



SUSTAINABLE WEST HARTFORD COMMISSION

June 24, 2024

7:00 PM, Room 407, Town Hall

MEETING MINTUES

1. Call to Order – 7:07 PM

- *Jim Fishman Y*
- *Kimberly Hughes N*
- *Aditee Madkekar Y*
- *Christy Matthews N*
- *Ted Newton Y*
- *Alejandro Paiuk Y*
- *Bernard Pelletier Y*
- *Stephen Sack N*
- *David Sagers Y*
- *Rachael Virgin Y*
- *Patricia Wilson Y*
- *Student Reps: Nathaniel Goldschmidt*
- *Town Staff: Adrienne Billings-Smith (Equity Coordinator), Rick Ledwith (Town Manager), Katherine Bruns, Catherine Diviney*
- *Public: Diane Duva, Ronnie Newton, Alex Scheib, Luciana Granstrand, Eric Granstrand, Jim Head, Ethan Frankel, Tom Virgin, Kristen Brown (Waste Zero), Nancy Jenson, Janet Jacobson, Chris Feely*

2. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes – *Approved (6-0, before some members arrived)*

3. Community Comment & Communications (max 3 min each)

- *Nancy Jensen commented that she supports and is impressed with research/efforts of this group to tackle the Town's waste crises without the need for residents to pay more taxes.*
- *Book gift. (John J. Berger, Ph.D.) – deferred*
- *Discussion/vote on process for communications to commission - deferred*

4. Ongoing Business

- *Working Group Reports, discussion focused only on Waste WG*
 - *Communications & Outreach - none*
 - *Nature-Based Solutions – none*
 - *Energy / Buildings –attached*

- Waste – attached. *NEW UPDATE: The Town Council vote on Unit-Based Pricing (UBP) 1-year town-wide mandatory pilot has unexpectedly been postponed and removed from tomorrow night's 6/25 Town Council agenda.*
 - *Rachael thanked the WWG and Commission for work and support over 9 months; members of public for willingness to learn and engage; State for funding and support for Morley UBP pilot. She showed stack of support letters and shared some personal stories from different outreach events. She recapped the successful presentation to PWF&S Committee on 6/6, and the culmination of their campaign resulting in a Town Council vote on UBP scheduled for 6/25. She turned it over to Rick Ledwith, Town Manager, for an update.*
 - *Rick Ledwith also thanked the Commission for their hard work. He shared that in the course of drafting a resolution for the 6/25 Town Council meeting, Corporation Counsel had advised that there was a legal issue that warranted postponement of the vote. Legally, the Town needed to present and vote on at the same time: 1. the resolution to move forward with the pilot and accept grant, and 2. an ordinance which includes the bag cost and enforcement piece. He was apologetic that this legal obstacle had not been foreseen earlier and reassured the Commission that the vote would take place later in the summer, but likely early fall with 30-day public hearing process. Additionally, since UBP was no longer an agenda item, public comment would not be allowed.*
 - *There was heated discussion about the postponement with Rick Ledwith, Commissioners, and members of the public.*
 - *Many felt the postponement would result in loss of momentum and kill the program. There was frustration about the last-minute notice, and skepticism as to whether the postponement and legal issues were real or just an excuse to derail the program with something more political going on "behind the scenes." There were questions/confusion as to why the sequential process – resolution to accept grant first, then ordinance – that was laid out months prior with Town leadership input could be legally invalid, since the ordinance relied on research from the initial phase of the grant. Some other comments included:*
 - *Discouraging that residents are not being listened to*
 - *Surprise that an agenda item could be removed after being publicly-notified and that public comment (even on the removal) was not allowed.*
 - *"Losing sight of the big picture" – we have a waste crisis and need transformative solutions! Need to keep fighting, especially for our youth.*
 - *Concern postponement may jeopardize the DEEP grant funding*
 - *Realization that Commission needs to focus on politics (as well as Environment, Economics, and Equity)*
 - *Concern that misinformation is active and postponement does not help this. WWG members shared experiences where they talked to people who did not support UBP and turned them into supporters once they understood it.*
 - *"Democracy is at risk"*

- *Disappointment and frustration that the “process” did not work. Separate perspective from outcome of vote - Commission has tried very hard to work within the system, and follow all the rules, but it’s feels like rules/dates keep changing and the “process” is not as transparent as it should be.*
- *Bernie concluded on behalf of the Commission that it’s “hard for many of us to accept there is nothing we can do.” He expressed thanks and empathy to Rick Ledwith for coming and being the messenger and gratitude to the Waste WG for getting UBP to this point.*
- *An additional summary of this discussion is presented in this We-Ha article: <https://we-ha.com/west-hartford-will-postpone-action-on-expanding-food-scrap-and-unit-based-pricing-pilot/>*
- *Discussion/vote on support for [West Hartford Center Infrastructure Plan](#) – Bernie noted that discussion about this started at last Commission meeting and was deferred to this meeting. There seemed to be 2 questions: 1. Does this fall within Commission purview? 2. If so, should the Commission write a letter of support? Rick Ledwith summarized some of the Plan background and evolution of the Options. There was some discussion centered around the written summary (attached) the Bernie provided, which ended with a motion. Vote: “The West Hartford Center Infrastructure Plan is within the purview of the Sustainable West Hartford Commission and we will send the letter of recommendation in support of the Pedestrian Bicycle Commission’s position.” **Approved (6-1)** (Yes - Jim, Ted, Dave, Alejandro, Bernie, Pat); No (Aditee, in favor of Commission sticking to narrower goals.). Ted/Bernie will finalize wording and send.*
- *Discussion/input on 1800 Asylum Ave. – Dave & Catherine have a meeting scheduled with Todd Dumais Town Planner on Friday 6/28. Jim is also trying to get developer to come to Commission meeting.*

5. New Business

- *Guest: Adrienne Billings-Smith, Town Equity Coordinator. Adrienne expressed desire to visit Commissions & Boards. Spoke a little about her experience in various roles for the Town and willingness to help the group “check all the boxes” and think about whose voice the Commission is representing (privilege) and who is not represented/engaged. Aditee expressed one of the reasons she wished to join Commission was b/c she was a person of color. There was discussion about knowing you are “in a bubble” but not knowing HOW to reach out? The Commission’s Working Groups are a road out to the community. Adrienne offered her assistance at the outset of initiatives to help plan out more inclusive outreach and engagement. Convincing people to change is hard. Adrienne challenged the group to ask themselves: What is your Why (or purpose)? It should not be about YOU. She gave the group homework: think about WHY are you here? Keep that Why at center? She can come back to another Commission meeting as her time was cut short by the waste discussion.*

6. Staff Report - deferred

7. Calendar Updates – 6/25 Town Council vote on UBP 1-year pilot - cancelled

8. Next Steps & Agenda for Next Meeting – Dave’s slides re 1800 Asylum Ave.

9. Adjournment – 9:13 PM

Anyone requiring auxiliary aid or service for effective communication or modification of policies or procedures to participate in a meeting, service, program or activity of the Town of West Hartford, should contact Suzanne Oslander, ADA Coordinator, at suzanneo@westhartfordct.gov or (860) 561-7580, as soon as possible, preferably seven days beforehand.

Energy/Building Working Group Report 6/24/24

- No meeting due to Celebrate WH and other events
- Tabled about PowerSmart and Celebrate WH
- We are working with Todd Dumais to discuss the building checklist, meeting the 1700/1800 developer, and other ways that we can support energy efforts in WH
- Kim Hughes has been working on Green Leaf Schools (in Simsbury) and made a connection to that town (Bayard Faithful)

Waste Working Group 6/24/24

- Great public response from booth at Celebrate WH- thanks to the entire Commission and helpers, we got another 135 letters of support to share with Town Council
- Presentation at Unitarian Church on Fern Street- great discussion
- Presentation for library (Zoom)- particularly good Q&A
- Door tags- we distributed to 750 households throughout WH, generating good amount of emails to TC
- Town Council meeting this Tuesday 06/25 7:30pm- Please come and support extending the pilot! Each member of the public is entitled to 3 minutes

Thanks!

Rachael

At the June 3rd Sustainable WH Commission meeting we introduced a motion to support “Option A” of the center development program. This motion was deferred to the 6/24/2024 meeting. There were two reasons for this deferral:

1. Some Commissioners felt that the Center Development Project was outside the scope of our commission.
2. Most Commissioners did not feel equipped or prepared to have commission support for the recommendation put forward by the Pedestrian Bike Commission. I.e., they didn’t feel up to speed on the facts and the options.

This memo to the commission addresses both points. It is suggested that the commission address the issue sequentially – point 1 and then point 2.

Point 1 - Is it in our purview to offer an opinion

Several points of reference make it clear that it is within our purview to support the position taken by the Pedestrian Bike Commission:

- Section 5-16 of the West Hartford regulations (our formation) supports a wide umbrella on sustainability question: “The Town Council hereby establishes a Sustainable West Hartford Commission ... for the purpose of promoting practices that lead to greater environmental, social and economic sustainability; ensuring a high quality of life for present and future generations by fostering an inclusive, resilient, and thriving community; and encouraging the responsible use and conservation of energy and natural resources.” The people centric nature of the center plan appears to fall into this scope.
- Action 5 in the SustainableCT list of actions cites the following: **5. *Dynamic and Resilient Planning*** *Balancing human development and resource use with a wide range of factors, including livability, economic opportunity, biodiversity and natural systems.* Again, it seems that, using SustainableCT as a gauge of what is sustainable – the people centric version of the center plan fits in.
- When the Sustainable West Hartford Commission was established, we actively discussed including Pedestrian Bike because their mission is so heavily weighted toward sustainability. Ultimately, they did not join us because of concern about too large a commission making focused action difficult.

Because Ped Bike is a separate commission, we are not intending to do their work – however under the general banner of sustainability is within our purview to selectively support their initiatives.

Point 2 – What are we being asked to support and what is the background?

The original option in February embodies more sustainability features:

- a zero-carbon transportation route to the Center (bike lanes)
- narrower roads, which are safer for pedestrians, particularly when they cross the road outside of crosswalks
- parallel rather than angled parking spaces, which are safer for pedestrians, because during the backup maneuver from an angled space the pedestrian is less visible to the driver
- wider sidewalks and dining zones, which will be able to better accommodate the influx of pedestrians to the Center that will result from people who choose to live in the many apartment units that are under construction in and around the Center (apartments are much more sustainable than single-family houses)

In addition, following Ed's letter to the editor I compared the streetscapes current – initially proposed – and as proposed with amendments. It will be quickly apparent that the initial proposal offered more space to humans and less to cars.

For reference I attach Ed Pawlak's letter published in WEHA.com below.

To the Editor:

Over the past two years, the project to reimagine and redesign West Hartford Center has generated a tremendous amount of public discussion. One thing that all sides agree upon is that it is people and vibrant businesses, *not* automobiles, which make the Center a vibrant destination. In fact, automobiles detract from the Center experience. They create congestion and pollution and at times threaten human safety.

A vigorous debate is taking place over how much of the public right-of-way in the redesigned Center should be devoted to automobiles vs. people. The challenge is finding a design that accommodates the transportation choices of visitors to the Center, but also creates a plenty of vibrant outdoor space for them to enjoy the experience. The town's consultant showed us what that could look like with an innovative plan that included narrower roads, wide sidewalks and outdoor dining areas, and which drew strong public support.

To the great disappointment of many, in response to complaints from some business owners and landlords in the Center, the town appears to have rejected that plan for one that devotes the vast majority of the public right-of-way to automobiles. The few additional parking spaces produced in this new design by angled rather than parallel parking won't meaningfully benefit the businesses in the Center. But they will swallow up an enormous amount of valuable space in the public right-of-way that could otherwise be devoted to people for dining, strolling, resting, riding bikes, etc. This is particularly frustrating because the town's consultant has documented the surplus of unused parking spaces in the Center, many of which are in surface lots in very close proximity to the businesses.

The community has already expressed a clear vision of how they would like to see public space in the Center divided between people and automobiles. In response to an online survey in 2022, a strong majority of respondents indicated a preference for "dedicated outdoor dining space" and "widened sidewalk walking space" over "angled on-street parking" on both Farmington Avenue and LaSalle Road. It wasn't even close.

The town has a very important decision to make in the near future. It can select a design for the Center that creates vibrant spaces for people, making it an even

more desirable regional commercial destination, to the benefit of the community and Center businesses, while also providing safe access to the abundant parking spaces in and around the Center. Or it can go all in for automobiles, clogging the roads. The people have spoken very clearly that they want a Center designed for people, not automobiles. Will the town honor that aspiration?

Edward Pawlak

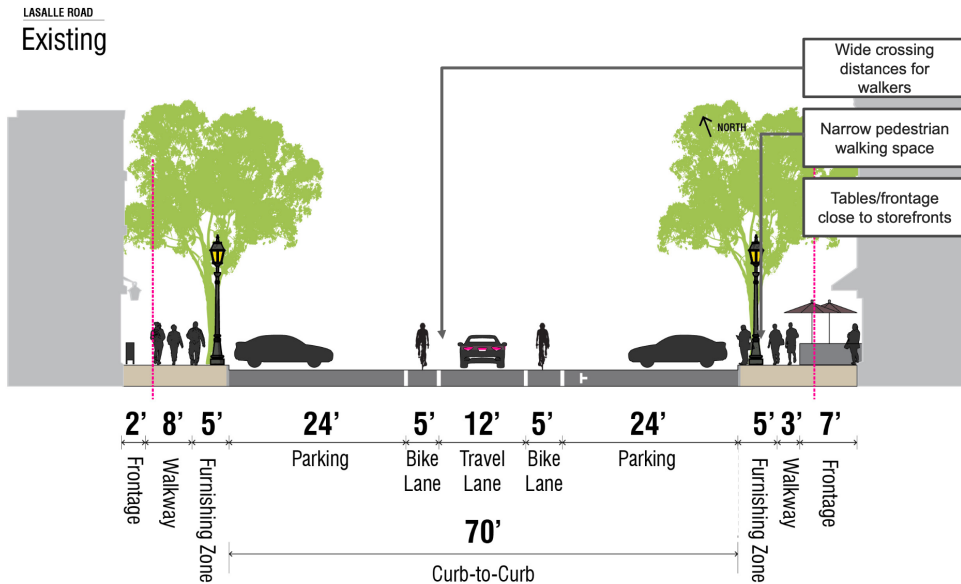
Chair, West Hartford Pedestrian and Bicycle Commission

roadways, polluting the air, and making the Center a much less desirable destination than it could be

LaSalle – Current Curb to Curb – 70 feet

Current Conditions: LaSalle Road

DRAFT

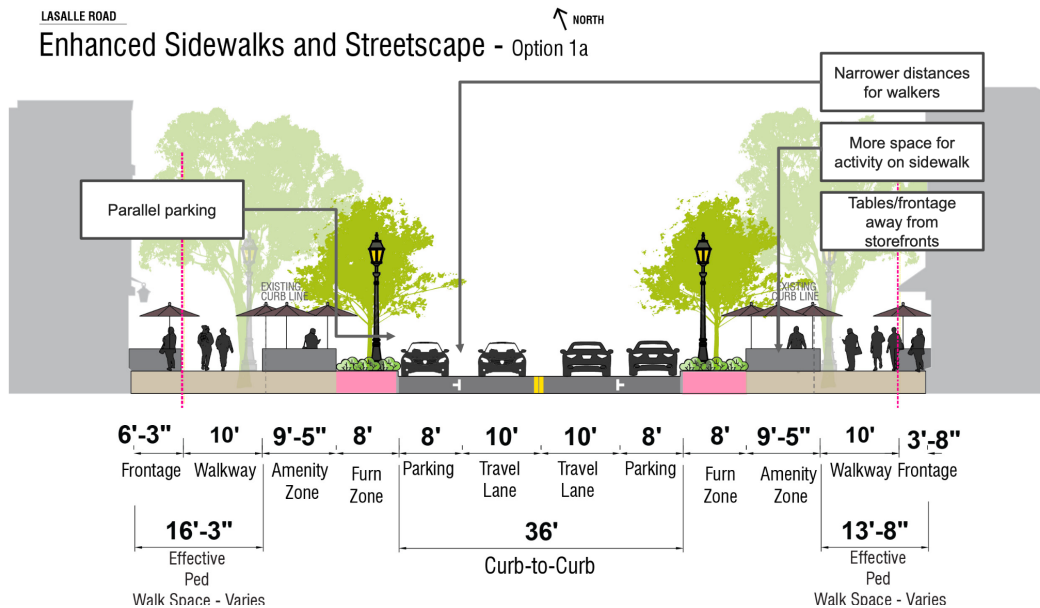


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Proposal in February: Curb to curb is 36 feet

Proposed: LaSalle Road (1)

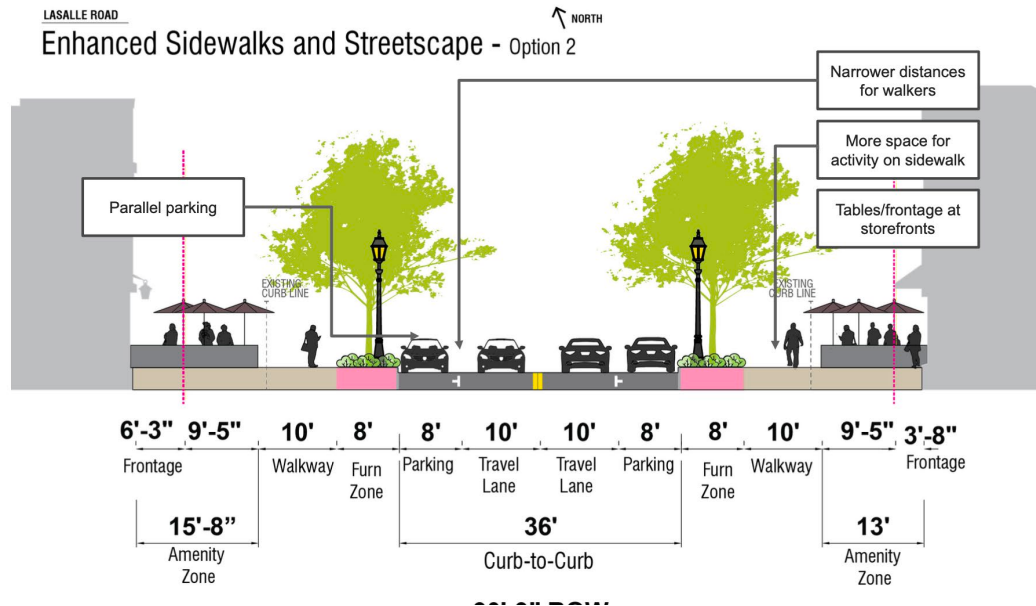
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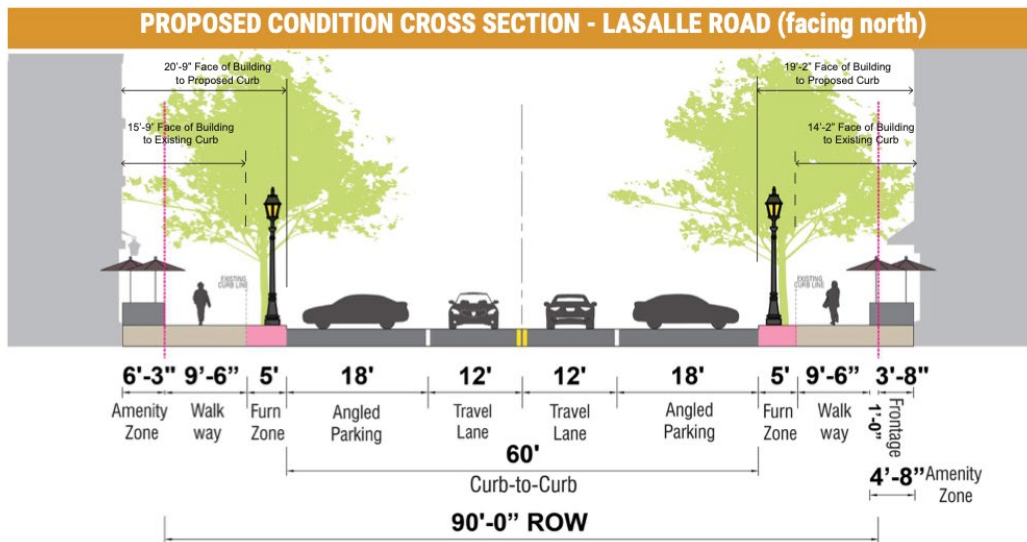
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Proposed: LaSalle Road

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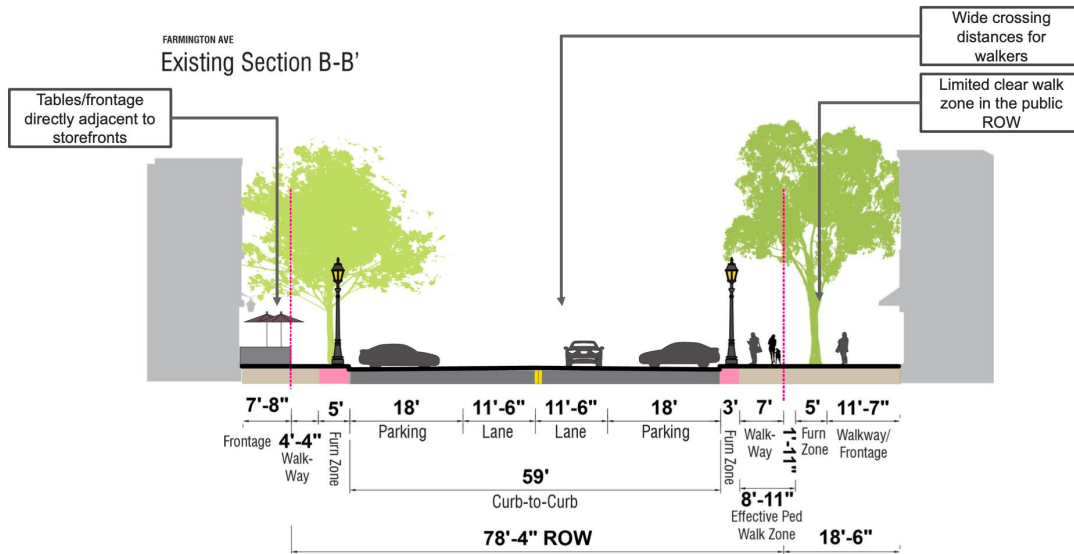


As amended curb to curb is 60 feet



Current Conditions: Farmington Avenue

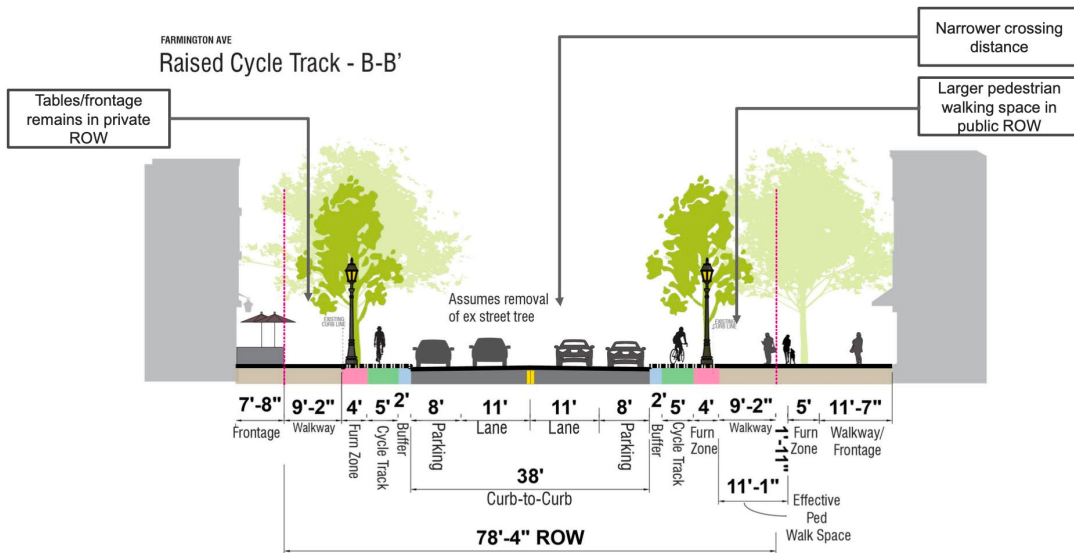
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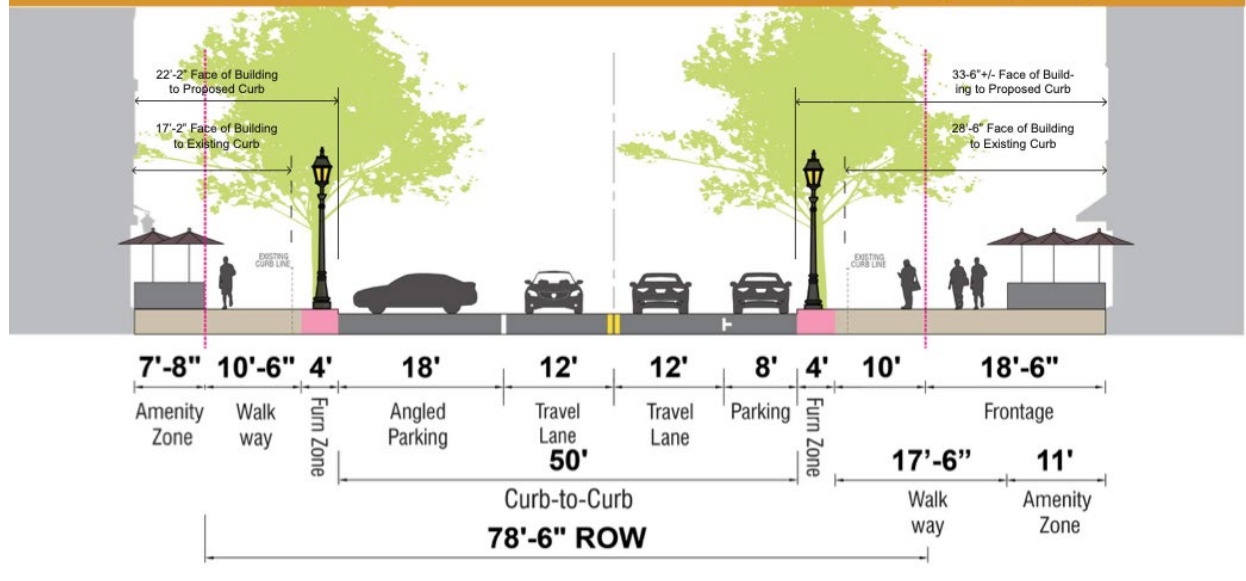
Proposed: Farmington Avenue

DRAFT



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PROPOSED CONDITION CROSS SECTION - FARMINGTON AVE(facing east)



July 8, 2024

Dear West Hartford Town Council, Town Manager, and Town Planner,

The Sustainable West Hartford Commission wishes to weigh in on the West Hartford Center Infrastructure Master Plan. This plan has been through several phases of development and consideration, with the most recent roll-out presented during public information meetings on April 8. Since then, town staff has received additional input from citizens, the Pedestrian Bike Commission, interest groups (e.g., Bike West Hartford), and the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce among others.

This plan falls within the purview of the Sustainable West Hartford Commission to comment on this matter, insofar as the commission was established for the purpose of promoting practices that lead to greater environmental, social and economic sustainability; ensuring a high quality of life for present and future generations by fostering an inclusive, resilient, and thriving community; and encouraging the responsible use and conservation of energy and natural resources.

The Commission recommends that the town give more weight to the original option that was unveiled in February, or an updated plan of a similar nature, which would be more people-centric nature and embody more sustainability features such as:

- A zero-carbon transportation route to the Center (bike lanes).
- Narrower roads, which are safer for pedestrians, particularly when they cross the road outside of crosswalks.
- Parallel rather than angled parking spaces, which are safer for pedestrians, because during the backup maneuver from an angled space the pedestrian is less visible to the driver.
- Wider sidewalks and dining zones, which will be able to better accommodate the influx of pedestrians to the Center that will result from people who choose to live in the many apartment units that are under construction in and around the Center. (Apartments tend to be more sustainable than single-family houses.)

Given this is a once in a generation opportunity to shape the future of the Center, and the desire to make the vitality of West Hartford and the Center sustainable for many years to come, we recommend that town carefully consider the above and other sustainability factors when selecting the final design.

Yours truly,

Bernard Pelletier, Chair Sustainable West Hartford Commission

cc.

Jim Fishman

Kimberly Hughes

Aditee Madkekar

Christy Matthews

Ted Newton

Alexandro Paiuk

Stephen Sack

David Sagers

Rachael Virgin

Patricia Wilson