

Route 6 area west of Brightman Street Bridge will undergo pedestrian-friendly redesign

By Grant Welker

Herald News Staff Reporter

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SOMERSET — The area just west of Brightman Street Bridge on Route 6 will see far less traffic when a replacement bridge is complete in late spring, but a plan is in the works to transform the commercial stretch into a mixed-use, more pedestrian-friendly area.

A quarter-mile stretch of Route 6 between Brayton and Riverside avenues would be reduced from a four-lane highway to two lanes, with a landscaped median and sidewalks. Slade's Ferry Avenue could have businesses and residences to liven up an area now dominated by pavement.

"It's going to feel a lot different than it does right now," said Nancy Durfee, the senior comprehensive planner for the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District, or SRPEDD, which is working with town officials on the plan.

Included in the vision for the area — what planners are calling Slade's Ferry Crossing — is better public access to the Taunton River, extension of a bike path through the area and use of part of the Brightman Street Bridge for recreation.

Beautification is a main goal. The park-and-ride lot next to Slade's Ferry Park could be moved to open space between Newhill Avenue and the nearly complete stretch of the new Route 6 to make room for more parkland, homes or shops. A construction staging area between Riverside Avenue and the river could become a gathering location or a spot for recreation, and a riverside walking and bike path could cross underneath the new bridge.

"Let's shoot for the moon," Selectmen Chairman William Meehan said, suggesting shrubbery and old-fashioned lights along the old stretch of Route 6. A Tufts University student is designing a 3-D computer model of the area to help planners and residents visualize how the area could be transformed.

A committee of town officials, regional planning officials and others met for an update last week and will meet once a month through June, when the Veterans Memorial Bridge is expected to be open to traffic. Soon after, construction crews will be able to shift just south of the bridge to where Route 6 will be made into a tree-lined boulevard.

The cost of making Route 6 more pedestrian-friendly and visually appealing is included in the \$285 million price of the new bridge and its related ramps and other infrastructure.

Other changes sure to be noticeable to drivers are the expected removal of traffic lights — to be replaced by stop signs — at the intersections of Route 6 and Brayton Avenue, and Route 6 and Riverside Avenue. The old Route 6 won't connect with the new, nearly completed stretch. West of Brayton Avenue, the road will turn into a small lane to connect with the residential road Stillwell Court.

IMPACT ON BUSINESSES

The shifting traffic patterns are sure to greatly affect businesses along the stretch, from Rockland Trust to New York Chinese Buffet.

Webster Bank has already taken steps to move to a better location, filing plans last fall to open a branch at the former Reliable Auto Sales site on Route 6 near the intersection with Brayton Point Road. The bank cited the new bridge as the main reason for the change.

SRPEDD said in its analysis of the area that the town should approach businesses to find potential partnerships for redevelopment. The use of eminent domain to take land for redevelopment has not been discussed.

Jeff Magoni, the owner of Magoni's Ferry Landing, a restaurant at 681 Riverside Ave., said he's still waiting for plans to develop but doesn't have plans to move.

"I'm just letting it all settle in right now," he said. Without the same traffic flow, "obviously it's not going to be the same."

That much has been clear for a while, which is partly why SRPEDD and the town are looking to remake the area.

"It is likely that all the existing businesses in Slade's Ferry Crossing will suffer declines when the new road opens," the analysis said. "Many are likely to close, and the area could become blighted without careful planning."

At Gridiron Sports Bar & Grill on Slade's Ferry Avenue, owners Bryan and Mike Monte are nervous about having less traffic but confident they've attracted enough regulars over the year and a half they've been in business that customers will still come. They said they're receptive to change for the neighborhood and have no plans to leave.

Iz Schwartz Appliance a few doors down is also optimistic that it has enough of a following to continue doing well.

"In our case, I think we're more of a destination," said owner Leah MacLeod, who had mixed feelings about the future of the area. "People actively seek us out."

A RANGE OF ISSUES

There are some challenges, as SRPEDD identified in its report. Among them are market conditions that mean "redevelopment is unlikely in the short term," and trying to create a single plan when 13 parcels in the study area have different owners with different ideas.

Not all of the owners — which have a combined 115,000 square feet of building space — will want to sell, relocate or have their properties redeveloped. There is also so far no public funding for redevelopment beyond changes to Route 6 itself. Any mixed-use development would require a special-use permit.

Planners also intend to relocate the park-and-ride lot next to Slade's Ferry Park but have yet to reach consensus on a new spot. Two spots between the new highway and Newhill Avenue have been suggested.

The future of the Brightman Street Bridge is also up in the air.

Federal legislation, led by U.S. Reps. Barney Frank and James McGovern, prohibits federal funds from being used to demolish the bridge, and the most likely scenario appears to be removing the center span of the bridge to allow boats to pass, and keeping the remainder as piers for recreational use. Converting the bridge to recreational use has been estimated to cost \$21 million.

NEARBY TOWN PARCEL VACANT

While businesses between Brayton and Riverside avenues are nervous about a future with less traffic, a town-owned 16-acre parcel across from The Home Depot and Stop & Shop remains unused nearly three years after a study recommended a mix of assisted living, medical offices and small-scale retail.

The wooded parcel, between Route 6 and Lepes Road, a residential neighborhood, was targeted for a few development options but mainly assisted living, in response to market studies that indicated a demand. The site, with its 2,000 feet of frontage along Route 6, is also attractive for medical offices and especially retail, the consulting firm GLC Development Resources said.

The town wasn't particularly receptive to the study, Town Administrator Dennis Luttrell said, so no action has been taken. With little market demand, there are no plans for selling or redeveloping the site, he said.

E-mail Grant Welker at gwelker@heraldnews.com.

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Smitty

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And how about that abortion of a highway that will be left when the spaghetti ramps in Fall River are demolished? How about replacing ALL of Rte. 79 between Brightman St. and Rte 195 with a surface level boulevard? How about doing a COMPLETE job in Fall River instead of a half @\$sed job that is being touted as the 'best' plan for opening up the waterfront to the city?

Seems like the state is just stringing Fall River along--like they usually do--and giving everything to the surrounding towns--like they usually do/

rtflanny

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Hey Smitty, how about everyone say slow down with spending our tax money. Fix what needs fixing. Our economy is in shambles right now. More government spending is not the answer. Jobs will 'trickle down' but it must start with Oil, yes Oil.

'Drill baby Drill' is the only answer! Obama must open the Gulf up to drilling again, as well as in Alaska. How will this help the economy? Easy, as soon as we announce the former, the price of a barrel of oil will drop, affecting the price a gallon of gasoline. Also loosen the restrictions on the building of nuclear power plants. Just this, and yet simple but necessary steps, will trickle down to employment and job opportunities, from manufacturing(in this country) to small business ventures.

Even Bill Meehan and his pipe dream 'shoot the moon' philosophy, might have a chance!

Dano65

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If Ken Fiola, Jr. Fall River Office of Economic Development (Is that not that an oxymoron?) is anyway involved in the revitalization of areas surrounding ret. 79, or bringing economic development to Fall River, it will not happen. Now is the time for mayoral action: The Office of Economic Developments contract has run out and they are currently opperating on a mayoral approved extention. Go figure.

I urge all responsible citizens to tell the mayor that Fall River does not need an Office of Economic Development. Now it is up to Mayor Flanagan to dissolve it, as it is presently up for review.

The OED cannot even get a big box retail store to locate here because corporations such as Target do not want to deal with Ken Fiola, Jr. That inept individual could not even get Building 19 to locate here.

Come on Mayor Flanagan rid the city of this self proclaimed (WSAR interview) thick-skinned under achiever, and the city will realize what truly is achievable without the hindrence of the Office of Economic Development and Fiola This man with a \$180,000 salary who refuses even to speak to the City Counselsors, or answer phone calls to his office because, according to the OED charter, he is not answerable to them, says committee member Linda Pereira, but to the mayor only.

Mayor Flanagan needs to have Mr. Fiola report to him daily, with a written summary as to what the OED accomplishes each and every day that would justify his enormous salary. I would wager that since the Hurricain's Highway Home went off the air, that Fiola has at least an extra 4 hours each day to do nothing for Fall River's economic development. Better yet, he needs to step up to the proverbial plate, and tell Ken Fiola, Jr. not to let the door hit him in the butt on his way out of his position at FROED.

villagerat

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'The park-and-ride lot next to Slades Ferry Park could be moved to open space between Newhill Avenue and the nearly complete stretch of the new Route 6 to make room for more parkland, homes or shops.'

I doubt the Newhill Ave residents would want it near their homes. They already use it as kind of a private parking area. I thought it was supposed to be a park?

I wouldn't want it near my home because aside from being used as a commuter lot, several commercial businesses park their trucks there on a regular basis. There is always a big box truck from a tire scrap business and backhoes and other construction equipment park there. That is not what it is for, but no one seems to do anything about it.

Figla

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Just a suggestion to the Town when planning the soon to be newly redeveloped areas - avoid using more of the puke green walkway lighting that's been installed along Riverside Ave. as part of the bridge project. Those light pole standards were a poor choice and the color that was chosen makes them even more hideous. I suspect that they were picked out of a catalog many moons ago and given how long it took to design the bridge and how long it's been in construction, the light pole design seems out of date (even though they are a poor attempt at mimicking historical lighting) and just doesn't seem to fit with what's seen on other streetscape projects. To make matters worse the design included totally different poles for street lighting on the opposite side of the street from the puke green sidewalk lighting, they used conventional aluminum cobra head styled lights in this case. Anyone with a head on their shoulders that dabbles in lighting design knows that you don't mix these two entirely different lighting standards. Money not so well spent here and now it's permanent.

One last issue that should be corrected prior to opening up the bridge to traffic - it appears that the traffic signal heads facing the northbound approach under the new bridge (spanning over Riverside Ave) will be difficult to see for oncoming vehicles at a reasonable/mandatory minimum distance because they weren't installed horizontal as seen at many other interections that are adjacent to an overpass that obstructs the view of the signal heads.

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