

## TOCC Public Service Committee

### Recommendations to the Town Council on the AMT Traffic Study

December 14, 2020

#### **Planning for the Future**

At this writing, the problem of cut-through traffic in the Town seems fairly remote. Covid-19 has consigned many people to working at home and shopping on the web and rush-hour is calm in our town. However, the committee strongly recommends the Council adopt a traffic mitigation plan before cut-through traffic again becomes a serious problem.

#### **The recommendations below are based on the following set of objectives:**

- Traffic should be managed to maximize public safety
- Mitigation and other measures should not unduly burden town residents
- Measures to mitigate traffic problems are preferable to measures that simply divert traffic from one street to another
- Where specific traffic problems have been demonstrated to exist and diversion, in conjunction with appropriate mitigation, is the most practicable solution consistent with other objectives, traffic should be diverted to those roads originally designed, and therefore best suited, to handle it.

#### **General Observations**

In measuring the traffic flow the consultants discovered several things. Among the most interesting was that a very substantial portion of the traffic entering the Town at high-volume places and times was Town residents. Another was that the actual speed of cars in Town was generally less than the posted speed limit of 25 mph. And finally, it would appear that the Town's efforts to thwart cut-through traffic by blocking logical routes was not working as expected.

While the mitigation of cut-through traffic is a commendable goal, the effect on Town residents must also be considered. Making the drive through Town more circuitous and convoluted is less helpful nowadays at discouraging cut-through traffic given mapping apps and also adds to public safety risks by increasing the raw number of miles that are driven on Town roads, thereby increasing the risk of accidents, side swipes, etc By industry standards Town streets are not overloaded for their size and the speed study showed most people are driving within posted speed limits.

The committee believes the AMT study provides valuable data for future traffic mitigation steps and was a valuable investment by the Council. After carefully reviewing the study, we have recommended the following mitigation strategy for the present, but one based on the consultants' findings.

### **Enforcement of Traffic Regulations**

No measures will be productive without reasonable enforcement, including the Town's existing traffic management measures. Stronger enforcement must be a part of the solution and is a prerequisite to the successful adoption of any measures recommended. Many drivers not adhering to regulations (e.g., not stopping at stop signs, entering at do-not-enter times) seem to be town residents (based on police enforcement activity reports and the AMT study) rather than people cutting through. We recommend enforcement (i.e., ticketing) of speed and current peak hour regulations for all drivers. We recommend that Off Duty officers hired by the Town should be posted at "hot spots" at random intervals and should write tickets to all who break the law. It is essential that residents are informed in advance for plans to enforce traffic regulations and they will be ticketed if breaking a traffic law.

### **Reducing Speed in Town**

We recommend that the Town set a uniform Town speed limit of 20 mph except for school zones (15 mph). The Study indicated that the 85th percentile speed was under the 25mph limit through the majority of Town, but the general perception is that cars are going too quickly for the safety of residents, especially on certain wider streets (Thornapple, Meadow, etc) and between speed bumps. A reduction in the enforced speed limit to 20 mph may also have a positive impact on the number of cars cutting through Town as it would increase travel times.

We also recommend that the Town regulation regarding speed bumps be rewritten to allow implementation on streets where most residents living thereon favor them. Alternatively, or in addition, the Town could consider creating a comprehensive plan for installing speed bumps throughout the Town. We recommend the Town should confirm that the type of speed bumps installed are safe to transverse at the posted speed limit without damage to vehicles and that their placement vis a vis one another does not encourage vehicles to accelerate between them.

### **Restricting Rush-hour Access**

The AMT consultants proposed a number of access restrictions that would, in effect, significantly restrict entry into the Town from many intersections during rush hour. Since the study confirmed that a substantial portion of this traffic is Town residents, we believe a more palatable solution may be to try routing as much of this traffic as possible down streets initially designed to handle a significant volume of cars (such as Leland and Meadow). However, these measures should not be implemented until mitigation steps including speed humps, stop signs, flashing signs and strict enforcement are rigorously implemented. By introducing these steps in stages we hope they would be acceptable to residents while discouraging cut-through traffic.

### **Leland-Maple to East-West Highway**

Contrary to the approach taken by AMT, we recommend the Town lift the current 4-6 entry restriction from Wisconsin Avenue at Leland and 46<sup>th</sup> Street. This would not be an easy decision and should be done only after the mitigation measures mentioned below are undertaken and possible unintended consequences reviewed. Opening Leland to PM rush hour traffic would alleviate traffic in two areas of concern listed in the report: cut-through traffic at the Lawton Center and the volume of traffic turning onto East from Bradley in the afternoon.

As noted in the Jane Lawton Center Draft Traffic Study dated August 15, 2015 (Lawton Study) Leland was built as the major thoroughfare for traffic going from Wisconsin to Connecticut and East-West Highway. It seems better to route traffic on Leland rather than onto East or down Willow and through the Lawton parking lot. There are reasonable concerns regarding speeding. However (also noted in the Lawton report) these concerns could be addressed by mitigation measures put into place before lifting restrictions-- including a flashing speed limit sign, more speed bumps and additional stop signs as appropriate. One intersection that would need to get particular attention is that of East and Leland (for incoming Town residents) where there is a crosswalk immediately following a very sharp right turn. Other intersections may exist that should be reviewed.

### **East Avenue from Bradley Lane**

Once the PM entry restrictions on Leland are lifted, we recommend that the AMT consultants' recommendation to restrict rush-hour left turns onto East should be evaluated as opening Leland may reduce traffic flow on East to acceptable levels. We specifically recommend that the Town only adopt the consultants' proposed added hours of PM restriction on East if the PM traffic restriction is lifted on Leland. Otherwise, the traffic currently on East will be pushed onto Walsh or other streets which are no better equipped to handle it. Notably a significant percentage (over half) of the traffic during this time is from residents. Mitigation steps including speed humps, stop signs, flashing signs and strict enforcement should be rigorously implemented.

### **Lawton Center Parking Lot and Maple Exit to E-W Highway**

The Lawton Center parking lot is a problem for which there is no simple solution other than lifting PM restrictions on Leland. The Lawton Study stated that eliminating the PM restrictions on Leland would greatly reduce traffic going through the Lawton Center along with potential safety concerns. We recommend the Town lift the PM restriction on Leland in part to alleviate the traffic through the Lawton parking lot, with changes to the adjacent streets as described in the report postponed until it is clear whether the opening of Leland has reduced this problem.

We recommend removing the Maple Avenue rush-hour Do Not Enter sign. The current entry restriction onto Maple is rerouting the cut-through traffic onto streets less safe because of their width and poor sight lines.

### **Other Mitigation Steps Proposed in the Report**

We do not favor implementing other traffic mitigation strategies recommended by AMT AT THIS TIME. Until we see post-pandemic traffic flow, the increased development on Wisconsin Avenue and the results of the steps recommended here (actively reducing incentives to cut through the Town by enforcing safety measures in the Town), we are concerned that the recommended entry restrictions will be more painful for residents than is the traffic on our streets.

We want to reiterate that traffic diversion is not a solution to cut-through traffic. Rather we believe the above-described mitigation measures better reflect the objectives adopted by the Committee in writing this report.

## TOCC Public Services Committee

### Minority Positions on the AMT Traffic Study

January 2021

1. Committee member Donna Worsham did not support the PSC's Dec. 14, 2020 recommendations.
2. Committee member Robert Enelow did not support the PSC's Dec. 14, 2020 recommendations and submitted the following recommendations to the Town Council on the AMT Traffic Study on January 7, 2021:

#### **Robert Enelow, MD – Minority Position on Recommendations on AMT Traffic Study**

As a member of the TOCC Public Services Committee, I wish to thank Mayor Cecily Baskir allowing me the opportunity to submit a Minority report. I have been a strong advocate of addressing the Town's traffic problems; as a member of the Town Council from 2003-2009.

As Vice-Mayor of the Town for two years, I led the effort to install additional speed humps, and unsuccessfully tried to lower the Town-wide speed limit from 25 MPH to 20 MPH.

My understanding was that the Council requested the PSC to review the AMT traffic study without bias and present the council with clear options grounded in the science of the study. I believe the committee overstepped their charter by disregarding the findings and recommendations of the AMT study, and instead substituted their own biases.

The PSC has disregarded both the professionals who conducted the study as well as our own Town Staff who spent innumerable hours with the contractor ensuring measurable, effective recommendations. The changes recommended by the AMT study are consistent with guidance from the council to further control cut-through traffic. Bethesda's uncontrolled growth and increased traffic density has been relentlessly creating pressure on our streets, pedestrians and our quality of life (the current Pandemic lull notwithstanding).

**Below are my Dissenting Opinion Comments in red/*italics* with supporting logic:**

#### **Planning for the Future**

At this writing, the problem of cut-through traffic in the Town seems fairly remote. Covid-19 has consigned many people to working and shopping from home; rush-hour is currently calm in our town. However, the committee strongly recommends the Council adopt a traffic mitigation plan that is based on long-term traffic projections rather than the current Pandemic pattern.

#### **The recommendations below are based on the following set of objectives:**

- #1 Traffic should be managed to maximize public safety
- #2 Mitigation and other measures should not unduly burden town residents

#3 Measures to mitigate traffic problems are preferable to measures that simply divert traffic from one street to another

#4 Where specific traffic problems have been demonstrated to exist and diversion, in conjunction with appropriate mitigation, is the most practicable solution consistent with other objectives, traffic should be diverted to those roads originally designed, and therefore best suited, to handle it.

*The PSC recommendation to open Leland directly contradicts objective 2 and 3.*

### **General Observations**

In measuring the traffic flow the consultants discovered several things. Among the most interesting was that a very substantial portion of the traffic entering the Town at high-volume places and times was Town residents. *Incorrect: Table A on page iv indicates that 2/3 of all volume on Leland St EB is “cut-thru” (614 of 923) traffic.* And finally, it would appear that the Town’s efforts to thwart cut-through traffic by blocking logical routes was not working as expected.

While the mitigation of cut-through traffic is a commendable goal, the effect on Town residents must also be considered. Making the drive through Town more circuitous and convoluted is less helpful nowadays at discouraging cut-through traffic given mapping apps and also adds to public safety risks by increasing the raw number of miles that are driven on Town roads, thereby increasing the risk of accidents, side swipes, etc. By industry standards Town streets are not overloaded for their size and the speed study showed most people are driving within posted speed limits.

*While managing cut through traffic during peak-hours is an inconvenience due to circuitous routing, that is precisely why it works and serves as a deterrent to non-residents. Most residents accept this minor inconvenience for the safety of all residents and the “greater good”. The alternative, opening all streets to unlimited cut-through rush hour traffic, is only going to seriously worsen the volume of traffic in our Town.*

The committee believes the AMT study provides valuable data for future traffic mitigation steps and was a valuable investment by the Council. After carefully reviewing the study, we have recommended the following mitigation strategy for the present, but one based on the consultants’ findings.

*Town staff should be commended for thoroughly scoping the work, managing the consultant and producing an excellent report. The work product is comprehensive, is fair and balanced, and contains valuable data to guide future actions.*

### **Enforcement of Traffic Regulations**

No measures will be productive without reasonable enforcement, including the Town’s existing traffic management measures. Stronger enforcement must be a part of the solution and is a prerequisite to the successful adoption of any measures recommended. Many drivers not

adhering to regulations (e.g., not stopping at stop signs, entering at do-not-enter times) seem to be town residents (based on police enforcement activity reports and the AMT study) rather than people cutting through. We recommend enforcement (i.e., ticketing) of speed and current peak hour regulations for all drivers. We recommend that Off Duty officers hired by the Town should be posted at “hot spots” at random intervals and should write tickets to all who break the law. It is essential that residents are informed in advance for plans to enforce traffic regulations and they will be ticketed if breaking a traffic law.

### **Reducing Speed in Town**

We recommend that the Town set a uniform Town speed limit of 20 mph except for school zones (15 mph). The Study indicated that the 85th percentile speed was under the 25mph limit through the majority of Town, but the general perception is that cars are going too quickly for the safety of residents, especially on certain wider streets (Thornapple, Meadow, etc) and between speed bumps. A reduction in the enforced speed limit to 20 mph may also have a positive impact on the number of cars cutting through Town as it would increase travel times.

*Agree with reducing the speed limit town-wide to 20MPH (and maintaining 15MPH in school zones during school hours). This is consistent with County guidelines and it is important that our traffic regulations are consistent and predictable for motorists.*

We also recommend that the Town regulation regarding speed bumps be rewritten to allow implementation on streets where most residents living thereon favor them. Alternatively, or in addition, the Town could consider creating a comprehensive plan for installing speed bumps throughout the Town. We recommend the Town should confirm that the type of speed bumps installed are safe to transverse at the posted speed limit without damage to vehicles and that their placement vis a vis one another does not encourage vehicles to accelerate between them.

### **Restricting Rush-hour Access**

The AMT consultants proposed a number of access restrictions that would, in effect, significantly restrict entry into the Town from many intersections during rush hour. Since the study confirmed that a substantial portion of this traffic is Town residents, we believe a more palatable solution may be to try routing as much of this traffic as possible down streets initially designed to handle a significant volume of cars (such as Leland and Meadow). However, these measures should not be implemented until mitigation steps including speed humps, stop signs, flashing signs and strict enforcement are rigorously implemented. By introducing these steps in stages we hope they would be acceptable to residents while discouraging cut-through traffic.

*The study has identified streets where a majority of traffic is non-resident (cut-thru). Further, streets such as Leland were not designed for “significant” traffic volume. The PSC repeatedly remarked that Leland Street was designed as a major thoroughfare for high traffic volumes. This myth needs to be put to rest. The following chart illustrates that Leland is one of Town’s narrower streets:*

<u>Street</u>	<u>Curb to Curb</u> <u>Width</u>	<u>Cross Street</u>
West	27'-0"	Stanford
Oakridge Lane	25'-6"	Oakridge Avenue
Maple	25'-6"	Oak
Meadow	25'-3"	Underwood
Oak	25'-0"	Woodbine
Maple	24'-10"	Stanford
Elm	23'-9"	45th
Oakridge Avenue	23'-2"	Leland
<b>Leland</b>	<b>22'-6"</b>	<b>45th</b>
Willow	21'-0"	45th
Walsh	20'-9"	46th

*Moreover, minimal observation reveals that, when cars are parked on Leland, traffic generally doesn't proceed simultaneously in both directions without one car pulling over and waiting until the oncoming car passes.*

### **Leland-Maple to East-West Highway**

Contrary to the approach taken by AMT, we recommend the Town lift the current 4-6 entry restriction from Wisconsin Avenue at Leland and 46<sup>th</sup> Streets. This would not be an easy decision and should be done only after the mitigation measures mentioned below are undertaken and possible unintended consequences reviewed. Opening Leland to PM rush hour traffic would alleviate traffic in two areas of concern listed in the report: cut-through traffic at the Lawton Center and the volume of traffic turning onto East from Bradley in the afternoon.

*Disagree with lifting rush-hour restrictions on Leland Street or Maple Avenue for the above reasons.*

*Let me reiterate that the AMT report does NOT recommend lifting the rush hour restrictions.*

As noted in the Jane Lawton Center Draft Traffic Study dated August 15, 2015 (Lawton Study) Leland was built as the major thoroughfare for traffic going from Wisconsin to Connecticut and East-West Highway. It seems better to route traffic on Leland rather than onto East or down Willow and through the Lawton parking lot. There are reasonable concerns regarding speeding. However (also noted in the Lawton report) these concerns could be addressed by mitigation measures put into place before lifting restrictions-- including a flashing speed limit sign, more speed bumps and additional stop signs as appropriate. One intersection that would need to get particular attention is that of East and Leland (for incoming Town residents) where there is a

crosswalk immediately following a very sharp right turn. Other intersections may exist that should be reviewed.

### **East Avenue from Bradley Lane**

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*With all due respect, the PSC is not qualified to make piecemeal ala carte selections or recommend actions contrary to the engineer's recommendations without understanding all the ramifications. Any partial selection or contradictory actions should be evaluated by the consulting engineer.*

### **Lawton Center Parking Lot and Maple Exit to E-W Highway**

The Lawton Center parking lot is a problem for which there is no simple solution other than lifting PM restrictions on Leland. The Lawton Study stated that eliminating the PM restrictions on Leland would greatly reduce traffic going through the Lawton Center along with potential safety concerns. We recommend the Town lift the PM restriction on Leland in part to alleviate the traffic through the Lawton parking lot, with changes to the adjacent streets as described in the report postponed until it is clear whether the opening of Leland has reduced this problem.

*The engineer recommended restricting egress from the Lawton lot onto Oakridge. An alternative compromise should be considered: restrict egress from the Lawton Center onto Oakridge ONLY during evening rush hour M-F, to coincide with the Leland Street rush hour restriction. The ATM also recommended that Oakridge Lane Eastbound be changed to DO NOT ENTER 24/7. Another compromise: ONLY restrict the ATM's proposed Oakridge Lane Do Not Enter to the evening rush hour, NOT 24/7.*

We recommend removing the Maple Avenue rush-hour Do Not Enter sign. The current entry restriction onto Maple is rerouting the cut-through traffic onto streets less safe because of their width and poor sight lines.

*Disagree with removing the Maple Avenue restriction. This will only encourage more rush hour cut through traffic. Commuters driving north on Wisconsin Ave, who have Google Maps, WAZE and other Apps, will be encouraged to cut through the Town during rush hour. And many streets will be adversely affected, not just Leland St. This will convert Leland Street into a East-West highway "entry ramp".*

*What is the purpose of creating another safety risk for children who are walking/biking home from Chevy Chase Elementary School down Leland Street, as a “solution” to the Lawton Center cut-through?*

### **Other Mitigation Steps Proposed in the Report**

We do not favor implementing other traffic mitigation strategies recommended by AMT AT THIS TIME. Until we see post-pandemic traffic flow, the increased development on Wisconsin Avenue and the results of the steps recommended here (actively reducing incentives to cut through the Town by enforcing safety measures in the Town), we are concerned that the recommended entry restrictions will be more painful for residents than is the traffic on our streets.

We want to reiterate that traffic diversion is not a solution to cut-through traffic. Rather we believe the above-described mitigation measures better reflect the objectives adopted by the Committee in writing this report.

Should the Council decide to implement a plan that is rejected by the traffic consultants, we would respectfully request that the traffic consultants evaluate the PSC recommendations, in order that the Council and the town residents understand the potential consequences.

*It is the stated mission of the PSC to “promote a safe environment for (all) residents”. We are very disheartened that the PSC’s recommendation to open Leland Street to accommodate cut-through high-volume traffic will significantly harm the quality of life in our Town.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Robert Enelow, MD*