

City to pursue grant for school route safety improvements

Nov. 16, 2021 | Carolyn Noel



EASTHAMPTON – The Easthampton School Committee met to discuss a variety of agenda items – including a proposed grant for infrastructure development on Park Street and district goals – at their Nov. 9 meeting.

City Planner Jeff Bagg was in attendance to discuss the sidewalks and enhancements proposed for the Mountain View School area. According to Bagg, there is an infrastructure grant opportunity coming up on Dec. 1 from the Safe Routes to School Program. This funding would cover improvements, enhancements or new ways for students to walk and bike to school.

Bagg said the Planning Department has been working on a feasibility study to look at alternative routes to Mountain View School. They were originally looking at creating a route going from the rail trail through Nonotuck Park but decided against it as it would be a longer route and would be more expensive to build.

“We feel like that is still really important information that we’ll have available to us in the future, but I think in the meantime we’ve shifted to look at Park Street,” he said.

The proposed Park Street route would be the focus of receiving this grant money.

“One of the key features that we’re trying to flesh out is the ability to build a handicap accessible path that would go from the Manhan Rail Trail up to Ward Avenue and it would bring you to the rail trail to Park Street,” said Bagg.

He said that this infrastructure plan is key in providing a safe route from the rail trail to Mountain View School.

Bagg said that the plan would take around four years to come to fruition.

“The process with MassDOT (Massachusetts Department of Transportation) is extensive,” he said.

However, he asked the School Committee to sign a letter of support for the Safe Routes to School Program grant at the meeting so that they could apply for this round of funding.

“This is not immediate, but the size of this grant at \$1.5 million is very much worth pursuing right now,” said Bagg.

The Planning Department would know by February or March 2022 if they received the money. If received, Bagg said it would show that they are advancing this project forward. If not, they could gather feedback and go through the pros and cons of the plan.

In the end, the School Committee unanimously approved the decision to sign the letter of intent for the grant funding.

Superintendent Allison LeClair then spoke on four new district goals. The first goal focused on student learning and working to “identify and develop an action plan to best address student needs in the area of social emotional learning through a multi-pronged approach.”