

Plandome Rd Vision Project (Article submitted to Manhasset Press)

Phase 1 Safe Routes to Schools (Manhasset Ave to Park Ave)

May 1, 2012; 7pm MHS Cafeteria

Plandome Rd Vision Coming into Focus.

Yes, it's finally going to happen! North Hempstead Town Supervisor Jon Kaiman, officials and project staff held a community wide meeting providing an update on the Plandome Rd Vision Project. The meeting was held May 1, 2012 in the High School cafeteria. Supervisor Kaiman anticipates Phase 1 to be bid out next month and construction to occur in August 2012. The entire Plandome Rd Vision Plan, covering Northern Blvd to Webster Ave, was presented and discussed at the last community wide meeting in February 2010 and estimated near \$2.5 Million. That scope far exceeds available funding, so the project must be phased as funding sources become available. Phase 1 covers a very short section from Manhasset Ave to Park Ave estimated near \$700K is funded by a NYS Safe Routes to Schools grant, matched by the Town of North Hempstead (TNH). In Phase 1 traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures are in focus, narrowing the vehicle travel lanes, creating a median, and adding bulbs-outs at corners, where practical, engineered to decrease pedestrian crossing distance.

TNH Planning Commissioner Michael Levine stressed the two year State approval process was arduous, involving not one approval but several stages of approval by NYS-DOT, with the final step approval of bid documents expected imminently. Understanding the time delay concerns of the community, he added the two year approval is consistent with NYS project approval time frames experience by most municipalities. The past community concerns and stakeholder recommendations details were determined during the past two year plan approval process between TNH and NYS. While many concepts are in the final plan, some were not. During the intersection by intersection review at this meeting, it was clear that each corner carried its unique pro's and con's. On the positive, Manhasset Ave will finally be widened using the Town's right of way to modify the sidewalk adjacent to Mary Jane Davies Green to legally accommodate adding an eastbound Manhasset Ave right turn lane onto southbound Plandome Rd. Several voiced concern why a southbound Plandome Rd right turn lane onto westbound Manhasset Ave was not included in the final plan. Project Architects responded that either pedestrian or vehicular safety standards were the basis of decisions. As the financier, NYS-DOT gets the final word.

In Phase 1 the median will not be a *raised* median, but rather a *flush* stamped pavement, similar to the new crosswalk pavement design placed last year on Park Ave. Safety advocates believe a raised 2" mountable (sloped curb) median would provide more pedestrian safety and better restrain traffic to stay in the assigned lanes, while providing emergency vehicles to cross it. However, the flush median does provide a future potential to change to a raised median if determined that drivers chronically ignore the flush median. Starting with a flush median in Phase 1, allows future modification if needed at much more modest cost. Similar crosswalks will be placed in the Phase 1 area.

Unless some huge grant or financing plan becomes available, the entire Plandome Rd vision will likely take years to accomplish. Phased progress carries a benefit of allowing the community to test the success of these design elements as the Plandome Rd Vision Plan continues in future years as funding becomes available. Given the multi-year nature of the entire project, TNH is re-paving the now badly needed Town owned sections of Plandome Rd from 25A to Webster Ave which has become a sea of pothole repairs. The Nassau County owned 0.3 mile portion of Plandome Rd through the Incorporated Village of Plandome Heights will also be repaved concurrently. TNH Public Works Commissioner Thomas Tiernan advised the entire repaving work is anticipated to take only a few days, performing a 2-inch scrape up of existing asphalt, followed by immediate full repaving with work performed at lower volume evening and night hours. While every road construction brings inconvenience to live through, the community was assured every TNH effort will be made to minimize traffic interruption during the work.

Other details outside the Phase 1 NYSDOT project are still being considered such as a badly needed crosswalk from the southwest to northwest corner of Memorial Place at Plandome Rd, storm sewer drain cleanouts with new catch basins where needed during repaving work to alleviate the chronic “plandome river” that runs on the east side of Plandome Rd during every heavy rain. TNH will also attempt to get LIRR to add one of the new design crosswalks at the northwest to southwest corners of the LIRR parking exit ramp onto Plandome Rd. Following the Phase 1 work, traffic light timing adjustments along the strip will be necessary. All traffic lights are a Nassau County responsibility.

Attendance was light at this meeting with many voicing concern about inadequate advertising and notice of the meeting. The blandness of another town meeting on what many perceive as just a simple repaving project may have contributed to low turnout. However, the meeting was needed as a venue to prepare the community for the coming summer work. Those who did attend were able to see and hear that community has both pro and con views on just about every element of the plan. Some fear ‘traffic calming’ could potentially back up more traffic along Plandome Rd. Yet for others, that traffic calming is exactly the point – to make Plandome Rd a less desirable short cut to the Port Washington Peninsula and in the long term will encourage diversion of more ‘through’ traffic to State Route 101/ Port Washington Blvd that was designed to better accommodate much larger traffic volume. At the heart of the initial goal, many concur the Phase 1 design elements is an improvement over current pedestrian safety conditions, provide more deterrence to chronic driver infractions – double parking, u turns, and speeding during non-peak hours, and the like.

Those close to the process of the past years acknowledge the long lead time gets discouraging but have also learned a great deal of the detail underlying laws, processes and rationale. Phase 1 will clearly not please everyone, but does meet the initial goals and the grant funding requirements, accommodating an incremental approach that maximizes future flexibility to satisfy the community while testing engineer design success as future project Phases progress. Despite debate on individual details, those that served on this project’s stakeholders group are pleased. It was noted Councilwoman Kaplan is planning to form a new Parking Task Force to consolidate the many separate groups all formulating parking solutions to compliment this roadway project. More importantly, Manhasset is finally getting the TNH attention it deserves and the Council of Greater Manhasset Civic Associations believes this project is a very positive improvement for our downtown, and gives a resounding ‘thank you’ to Supervisor Kaiman, Councilwoman Kaplan and TNH project staff for this progress towards a better Manhasset project..

[The author is the President of the Council of Greater Manhasset Civic Associations and its members contributed to this article.]