



September 30, 2019

Dear Mayor and City Council,

As members of Newburyport Livable Streets, we appreciate the progress the City has made in the past few years under your leadership in support of Complete Streets. We also appreciate being invited to be part of the dialogue as we work collectively to improve our community's transportation network. As you know, there is still a lot of work to be done. To ensure that the City continues to follow our Complete Streets Policy, NLS would like to make some suggestions regarding the processes followed by the City during the planning, design, construction and maintenance of our roads and sidewalks.

We would like to focus your attention on a few sections of the City's policy that are relevant to some of the issues we have observed on recent road and sidewalk projects:

City officials shall approach every transportation improvement and project phase as an opportunity to create safer, more accessible streets for all users. These phases include, but are not limited to: planning, programming, design, right-of-way acquisition, construction engineering, construction, reconstruction, operation and maintenance. Wherever feasible, Complete Streets design principles shall be incorporated into all new publicly and privately funded projects, and incrementally on existing streets through a series of small improvements and activities over time.

Complete Streets principles will be applied in all street construction, retrofit, and reconstruction projects except in the unusual or extraordinary circumstances listed [in the policy]. Even under the conditions outlined [in the policy], a project's impact will be evaluated for the effect it would have on the usefulness of the street for all users, now and in the future, and the ability to implement other adopted plans in the future.

When designing a street improvement project, the DPS and OPD shall collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure that, wherever feasible, all users and transportation modes are adequately accommodated. These stakeholders may include, but are not limited to neighborhood groups, individual residents, the Police Department, Fire Department, TSAC, Newburyport Commission on Disabilities, and when required any federal or state agency with jurisdiction or direct interest on the proposed project.

As such, the City needs to consider whether there are adjustments that can be incorporated to make the street or sidewalk safer for all users when planning any roadway project - from major projects such as road reconstruction and paving, to maintenance projects such as re-striping and patching after utility

work, to installation of traffic signals. We also believe that Complete Streets principles should apply to all phases of a project (from planning through construction). For example, on the recent High Street repaving and sidewalk project, there was a great deal of frustration on the part of the public when it was discovered that a number of heavily used crosswalks would not be re-striped due to lack of appropriate tip downs (ie ramps) at those access points. If those changes had been identified and communicated early on in the process, there would have been an opportunity for public review and comment and the City might have had a chance to respond and potentially work out a solution (e.g. request more funding to add the required tip downs).

In another example on Merrimac Street, NLS believes incremental changes could have been incorporated into the reconstruction of sidewalks that would have helped to alleviate some of the neighborhood concerns around traffic calming and pedestrian safety. With more advanced notice and an avenue for submitting those suggestions, we believe the City would have had a chance to consider and potentially modify the scope of the project without significant delay or added expense. Furthermore, we believe the decision to install an asphalt sidewalk on a portion of the street is in direct violation of the City Ordinances and, had there been advance notice and opportunity for discussion of the proposed approach, the decision to use asphalt would likely have been avoided.

Finally, with the recent sidewalk work on both Merrimac and High, we have observed that pedestrians have often been forced into the street to walk alongside vehicular traffic with no physical separation. This issue is particularly concerning where projects impact primary routes to school. Furthermore, as the re-striping of the High Street bike lanes has been further delayed, no provisions have been implemented to provide temporary bike lanes or otherwise create a separation between vehicular and bicycle traffic while the pavement work is concluded. As you know, we have been working for many years (with your support) to encourage families to allow their kids to walk and bike to school. When these key routes are temporarily made uncomfortable or, especially, unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists, they can be discouraged from continuing (or starting in the first place).

With the above examples in mind, we would like to suggest several steps that the city can take before and during construction in order to provide better communication with residents, ensure that projects stay on schedule and that project budgets are adequately planned for, and make sure that all users' concerns and safety are considered. We believe all of these suggestions are consistent with the City's Complete Streets Policy.

- **We recommend the City post a notice of planned roadway projects (including paving and routine maintenance) 3 to 6 months prior to project start and provide a contact point to whom comments and suggestions can be submitted for consideration.** We understand that not all suggestions will be able to be incorporated into every project, but we think it's important for the City to consider every opportunity for incremental changes.
- **We recommend that any construction project that impacts roads, sidewalks, and bike routes have a clear communication and detour plan that includes regular construction schedule updates via social media and the City's web page, road and sidewalk closure information, recommended detour routes, and identification of safe**

crossing points. When school routes are impacted, we recommend that the School Department receive notice well in advance and be provided with a map of the detour routes for walkers and bikers.

- **We recommend that the City require and oversee accommodations and safety measures for bicycles and pedestrians during construction including signage and detours for bicycles and pedestrians.**

As always, NLS is ready and willing to work with the City to develop these procedures and policies for implementing and supporting our Complete Streets Policy. Thank you for your consideration, we look forward to your response and opportunity for further discussion.

Sincerely,

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on behalf of Newburyport Livable Streets
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Newburyport Livable Streets seeks to support and improve the health and well-being of our community through education and advocacy related to transportation infrastructure and policies. Our goal is to make it easier for people to bike and walk throughout Newburyport by providing a network of streets, sidewalks and trails that are accessible and comfortable to everyone regardless of age, ability, or mode of travel. We support safe sidewalks, bike routes and neighborhood streets; off-road paths and trails; local transit; and other policies and investments that respect Newburyport's intimate scale and historic character. Livable Streets will nurture a healthy, vibrant city that people want to live in, businesses want to invest in, and tourists want to visit.