

From: Residents of South Main Street, Haydenville

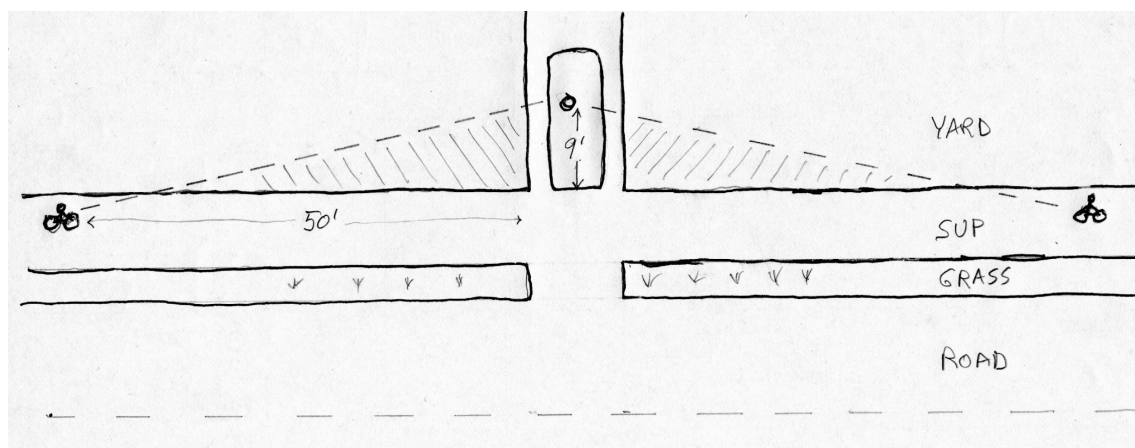
To: William Sayre, Denise Banister, Paul Wetzel, *Williamsburg Board of Selectmen*
Denise Wickland, *Police Chief*
Gaby Immerman, Eric Bloomquist, *Williamsburg Mill River Greenway Committee*
Nick Caccamo, Eleanor Warnock, *Williamsburg Town Administrator*
Alwin Ramirez, Mark Devylder, Carrie Kavallee, *Mass. Dept. of Transportation*
Lindsay Sabadosa, Paul Mark, *Massachusetts State Representatives*
Jim McGovern, *United States Representative*

Date: November 15, 2023

We the undersigned residents, property/business owners and supporters of South Main St. in Haydenville believe that **safety concerns** about the lower S. Main St. pedestrian+bike path **have not been adequately addressed.**

The proximity of the proposed shared-use path to front-yard fences, foliage, and adjacent buildings means that many drivers will have restricted vision of the path as they are backing out of their driveways.

A bicycle traveling at even 5 MPH moves more than 7 feet every second. If it takes a driver 7 seconds to look over their shoulder to the left checking for bikes, then look to the right, then begin backing up, a bicycle going 5 MPH will have traveled 50 feet since the driver looked to the left. With a car halted in a driveway at the edge of the shared-use path, the driver is probably 7 to 12 feet away from the edge of the path (for car vs. pickup truck). The scale diagram below shows the geometry of the situation:

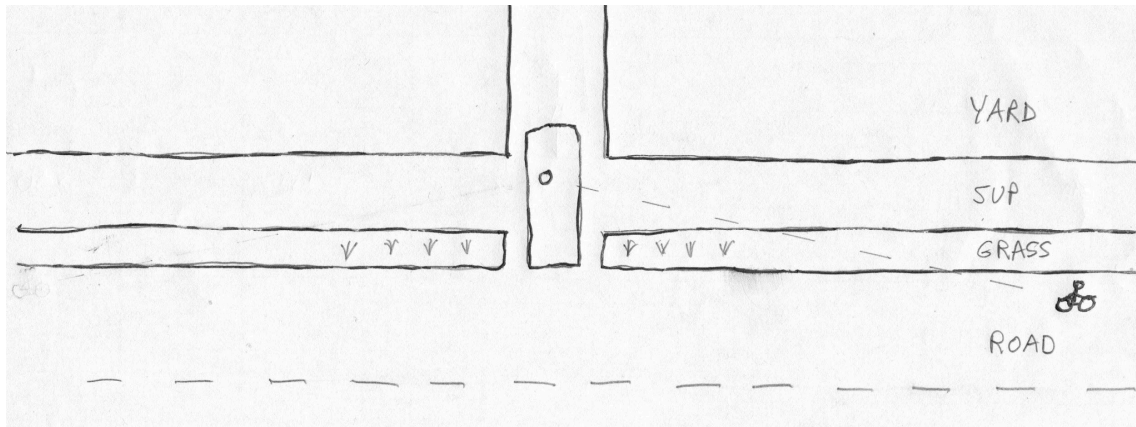


The shaded area must be free of visual obstructions for the driver to be able to see a cyclist within collision range when backing up. Nearly all of the houses along S. Main St. have fences, foliage, between-property hedges/trees, or adjacent buildings in this region. (See Appendix A below.) These cannot simply be “trimmed,” as the Greenway

committee suggests; a good deal of the neighborhood's character would have to be changed in order for drivers to see bicyclists on the proposed path.

It is important to note that the hazard here is greater for children than for adults. Children are shorter and thus more likely to be obscured by low obstacles, and they are less likely to understand the critical importance of stopping quickly if a car in a driveway is moving towards the path.

What residents along S. Main St. are presently used to—bicyclists traveling in the road—is pictured in the diagram below.



Here, the driver has stopped at the edge of the road. Only one sight line is needed (cyclists travel in the same direction as cars), and that sight line passes over the sidewalk and grass strip: no obstructions.

In general, a safely-designed path designated for bicycle use which is crossed by driveways must be set back from any visual obstructions by a distance equal to the largest expected distance between a driver and the bumper of their vehicle.

The S. Main St. shared-use path is not designed in this way, and the neighborhood, which is built up to the sidewalk, is not amenable to the proposed design.

An example of a safely designed path can be found along Court St. in Westfield. (This is currently the *only* place where I have found a bike path replacing a “residential” sidewalk—though only one building along this path is not a business.) The path can be examined using Google Street View here:

https://www.google.com/maps/@42.1198016,-72.7563397,3a,75y,213.36h,83.92t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1ssQgg-jAM_Z9_eu6xY1WLeAI2e0!7i16384!8i8192?entry=ttu

Nearly all of the buildings have front lawns which are free of obstructions. (And most of the driveways attach to parking lots, which means that drivers will be pulling out of the driveway in a forward direction, which requires less visual clearance than is needed when backing up.) The character of the neighborhood is quite different from S. Main St. in Haydenville, though. It has much more of a “barren”/“city” feel to it, and it would be

destructive to the character of our neighborhood to carve out enough visibility to make the proposed shared-use path safe for bicyclists and residents backing out of their driveways. (Before and after pictures of the Court St. path can be seen here: [Before](#) vs. [After](#).)

Right of Way

One important issue is the question of who will have the right of way here—whose responsibility is it to stop to avoid a collision? (And more importantly, who will *think* they have the right of way and don't have to stop?) On the road, just four feet away from the shared-use path, the situation is clear: Bicycles and cars don't have to slow down or even think about motorists backing out of their driveways; drivers backing up must stop and yield to traffic in the road. Is the situation different on the bike path? *Will cyclists understand this?* When rail-trail bike paths cross a road, there are stop signs clearly warning cyclists that they DO NOT have the right to sail across the intersection, oblivious to any road traffic. (Evidently the designers of these paths did not believe that cyclists would understand and remember this without the signs.) The absence of similar signs where the S. Main St. path intersects driveways creates a safety hazard for cyclists, and a liability hazard for residents. (And perhaps for the town as well, if it is found liable for building an unsafe path for bicycles.) Simply making driveways out of different material, as the Greenway committee proposes, does not adequately address these concerns.

Expecting bicyclists to slow down and stop for drivers who can't see them—and who cyclists themselves may not be able to see—is a predictable accident waiting to happen.

Pedestrian Safety

In the October 19th meeting, one of the commentators basically ridiculed our concern for pedestrian safety, accusing us of expecting bicycles to ram pedestrians. This is not what we are worried about.

Accidents happen because they DON'T happen over & over & over again, leading to people letting their guard down.

- A pedestrian who turns and steps to their left to examine something that has caught their eye is almost certainly not going to be struck by a bicyclist—until the one time when there happens to be a cyclist they haven't noticed coming up from behind, about to pass them.
- A resident who steps from their front walkway onto the path without being careful to look both ways first will almost certainly not get hit by a bicyclist—until the one time when there *is* a cyclist coming. Some walkways along S. Main St. have limited visibility along the proposed path, and some residents are elderly and may have

difficulty remembering to look before setting foot on the path—remembering that their sidewalk is no longer a safe place for them to casually step onto.

Our objection to the proposed shared-use path is that it takes away something that we—and many residents of town—presently have: a place where pedestrians can safely walk without concern about being struck by a bicycle as a result of some unexpected movement on our part. **Therefore, we hereby propose leaving the existing sidewalk as it is, for pedestrian use and enjoyment only, and for bicyclists to continue to use the road as they have been doing for decades without incident.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Jim Weigang
Gary Linscott
Mark Albright
Mary A. Moriarty
Cate Edon Higgins
Libby Jalbert
Ned Jalbert
Donald Dextraze
Madelyn Breen
Rebecca Brooks
Penny Robbins
Gerry Shattuck
Cora Lee Drew
Tom McCabe
Anne McCabe
Jeremy Pheasant
Jo Pheasant
Elizabeth Ducharme
Sue Fortgang
Todd Dextraze
Olivia Dextraze
Amity Perman
Eric Cerreta
Michael J Moran, Jr
Lynn M Moran
Nancy Callahan
David Nehring
Alan Verson
Joe Pasternak
Santo Tomasine

Appendix A

Following is a summary of obstructions blocking the view of the sidewalk from all driveways and walkways along South Main St. Driveway obstructions were observed 9 feet back from the edge of the sidewalk at an altitude of 4 feet above ground. “Right” and “left” refer to directions looking back at the sidewalk from the observing position.

S. Main St.

- 29: low fence on right, probably not obstructing vision
- 27: fences obstructing view in both directions
- 25: trees on right, fence & shrubs completely obstructing view to left
- 23: trees obstructing view in both directions
- 21: fence on right, 25 feet away
2nd & 3rd driveways: tree and shrubs on left
- 19: tree-like shrub obstructing view to the left
2nd driveway: fence on right, 25 feet away
- 17: fence on right

9 Bridge Rd. (driveway on S. Main): fence obstructing view to left, car parked on lawn completely obstructing view to right

- 13: walkway has view to right completely obstructed by large hedge at sidewalk edge
- 11: hedge and garbage bins completely obstruct view to left, tree 35 feet to right
- 9: shrub blocking view to right, tree 30 feet to the left
left side walkway: view to right completely obstructed at sidewalk edge by tree-like shrub between properties
- 7: walkway: tall shrubs interfere with view to the left
driveway: shrubs 30 feet away on left, closer on right side plus building on right
- 5: shrubs interfere with view on left, heavy shrub and building completely blocking view to the right
- 3: flower delivery drive: building blocking view to left
parking pad: no obstructions
- 1: no driveway

Appendix B

A few excerpts relating to sidewalks and bike paths:

Although the shared use path should be given the same priority through intersections as the parallel highway, motorists falsely expect bicyclists to stop or yield at all cross-streets and driveways. Efforts to require or encourage bicyclists to yield or stop at each cross-street and driveway are inappropriate and frequently ignored by bicyclists.

— from <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferjourney1/Library/countermeasures/08.htm>

11.4 Shared Use Path Design

[...]

A mix of users on a shared use path is not always a desirable situation because the potential for conflicts is high. For example, commuting bicyclists are slowed by users on recreational strolls. The safety and enjoyment of a path can decline when conflicts among users occur. For these reasons, the designer should avoid creating situations in which sidewalks are used as shared use paths. Conflicts between users stem from many sources including:

- Personal expectations;
- Overcrowding;
- Clashes between different users;
- Various levels of ability and experience; and
- Differences in speed.

— from

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/massdot-design-guide-chapter-11-shared-use-paths-and-greenways/download>

Bicycle lanes must be physically separated not only from cars but also from pedestrians to prevent unsafe conflicts. [pg 10]

The first bicycle lanes were built on sidewalks, but pedestrians complained about their moving space being taken over by fast bicycles. Over time, this problem was addressed, and today most bicycle lanes are separated from both cars and pedestrians. [pg 16]

— from <https://www.fiafoundation.org/media/xmwl54t2/cc-protected-oct201022.pdf>

Appendix C

The following was read by Jim Weigang at the Oct. 19 Greenway public meeting:

- In 2015 a report was presented to the Greenway committee by the civil engineering firm Fuss & O'Neill on the subject of connecting the Leeds rail trail to the Rt. 9 bike path. They recommended keeping bike and pedestrian traffic separate, with bikes using the street, and they gave suggestions for improving street safety for cyclists.

Then, in 2017, the Greenway Committee said it planned to use “Complete Streets elements” on S. Main St.: sharrows, or markings to indicate bicycle use of the street.

- Searching the internet, I can find NO PLACE where a mixed-use bike path has **replaced** a sidewalk—no residential setting that has a mixed-use path **instead** of a sidewalk. [Note: I found Court St. in Westfield after writing this, but it is not really a residential setting.] EVERY street planning document I've found provides **separate** paths for bicyclists and pedestrians. I suspect this is because combining a residential sidewalk with a bike path is NOT A GOOD IDEA.
- There are obvious safety reasons for this: not only from bikes hitting pedestrians—particularly eBikes, which are heavier & faster—but also from serious injuries resulting from people inadvertently walking into the path of a cyclist. Children can safely play on a sidewalk, casually and without concern. Anyone on a bike path had better remember to look around before “changing lanes.”

These safety issues are only made worse by the proposed path being only 8 feet wide, rather than the more common 10-12 foot width for bike paths.

- But beyond safety issues, bicycles change the nature and quality of walking for pedestrians:
 - You **must** walk on the right side of the path, because you're basically on a roadway.
 - It becomes hazardous to walk with earbuds on because you can't hear warnings from cyclists you can't see coming up behind you.
 - Even without headphones, pedestrians are **going** to be startled by cyclists suddenly calling out “On your left!” (if you're lucky) and whooshing past you. On the Northampton bike path, despite slowing down as I approach, I have never managed to avoid startling people I pass.
 - On a bike path, you have to deal with cyclists you can't see coming up behind you. This is worse than even walking along a street without a sidewalk, because in that case you're walking against traffic and can see both cars & bicycles coming towards you.

- A sidewalk is supposed to be a place for people to walk and children to play on in a relaxed way without having to look both ways before stepping onto it, and without having to beware of traffic coming from behind you. Converting our sidewalk to a mixed use path takes this sort of sidewalk away from us and DENIES us what every other neighborhood with a sidewalk enjoys.
- We've heard it said that we don't have to worry, that bicyclists won't even use the bike path, they'll use the road. And indeed, the Greenway committee's model shows a bicycle rider on the road and a cyclist WALKING his bike on the path. (Will our path have signs saying, "Bicycles must be walked on this path"?) If this is so, then why spend millions of dollars and disrupt our neighborhood and businesses for a project that changes nothing? Bicyclists can already ride on the road, and they are more than welcome to walk their bicycle along our current sidewalk.
- What Fuss & O'Neill proposed back in 2015, and what the Greenway Committee planned in 2017 seem like good ideas to us. Implement them!
 - Extend the sidewalk along S. Main St. down below Fort Hill Rd.
 - Install speed humps to slow down cars, particularly along the long broad straightaway of lower S. Main St.
 - Paint share-the-road bicycle markings on the roadway.
 - Let cars continue to park on both sides of upper S. Main, which naturally slows down traffic above Bridge Rd.
 - And make sure the roadway pavement is kept in good repair **all the way to the edge of the street**—something that doesn't matter to cars but is of considerable importance to cyclists.

Appendix D

Photographs of sidewalk visibility on South Main St. driveways:



27 S. Main St., looking south



27 S. Main St., looking north



25 S. Main St. front entrance



25 S. Main St., looking south



Driveway at 21 S. Main St., looking south



Driveway at 19 S. Main St., looking north



Driveways of 17 S. Main St. and 9 Bridge Rd., looking north



Front entrance of 13 S. Main St., looking north



Driveway of 11 S. Main St., looking south



Driveway of 5 S. Main St., looking north