

August 6th, Special Town Meeting

Green Space: Process, Pedestrians & Parking

What is the purpose of this article?

You are being asked to vote for an article that instructs the Board of Selectmen (BOS), as the overseers of the Town Center Reconstruction project, to adhere to the original design documents that the Town completed in December, put out to bid in January and February and contracted to build on April 21st of this year (aka "Plan A").

By voting "YES" you will be instructing the BOS to implement the vision for Belmont Center represented in the design documents and presented to Town Meeting in November, 2014. You will be instructing them to put aside their own plan for the Town Center (aka "Plan B"), which was unveiled and immediately adopted in a May 28th Special Hearing of the Board without review by the Planning Board, Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC), Town Meeting, or the public.

Where did Plan A come from?

Plan A, the original design plan for the Belmont Center Reconstruction, was the product of a four-year-long process of public meetings, deliberations and hearings by the TAC, the Planning Board, the BOS, and Town Meeting. It represents the consensus plan of Belmont as a community. The extensive public vetting included:

- Four Belmont Center information sessions hosted by the TAC from October 2010 to January 2011 with Planning Board input
- A presentation at Town Meeting in May, 2014
- A presentation at Meet Belmont in August, 2014
- Discussion at precinct information sessions hosted by the BOS in September, 2014
- A presentation at a joint meeting of the BOS, the Warrant Committee and the Capital Budget Committee in October, 2014
- A presentation at the League of Women Voters' Warrant Briefing in November, 2014
- A presentation and discussion at a Special Town Meeting in November, 2014

Where did Plan B come from?

Plan B was drawn up by Director of Community Development, Glenn Clancy, at the instruction of Selectman Sami Baghdady in the days leading up to a May 28th meeting. This meeting was advertised as an update to Belmont Center Reconstruction; no advance mention was made of changes to the contracted plan. After being introduced at the May 28th meeting, it was immediately adopted that evening, without input from any of the bodies that contributed to Plan A.

What are the differences between Plan A and Plan B?

The major differences between the Town Meeting-approved Plan A and the Selectmen's Plan B concern the existing "cut-through" road in front of Belmont Savings Bank. Plan A removes the cut-through and uses the space freed up to create a continuous lawn linking the current

landscaped traffic island with the sidewalk that runs in front of Belmont Savings Bank and the adjacent parking garage. Plan B restores a narrower cut-through road than the one in place today and four parallel parking spaces in front of Belmont Savings Bank in place of six parking spaces in the original redesign (Plan A).

The lawn feature is the centerpiece of the Town Center Reconstruction project. As explained to Town Meeting in November by Glenn Clancy, it plays a critical role in the traffic calming and pedestrian friendly features of the reconstruction plan, enforces a single lane of traffic in each direction for the length of Leonard Street, removes a troublesome "pinch point" at Moore Street. Finally, the lawn provides more space for pedestrians to walk, sit, socialize and relax.

Does Plan B increase parking in Belmont Center?

No. It actually reduces parking by two spaces. Plan A, the design for the Town Center Reconstruction that was contracted in April, includes **six parking places** in the area around Belmont Savings Bank: three off-street spots adjacent to the lower entrance to the Belmont Savings parking garage and three new spaces adjacent to the entrance to Belmont Savings Bank on Concord Avenue. Plan B offers just **four, parallel spaces** along a narrower cut-through lane in front of Belmont Savings bank, and eliminates the Concord Ave spaces.

Does removing the cut-through road pose a safety risk?

No. Just the opposite. The town lawn feature is a pillar of the pedestrian-friendly and traffic calming features of the design. It replaces a small, little-used island of green space bounded on all sides by heavily trafficked streets with a continuous lawn accessible from the sidewalk in front of Belmont Savings Bank. Further, the removal of the cut-through is intended to remove a busy, confusing and hectic intersection at Moore and Leonard Streets, where two lanes of traffic expand to three lanes, creating a pinch point that is dangerous for motorists and pedestrians.

Does how I vote have implications beyond the Town Center?

It does. The Belmont Center Reconstruction is one of a long list of infrastructure projects in Belmont over which the Board of Selectmen will have jurisdiction and about which there are differences of opinion within town. Several projects will come to Town Meeting in the near future: the Belmont Community Path, the Grove Street Playground and the Belmont Incinerator site among them.

By voting "YES," you will be affirming that process and transparency are key elements of planning in Belmont. Major infrastructure projects should not be designed by whim and adopted hastily. They should be deliberate and represent the interests of the whole community. Plan A meets that standard. Plan B simply does not. Conversely, by voting "NO", you are agreeing with the Selectmen that, within the four corners of a project, the BOS has total authority to change any element of the design at any time and for any reason. In such a system, there would be no such thing as an "agreed upon plan" for any project. Belmont would be in the position of waiting until each ribbon cutting to see what the Selectmen decided to build.

Questions regarding this page should be directed to:
Paul Roberts, Town Meeting Member Precinct 8,
paulroberts@gmail.com, 617 932-1234 and/or
Bonnie Friedman, Town Meeting Member Precinct 3,
home@bonnieanddavid.com, 617 484-1388.