



March 25, 2020

RE: Hale Street Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements

Dear Members of the City Council:

Hale Street is an important route connecting the Squires Glen and West End neighborhoods to schools, recreation areas, and the downtown. It also links to the Coastal Trails network, with a trailhead for the Gloria Braunhardt Bike Path that provides a safe walking and cycling route to the Storey Avenue business district as well as to the bus station and the Garrison Trail.

However, Hale Street's high traffic speeds, lack of sidewalks, and narrow to nonexistent shoulders make it unwelcoming and unsafe for walkers and bicyclists, particularly young people getting to school and activities. Improving this road's safety and walkability has long been a desire of West End residents. The Safe Routes to School Preliminary Assessment report that was prepared for the City in 2016 identified as a priority project the widening of Hale Street and the construction of a protected multimodal (bike/ped) path. The report also recommended implementing traffic calming devices along Hale Street in order to reduce vehicle speeds.

On February 4, Newburyport Livable Streets facilitated a community meeting about Hale Street, which was attended by about 40 neighborhood residents, as well as several members of the City Council. Mayor Holaday opened the meeting, and City Engineer Jon-Eric White presented preliminary concepts for better accommodating walkers and bicyclists within the street's existing layout, and with minimal impact to sensitive resources. Meeting attendees offered their own perspectives on the issue, expressing a variety of concerns about project complexity, costs and timeline, but all were in support of making the road better for walking and cycling, especially for school-age children.

It is undeniable that Hale Street can be redesigned and improved to provide safe accommodation for vulnerable users, but it is also true that cost considerations will likely require the optimal project to be funded and constructed in phases. Newburyport Livable Streets believes that it is time to move forward with project planning and design to demonstrate to residents of Squires Glen and the West End that the City is committed to resolving this long-standing issue.

In order to move this important project forward, some preliminary steps should be taken in the short term. City Engineer White has recommended that the City engage a survey firm to carry out a detailed survey of the right-of-way and adjacent land, and then engage an engineering firm to prepare a concept plan. The total cost of these two projects is estimated to be \$125,000. Once a concept plan has been prepared and a long-term solution has been agreed upon, the final design can be done in-house by the DPS Engineering Division.

We understand that the Mayor will be presenting a request for these funds to the Council, either as a CIP project or as a transfer request. We strongly urge you to support such a request so that survey and design work can begin this year.

Thank you for your consideration of this project. We look forward to working with the City as the project progresses.

Sincerely,

NEWBURYPORT LIVABLE STREETS

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