the Village Boards.
  - Daniel Grove noted that if the report was to go in front of the Northfield Board in March, as originally envisioned, it would need to be finalized, with Committee input, by March 11<sup>th</sup> to be submitted to the Board.
  - Fred Gougler commented that he wanted time to get consensus on the report.
  - Becky Hurley and Peter Fischer commented that they agreed additional time should be taken to review the text and discuss, and to hear once more from the public.
  - Becky Hurley asked Northfield and Winnetka staff if there were any issues with the process moving back one more month, with a target of presenting

to the Boards in April. Stacy Sigman and Doug Williams indicated that they did not believe there were any issues.

- The Committee discussed the idea of one last meeting to discuss and finalize the report. The Committee agreed that the best approach was for Lakota to finish the report, circulate it to the Committee members, allow for one round of comments and revisions, and then meet a final time for comments and discussion.
- Lakota was asked to come up with a schedule and select a few dates for Northfield staff to circulate to the Committee for this last meeting.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Irv Hobson thanked the Committee and especially Becky Hurley for their time and the openness of the process. He stated that he was disappointed that a plan couldn't be finalized.
- John Kemper stated that he wanted to echo Irv's comments. He added that to reach a final solution, he felt the communities should put themselves in each other's shoes.
- Margaret Parcels commented that a widening of the road would cut Northfield in two. She reminded the Committee that Northfield reached consensus on a three-lane plan in 1999. She added that there was a lot of work put in at the time on a very political issue, and at one point, all the neighboring communities on Willow Road agreed that they would not tell each other what to do on the road. She regretted that this has changed in the last several years, and outside forces are trying to influence the new plan. She added that it was a wonderful plan and should not be cast aside.
- Ted Greene commented that he thinks that the Committee should select a plan to put forward. He added that the road is part of a unique political situation, where one community is being asked to pay for the growth and development decisions of another community, and the price is increased traffic and crime. He concluded that he feels this should not be viewed as just a transportation issue, but the Committee should be sensitive to the politics as well.
- Jeffery Liss had the following comments:
  - He feels the Committee is at the lynchpin of getting something done or not getting something done. He stated he believes the "85%/15%" plan will not lead to something getting done.
  - He suggests the Committee select a direction that is best for the two communities, balanced with an element of regionalism.
  - He restated that he believes there is no point in proposing something that will not get done, that IDOT is serious about improving the level of service.
  - He commented that with the difference coming down to 8' and one lane at the intersections, that a four-lane plan with added safety enhancements is a win/win situation which would address mobility, capacity, and safety.
  - He stressed that he believes you can never achieve perfect safety on this road, that there are always decisions and compromises to be made.
  - He suggested that the character of the entire Village of Northfield should not be set by a small two-lane section of road.

- He encouraged Northfield to “bite the bullet” and do the right thing, and if they do, they could get a plan implemented with the improvements/enhancements desired.
- Finally, he stated that he hoped while the Committee reads the draft report, they will decide that a complete plan is necessary.

#### **NEW ITEMS/COMMITTEE DISCUSSION**

- No new items.

These minutes represent our understanding and interpretation of the issues discussed at that meeting regarding the project. Please forward any additional comments or clarifications to Lakota.