



TOWN OF ARLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager
Cc: Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning & Community Development
Mike Rademacher, Director of Public Works
Chief Julie Flaherty, Arlington Police Department
From: Daniel Amstutz, Senior Transportation Planner
Date: September 10, 2020
RE: Brooks Avenue Shared Street Update

On July 20, 2020, the Select Board approved the reinstallation of the Brooks Avenue Shared Street Project, with modifications, until the beginning of the school year. The shared street was reinstalled on August 6. The modifications to the shared street project included removing Brooks Ave from Lake Street to Chandler Street and Chandler Street from Brooks Ave to Herbert Road from the project area; changing the signage at the soft gateways; and adding more traffic calming strategies to Brooks Ave.

The shared street has now been in operation for more than a month. There have been no reports of safety concerns or crashes as a result of the shared street. The shared street continues to function similarly to the demonstration project in May. The temporary materials are still in place in the same areas where they were placed. It has now been determined that the school year will begin on September 21 in a hybrid format, with some virtual instruction and some in-person instruction for parents that choose it. Therefore, school traffic should be diminished substantially from previous years.

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) has applied for funding through the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program for both a Mary Street shared street pilot and additional materials to incorporate traffic calming onto the side streets between Brooks Ave and Herbert Road that are part of the shared streets area. Staff expect to receive a response from MassDOT on the status of the grant application by the week of September 14.

DPCD recommends continuing the Brooks Ave shared street project until the first week in December, weather permitting. The materials will be removed sooner if the town receives plowable snow before this time, to ensure plows will not damage or be damaged by the temporary materials.

Further information and backup data is provided below.

Traffic Data and Public Outreach

In advance of the reinstallation of the project on Brooks Avenue, Town staff put up 150-200 fliers on as many residences as possible on Brooks Ave and the roads between Brooks Ave and Herbert Road:

Chandler Street, Egerton Road, Melrose Street, Milton Street, and Varnum Street. Shortly after installing the materials again, staff received four or five emails about the project from local residents. Concerns raised in these emails included:

- The soft gateways on the side streets are not effective enough to deter or slow traffic;
- The traffic cones for traffic calming are small and not easy to notice;
- The diversion at Chandler Street and Brooks Ave may send more traffic down Chandler Street, and traffic calming on Chandler is needed;
- Contractors parked on Brooks and side streets create visibility issues for all modes; and
- General courtesy of people walking through the neighborhood, including playing loud music and picking up after dogs.

In response to the first two items, Town staff made minor adjustments to the placement of the gateway materials on the side streets to make the openings smaller, and reset the temporary traffic calming on Brooks Ave as needed. As mentioned above, DPCD has also applied for funding through the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces Program to acquire more materials for additional traffic calming in this area, specifically on Egerton, Melrose, Milton, and Varnum Street. Town staff will also monitor the remaining three items during observations.

Recent data on volumes and traffic speeds on Brooks Avenue were not available at the time this memo was developed.

Town staff have made observations of the number of people bicycling and walking at Brooks Avenue and Varnum Street. A table of recent data collected is provided on the next page. For the count conducted on September 9, mask compliance was not collected. In general, mask compliance is observed to be high.

Date	9/4/2020	9/9/2020
Day	Friday before Labor Day	Wednesday
Weather	Sunny, 80 degrees	Partly Cloudy, 82 degrees
Start	11:25 am	3:15 PM
End	12:25 pm	4:15 PM
Duration	1 hr	1 hr
Total People	44	47
Children (<13)	4	10
Older Adults (>60)	0	1
Average people per hour	44	47
% On Sidewalk	57% (50% pedestrians)	55% (66% pedestrians)
% In Street	43% (85% cyclists)	45% (100% cyclists)
% Wearing Masks	91%	N/A

For comparison, the table of bike/pedestrian data collection collected before and during the demonstration project in May is provided below, which was also collected at Brooks Avenue and Varnum Street.

	Before	During	During
Date	5/14/2020	5/24/2020	5/26/2020
Day	Thursday	Sun Memorial weekend	Tuesday
Weather	Sunny, 70 degrees	Sunny, 60 degrees	Sunny, 75 degrees
Start	2:45pm	3:26 PM	2:45 PM
End	4:15pm	4:27 PM	4:15 PM
Duration	1.5 hrs	1 hr	1.5 hrs
Total People	94	96	55
Children (<13)	15	22	12
Older Adults (>60)	8	4	2
Average people per hour	63	96	37
% On Sidewalk	64.89%	33.33%	52.73%
% In Street	35.11%	66.67%	47.27%
% Wearing Masks	90.43%	81.25%	83.64%

In general, the recent bicycle and pedestrian count data is comparable with the data during the demonstration pilot, although the number of people per hour is lower, on average, as well as the number of people in the street. The number of vehicles going through this intersection were also counted by staff, and found to be very low – less than a dozen cars an hour for the counts completed. Thus even when there are people walking in the street, the number of possible conflicts with drivers are limited.