Belmont audience introduced to streetscape and traffic flow changes envisioned by N.H. Design team

BY MICHAEL KITCH
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — Some two dozen residents gathered at the Corner Meeting House Thursday night to consider proposed improvements to the infrastructure in the center of town, which represent the first steps toward fulfilling the vision for the revitalization of the village expressed by the N.H. Design Charette in June, 2010.

Chris Mulleavey, an engineer with Hoyle, Tanner & Associates, Inc. opened the session by explaining that the improvements to Main Street, Mill Street, Center Street, Sargent Street and Fuller Street were intended to accommodate the major projects identified by the charette. These include relocating the Gale School, which would house the town offices, expanding the Public Library, building a community center at Sargent Park and constructing a park pavilion along the Tioga River.

Ron Cormier, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, said that the town has sufficient funds to begin pursuing the revitalization process, but emphasized that it would be a “multi-year” undertaking.

The infrastructure improvements, Mulleavey explained, are intended to improve the appearance of the village and create a “pedestrian friendly” environment with the goals of drawing more people to the village and encouraging property owners “to take pride in their properties.” He said that if the town invests in the improvements, “hopefully property owners will also invest.”

Mulleavey and his team, which includes Michael Castagna of the Castagna Consulting Group, LLC and Randy Knowles of Knowles Design, offered two options, which shared several features in common.

Both options would restrict Fuller Street to one-way traffic westbound, from the Corner Meeting House to the Town Office, and line the north side of the street with sidewalks. Moreover, both plans would install sidewalks on the west side of Sargent Street. Mulleavey said that schoolchildren regularly used both streets and one-way traffic on Fuller Street and sidewalks on both streets would enhance their safety.

Both Police Chief Vinny Balsecchi and Fire Chief David Parenti silently indicated they had reservations about restricting Fuller Street to one-way traffic. Likewise, the two plans would line both sides of Main Street with curbing, sidewalks and trees as well as add “bump outs” to define parking spaces from beyond the junction with Route 140 to the north and past School Street to the south.

The first option would add sidewalks and landscaping to Mill Street and Center Street without, however, altering the course or pattern of the streets and one-way traffic on Fuller Street and sidewalks on the west side of Sargent Street. Mulleavey said that the improvements to Main Street, Mill Street, Center Street, Sargent Street and Fuller Street are intended to improve the appearance of the village and create a “pedestrian friendly” environment with the goals of drawing more people to the village and encouraging property owners “to take pride in their properties.” He said that if the town invests in the improvements, “hopefully property owners will also invest.”

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The second, more ambitious option, would eliminate the corner parking spaces between Mill Street and Fuller Street and install sidewalks on both sides of Main Street with curbing, sidewalks and trees as well as add “bump outs” to define parking spaces from beyond the junction with Route 140 to the north and past School Street to the south.

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from preceding page

nate the existing westbound stretch of Mill Street to the south of the library and replace it with an elbow intersecting Main Street north of the library and joining Mill Street north of the mill. The existing Mill Street would become part of green space surrounding the expanded library and housing the War Memorial and bandstand. There would be parking areas at either end of the elbow to serve the library Memorial and bandstand. There would be parking areas at either end of the elbow to serve the library and a line of trees in its crook.

This plan would close Center Street at its junction with Main Street while ensuring access to residents from Mill Street. Fire Chief David Parenti voiced misgivings about closing the east end of Center Street, which he said could hinder the movement of emergency vehicles.

Knowles spoke to several sketches of the streetscape envisioned by the plans, stressing the importance of “consistency” of design. For example, he suggested installing street lamps along Main Street, which he said could hinder the movement of emergency vehicles.

In response to questions about the cost of the improvements, Mulleavey said that estimates will be immediately determined and an investigation in

Firefighters from five area departments responded yesterday afternoon to the report of a house fire at 25 Church Street in Tilton. The flames were quickly knocked down but the lone resident of the building is said to have lost all of her belongings. The wall in the right foreground of this photo is a part of the Lochmere Baptist Church. (Laconia Daily Sun photo/Michael Kitch)