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GREAT ROAD SAFETY

Rte. 2A walking proposal unveiled

By Patricia Bertuccio
Staff Writer

ACTON — Pedestrians may still need to worry about crossing Great Road, but a new proposal may bring hope for better and more numerous sidewalks.

In a presentation at the Board of Selectmen's May 23 meeting, the Traffic Advisory Committee presented guidelines to building sidewalks in town, focusing primarily on Great Road (Route 2A). Selectmen expressed their enthusiasm for the project, but the final decision is in the hands of the Planning Board.

"The project can only be an improvement on [Great Road]," Selectmen Walter Foster, recently named the new chairman of the board. "It's very doable, and I am very supportive of this design review process."

Great Road has been the subject of some debate in recent months as a citizens group known as the Friends of Great Road have lobbied for greater safety on the state roadway after several serious accidents. The Friends are calling

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Advisory board urges more Rte. 2A sidewalks

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for traffic lights along the road and a reduction of the speed limit, two provisions the state has been reluctant to give in to.

Selectmen asked whether the traffic committee showed their proposal to the Planning Board because developments on zoning laws lie in that panel's jurisdiction.

Ann Sussman, chairman of the traffic committee, said her panel had met informally with Planning Board members and the police. She hoped her presentation would provide sidewalk examples and options to be decided by the appropriate body. The advisory group intended to win support from selectmen before bringing their plans back before the Planning Board.

Sussman said the purpose of the proposal was to create guidelines for building sidewalks that would foster more walking and biking safely along Great Road, which has a patchwork of sidewalks. The advisory's goal is to promote walking and safety in Acton by establishing a continuous walkway along Great Road. They also determined that the recent development of the Brookside Mall would encourage people to walk their from their homes and sidewalks would need to allow pedestrians to safely make the trip.

The Massachusetts Highway Department recently put in a section of sidewalk, which Sussman described as a "missed opportunity."

"It costs about the same to put in sidewalks as we recommended," Sussman said.

The advisory committee's presentation suggested walkways with a buffer such as grass or a barrier between the road and sidewalks to make pedestrians feel more comfortable walking along a main road.

The sidewalk near the Chevrolet dealer on Great Road was cited as another example of what needs to be improved. At this location, a gravel divider separates the sidewalk from the road, which the committee said is better than no buffer, but could be improved.

Art Wu, an advisory panel member, told selectmen that his board plans to provide a "dictionary of tools" that the town could use for providing pedestrian safety and slowing traffic down.

"We need to work better with Mass. Highway and plan for them so they'll agree to go forward with putting in crosswalks and a stoplight," Selectman Peter Aston said, referring to the area near Brookside Mall, which includes Staples. "We have the money for it and it will help lower the speed of traffic coming through East Acton village."

The advisory group also brought ideas about adding crosswalks, which the committee said would be a challenge since the state requires the speed limit to be at most 35 miles per hour in order to implement a crosswalk. The current speed limit on Great Road is 40 mph, which the state was originally reluctant to lower from its original 45 mph limit.

Friends of Great Road member George Wrenn said by telephone and e-mail that the town needs to consider taking action as it had in West Acton, where it ended the state highway to resume Route 111. This action allowed the town to add stop signs and traffic lights as it saw fit without state approval.

"The town needs to take back East Acton Village by ending the state highway in a period a little over half a mile, repeating the success of West Acton in East Acton without the death grip of Mass. Highway around the neck of the whole town," Wrenn said.

In other business, the board addressed a recent problem with solicitors in the area. Town Manager Don Johnson said residents had the right to call the police if someone comes to their door without a name tag and without providing information about a product or service in a straightforward manner. Johnson said solicitors need to register with the town to get a permit.

Selectmen also discussed the formation of a Water Resources Advisory Committee and selectmen were in support of a five-year Title 5 waiver for residents in certain neighborhoods of Acton, such as Flint and Spencer Roads. The waiver will allow time for a public sewer to be built so that homeowners do not have to make the costly replacement of their current septic tanks.

"The Board of Health recognizes these homes will be served with sewer expansion," Foster said in a telephone interview. "The town is working very diligently in the permitting process where expanding should go to and all going as fast, in my opinion, as it possibly can."

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