



Bernard F. Lynch
City Manager

*In CC packets
6/5/09 by
Bethes*

TO: Mayor Edward Caulfield
And
Members of the Lowell City Council

FROM: Bernard F. Lynch, City Manager

DATE: June 3, 2009

SUBJECT: **MOTION OF 5/26/09 BY COUNCILOR KAZANJIAN
"REQUEST THE CITY MANAGER TO REPORT ON THE
REPAIRS AND CONDITIONS OF THE ROADWAYS AND
SIDEWALKS IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA".**

Regarding the above-mentioned motion, I have been in contact with Adam Baacke, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director. Adam has informed me that as a result of the City Manager's Downtown Summit Series held in 2007, the City Administration engaged the services of the engineering firm, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB), to prepare a plan of action for the downtown streets, sidewalks, handicapped accessibility, underground vault issues, traffic control, etc. In the period following the Summit, VHB has inventoried the majority of vaults, prepared plans for cobble repairs, designed a new crosswalk installation with proper handicapped ramps and other general street and sidewalk repairs with some recommendations for improved traffic controls.

Given the costs of improvements the City has sought to phase the work and look for creative opportunities to fund the needed improvements. The downtown business and residential community clearly prioritized the need to repair the cobble stone streets where they have been patched which will also include sidewalk repairs, installation of new crosswalks which provide a smooth walking surface and new handicapped ramps. VHB prepared plans for the cobble repair work which is located in the core of the downtown on Middle, Shattuck and Palmer Streets and will include 14 new crosswalk locations with ramps in this area along with removal of the cobble rosette at the major intersection of Market/Prescott/Central. We hope to see this work commence this construction season and it is anticipated that it will take two seasons due to the specialty of this work and the need to maintain traffic during construction activities.

In addition to the cobble repairs we are seeking any available grant funding to implement some changes to traffic equipment that will lead to more efficiencies in traffic flow through the downtown. Although the downtown business and residential community felt some improvements might be realized by evaluating one-way operations and access from Shattuck Street to Dutton via a newly allowed right turn, these options failed to provide any improved level of service after careful analysis. However, there are some signal upgrades that will gain some efficiency and we will continue to seek funding opportunities for implementation.

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A major obstacle to certain improvements is the underground vaults owned by the private building owners but located under City sidewalks. The DPD staff working with VHB is contemplating various means to address deficiencies and develop a program of sorts that would encourage vault owners to either make repairs or abandon their vault areas. This process is even more complicated where utilities are located in vault areas. We expect it to take some time and some creative financing options to be able to address this issue with owners, but it remains a priority since our downtown infrastructure is critical to its economic viability.

This response to this motion should recognize the achievement of some significant milestones in addressing downtown needs over the last two years. Defining a scope of work and getting our consultant, VHB on board was our first achievement. The completion of the vault survey and assessments which required the cooperation of many building owners is a significant step towards our overall program of improvements. Physical enhancements completed thus far include the installation of the Mack Plaza Trolley Playground for use by the children of downtown residents and visitors. A new landscape was installed at the Central Street Island. Our Gateway Signage System saw some upgrades and new installations. New benches and trash receptacles were purchased for the downtown and some were installed during the major downtown clean up in May. The City is also in possession of approximately 58 new Victorian lights to replace the existing cobra fixtures in an extended downtown area which requires further coordination with NGrid and the City's workforce. Collaborative marketing efforts were pursued, solidifying the public-private relationship in promoting Lowell. Retail recruitment and retention spurred a Best Retail Practices Program. The effort to link special events and downtown businesses has ensured that benefits accrue to the local retailers. New parking management mechanisms are ongoing and ground floor garage shopper parking presents a customer friendly image.

I should also note that through the generosity of our some of our downtown banks, the Chamber, CVB, Center City and possibly some additional donors, we were able to continue our downtown flowering baskets this year. We will formally recognize all donors later in the year.

I hope this provides a clear view of our progress thus far while showing a commitment to continued efforts to improve our downtown streetscape and infrastructure.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.

cc: Adam Baacke, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director
Anne Barton, Deputy Director
Diane Tradd, Chief Design Planner