



**TOWN OF HOLLISTON
PLANNING BOARD**
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Selectmen
Jeff Ritter, Town Administrator
FROM: Planning Board *WJR*
DATE: March 30, 2016
RE: Downtown Traffic – McMahon Technical Review

The Planning Board reiterates its support of the Board of Selectmen's plan to proceed with a request for funding design and installation of Downtown traffic signals as per McMahon Transportation Engineers & Planners' August 2014 "Alternative 1" concept plan (McMahon's Concept). However, the Planning Board finds that additional efforts are necessary to meet our shared stated goal to allow for improvements to McMahon's Concept and prepare for Town Meeting, specifically with regard to additional work/consultation with McMahon as well as additional community engagement. We understand from Selectman Leary that funding for additional meeting(s) and design work is extremely limited. The Planning Board remains willing to support additional funding such as a joint application to the Finance Committee for additional funds to responsibly move forward with this project.

Technical Review. We feel strongly that there remain substantive issues to discuss with McMahon Associates as indicated in our memorandum of January 22nd as well as after reviewing McMahon's recent responses. There is an open question as to the trade-off between parking spaces and the vehicle queuing and level of service impacts of a single-lane solution; neither McMahon's June 5, 2014 or current response memos completely address this issue, and additional conversation would clarify the stakes and potential solutions. Additionally, McMahon's response lacks a clear discussion of the feasibility of a one-way Exchange Street design scheme, as well as the feasibility of a raised median on Washington Street northbound of Hollis Street. We raise these issues not to fault McMahon's engineering expertise, but rather to show the shortcomings of a public comment process that is only conducted through memos. Direct, face-to-face communication with the consultants the Town has engaged is essential to the success of this project.

Community Engagement. The town must swiftly improve its community engagement practices if it is to regain the trust of residents and arrive at a compromise solution that meets the varied needs of Downtown Holliston. The Planning Board proposes the following:

- In-person joint public meetings (at least one) with the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, key town staff participants and McMahon Associates to review responses to comments provided to McMahon in previous public forums.
- Documented changes to the McMahon plan as a result of comments provided in previous public forums (i.e. what are the steps and what's possible in taking the concept to final design).

Public comment cannot effectively take place solely through written question and answer. The Town and McMahon Associates must be responsive and transparent with respect to public comments if Holliston residents are to feel as if their concerns and suggestions are being heard and taken into account. Feasible design changes, such as the bike racks and shared lane markings referred to in the February 10th Response to Working Group Comments, should be integrated into updated concept plans.