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TO: Arlington Transportation Advisory Committee
Arlington Select Board
FROM: Paul Schlichtman
SUBJECT: Chestnut Street TAC Recommendations
DATE: June 8, 2021

I am writing in response to the recommendations of the Transportation Advisory Committee, and the corresponding summary provided by the Engineering Division of the Town of Arlington, pertaining to the short-term and potential future improvements for Chestnut Street.

The engineering summary presents the viewpoint of the Town Engineer, whose often-stated strong preference is to eliminate the crosswalk at Chestnut Street and Chestnut Terrace. The summary presented on May 10, 2021 is rooted in that opinion. Approximately one third of the summary is a listing of how pedestrians using the Chestnut Terrace crosswalk should be crossing Chestnut Street.

As a Town Meeting Member and an elected member of the Arlington School Committee, my orientation is not to best accommodate and facilitate truck traffic cutting through Arlington, but to focus on friends and neighbors who walk in my neighborhood. I also note that I have joined the work of my fellow Town Meeting Member Jo Anne Preston, who also serves as an elected member of the Arlington Housing Authority. She has been an effective and diligent advocate for the AHA residents, seniors, and local residents who walk in our neighborhood.



Ms. Preston has been an outstanding leader of this effort, ever since my downstairs neighbor, **Ann B. Desrosiers**, was killed at this crosswalk on December 31, 2019. Ms. Desrosiers was attempting to cross the street on her way to 7:00 a.m. Mass at St. Agnes Church. Police later reported that the driver, who was proceeding westbound on Chestnut Street, was obeying the speed limit at the time of the fatal collision.



Ms. Derosiers was killed approximately 20 minutes before the 7:14 a.m. sunrise, at a time most drivers are not particularly alert for pedestrians. Weather was reported as 44 degrees with light rain and fog. The Transportation Advisory Committee recommendation 6 calls for a pedestrian-activated warning signal at the Chestnut Terrace crosswalk. If that warning signal would have been in place 18 months ago, it is highly likely that Ms. Desrosiers would have lived to celebrate the New Year later that evening, as the lights would have effectively broken through the dark, drizzle, and fog of the early morning hours.

However, the long-term improvements to Chestnut Street are essential in order to promote pedestrian safety, and are imperative if pedestrians can safely access Arlington Center from neighborhoods to the north.

Crossing at Mystic and Chestnut

In his summary, the Town Engineer states that “the Mystic/Chestnut Street traffic signal would be a safer crossing location. This Route would require a two (stage) crossing.” He also states, “very few destinations require pedestrians to utilize the three (3) stage portion of the signal phase.”

Let’s examine the crossing at Mystic and Chestnut Streets. While it is signalized, the intersection features “slip lanes” that serve to accelerate right turns at the intersection. There are pedestrian actuated crosswalk signals, but crossing the intersection requires two or three light cycles to complete the crossing. There are only two permitted crossing movements at the intersection.

Pedestrians who cross from the southeast corner (adjacent to the municipal parking lot) may not cross Mystic Street without first crossing Chestnut Street. That movement requires a pedestrian to cross a slip lane onto a traffic island, engage another pedestrian actuator to cross the center lanes of Chestnut Street, and then engage another pedestrian signal actuator on the southern island. At that point, the pedestrian can cross the other slip lane to reach the northeast corner, or they can cross Mystic Street. Pedestrians originating at the northeast corner must cross the slip lane to reach

the northern island, at which point they can choose the one additional light cycle to cross Mystic Street or the two cycle crossing to reach the other side of Chestnut Street.



Two features of this intersection make this crossing either unsafe or impossible. Drivers making the right turn from Chestnut Street to Mystic Street often ignore the red signal, eyes fixed on northbound Mystic Street traffic coming from the left. The Transportation Advisory Committee addresses this issue with recommendation 6, placing a NO TURN ON RED sign on the Chestnut Street approach.

Even if drivers comply with a new NO TURN ON RED sign, and even if pedestrians are willing to spend a couple of minutes standing on the islands in the middle of the intersection, this crossing becomes impossible in the winter. These

islands accumulate plowed snow, which makes it impossible to traverse across these islands during most winter days.

Casual observers will note that southbound pedestrians approaching Chestnut Street on Mystic Street will avoid crossing at the signal, and will walk along Chestnut Street to cross at Chestnut Terrace. This pattern includes a significant number of Arlington Catholic athletes walking between the school and their athletic fields on Summer Street. As a resident of 47 Mystic Street, I choose to cross at Chestnut Terrace and will avoid the crossing at Mystic Street; while the Chestnut Terrace crosswalk is dangerous, the Mystic Street crossing is even more perilous.

Crossing Chestnut Street at Medford Street

The Town Engineer also wrote that “the existing crosswalk at 5 Chestnut Street would be a safer location” than crossing at Chestnut Terrace. Again, I disagree.



Traffic heading west on Medford Street move through a gentle curve that places them on Chestnut Street. While pedestrians crossing at Chestnut Terrace have a short, straight stretch in which to observe approaching westbound traffic, the curve limits the ability of drivers and pedestrians to see each other at the Medford Street crosswalk.

Long term recommendations

The Transportation Advisory Committee discusses their intent to study the intersections of Chestnut Street and Medford Street, and Chestnut Street and Mystic Street, as part of their continuing work to improve pedestrian and traffic safety along this road. This is an important recommendation.

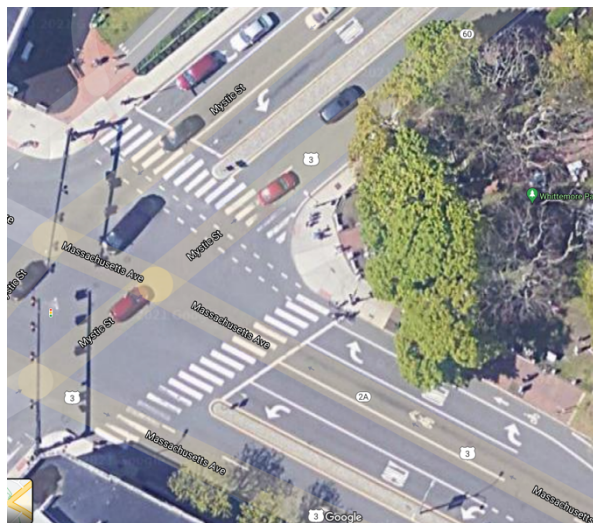
It is clear that the current geometry was designed to facilitate rapid movement of traffic through the neighborhood. The merges and slip lanes are not appropriate features for urban intersections with significant pedestrian traffic. They are particularly inappropriate for intersections one block from the center of the most densely populated town in the Commonwealth. Progress toward rebuilding these intersections must be encouraged, and should be supplemented by an impartial consultant who has not advocated for a preferred solution that is not embraced by the community.

Through truck traffic on Route 60 and US 3

It must be noted that the Town Engineer wrote that “Chestnut Street (Route 60) is a heavily utilized Truck Route which can accommodate oversized loads and hazardous cargoes. Route 60 is the only east to west designated truck route available between Interstates 93 & 95 north of Interstate 90. It has also been reported by the Arlington Police Department that in addition to the large truck volume on Route 60, a significant amount of truck traffic also utilizes Mystic Street (Route 3) due to the significant presence of trucking, distribution, and retail centers located In Woburn/Burlington in the vicinity of I-95/Route 3/Route 3A.”

The argument that Mystic Street and Chestnut Streets are numbered routes is often raised as a reason for taking no action to make the streets more pedestrian friendly, and opposition from the state is often implied as a reason to put this discussion aside. An examination of recently funded improvements to Route 60 and US 3 is in direct conflict with these concerns.

As part of state project 606885 (ARLINGTON- BIKEWAY CONNECTION AT INTERSECTION ROUTE 3 & ROUTE 60, MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, PLEASANT STREET & MYSTIC STREET), MassDOT supported the \$1,640,269 construction bid price for this work. As part of the project,



curbs were extended into the intersection. This work sharpened the angle on the northeast corner of Mystic Street and Massachusetts Avenue; truck traffic moving along **US Route 3** is directed to turn right from Massachusetts Avenue onto Mystic Street. This angle is sharper than any angle that would be created by removing the slip lanes at Mystic and Chestnut Streets, and sharper than any corner that could be constructed by transforming the intersection of Chestnut and Medford Streets into a traditional T intersection.

When **Route 60** crosses into Medford, it becomes High Street. MassDOT is funding through its Safe Routes to School project 608835, described as expanding upon “Medford's Complete Streets project on High Street, focusing on the area of High Street between Auburn Street and Woburn Street to provide curb extensions and uniform bicycle treatments.” The construction bid price is \$781,641. These improvements include the kinds of initiatives being proposed for Chestnut Street.

In conclusion, MassDOT has a record of supporting and funding pedestrian safety improvements on US 3 and Route 60 in Arlington and Medford. Reconstructing the intersections at either end of Chestnut Street, and crosswalk improvements at Chestnut Terrace, are not inconsistent with projects funded by MassDOT. Representative Garballey has offered his assistance to gain funding for these significant improvements, but these improvements require the solid support of the Town of Arlington in order to attract support and funding from the state.

For that reason, I urge you to unanimously and enthusiastically support the short-term recommendations of the Transportation Advisory Committee, and work to reconstruct the Chestnut Street intersections at Mystic Street and Medford Street.

Ann B. Desrosiers was killed on Chestnut Street on December 31, 2019. We have waited too long to take even the simplest steps to make crossing this street safer. We should move forward to fix this street without further delay.

State funded improvements to High Street (Route 60) in Medford



1. High Street (Route 60) at Woburn Street.



2. High Street (Route 60) at Wolcott Street.



3. High Street (Route 60) at Mystic Street



4. High Street (Route 60) at Allston Street