

MEMORANDUM

TO: Vinal Square Strategic Action Plan Committee

FROM: Beverly Woods, NMCOG Executive Director
Justin Howard, NMCOG Assistant Director
Carlin Andrus, NMCOG GIS Specialist

RE: Vinal Square Concept Plan

DATE: January 6, 2022

This summary memo outlines possible next steps for moving forward with the concept plan for Vinal Square developed by the Vinal Square Action Plan Committee with assistance from the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG). The memo includes a summary of possible funding programs available to the Town and focuses on the process for securing funds through the region's Transportation Improvement Program. Information is also provided on other relevant statewide funding programs including the Shared Streets and Spaces and the Complete Streets funding programs. Where possible, estimated costs and timeframes have also been provided for the elements within the concept plan.

Next Steps

The Vinal Square Concept Plan has been funded through the State District Local Technical Assistance Program (DLTA) utilizing funding appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature. The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) provides technical assistance to its member communities through the DLTA program. This memo outlines the next steps that can be used to implement the recommendations and concept plan developed for the Town through this DLTA program.

Next Steps

The Select Board should review and vote to support the concept developed by the Vinal Square Action Plan Committee prior to approaching MassDOT. Once the concept has been vetted and endorsed by the Select Board, town staff will need to work with MassDOT to initiate a TIP project and begin design and permitting for the proposed improvements. To begin this process, a meeting should be held with MassDOT District 4 staff to present the concept and receive feedback.

As the project proponent, the Town will be responsible for the costs associated with design, permitting and any right-of-way acquisition needed. Federal and State funding can be used to cover construction costs through the TIP process. Typically, project initiation, design and permitting requires 2-4 years to complete, depending on the scope of the project, environmental permitting complexity, and the timeframe necessary for any right-of-way acquisition. It may take 1 to 2 additional years to secure the needed state and federal funds through the TIP process, depending on other projects in the funding queue.

Funding Programs

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Funding Process

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a five year programming and management document for the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO), containing all federally funded transportation projects planned in the region. Projects programmed on the TIP are prioritized based on the MPO's goals and investment programs. It also includes MassDOT prioritized projects that are federally funded. Transit projects for the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) are included as well.

For a project to be eligible for the Northern Middlesex TIP, it must first be initiated by the Town, and then approved by the MassDOT Project Review Committee (PRC). MassDOT has a standard operating procedure outlining the process. The PRC meets three times a year to determine if a project will be approved. If approved, MassDOT will assign a project manager and the project will be considered eligible for the programming on the Northern Middlesex MPO Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The PRC examines each project to determine whether it is feasible from an engineering perspective and to ensure that it meets federal funding eligibility criteria. Once a project is deemed viable, it must be programmed in the appropriate year of the region's TIP through the MPO process.

Complete Streets Funding Program Process

The MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program addresses critical gaps in transportation networks by giving Massachusetts municipalities the tools and funding needed to advance Complete Streets in their community. The purpose of the program is to: educate municipal and transportation professionals on Complete Streets; promote adoption of Complete Streets Policies; increase adoption of Complete Streets Prioritization Plans; and implement those plans through construction funding awards.

Chelmsford has adopted a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan and the proposed Vinal Square improvements are included within the plan, thus making them eligible for construction funding through the application process. More information on the application process can be found at: <https://gis.massdot.state.ma.us/completestreets>

Shared Streets and Spaces Funding Program Process

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some existing mobility needs and has also created new ones. Through the Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation seeks to assist municipalities in meeting their individual needs for additional and safer outdoor recreation, commerce, community activities, and mobility. All municipalities in the Commonwealth are eligible to apply for funding. Shared Streets and Spaces provides communities with grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$200,000. MassDOT is currently preparing for another round of applications, which are anticipated to be opening on January 10th, 2022. Applications are accepted online through the following site:

<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/how-to-apply-shared-streets-and-spaces-grant-program>

Potential Funding Programs	Description	Elements to be Funded	Agency	Estimated Cost Range	Timeframe
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	The TIP process secures federal funding for construction of transportation Improvements. Project Initiation is conducted in partnership with MassDOT, using funding programmed through the Northern Middlesex MPO	Implementation of Overall Concept Plan	MassDOT, NMMPO	Project Cost	Five years from project initiation until construction commences; plus 2 construction seasons for completion
Complete Streets Funding Program	Program addresses critical gaps in transportation networks as outlined in the Town's Complete Streets Plan	Sidewalks, bike lanes, gathering spaces, crosswalks	MassDOT, Town	Town is eligible for an award up to \$400,000 in FY 2022	1-2 years
Shared Streets and Spaces Program	MassDOT program to assist municipalities in meeting needs for more and safer outdoor recreation, commerce, community activities, and mobility	Sidewalks, bike lanes, gathering spaces, crosswalks	MassDOT, Town	\$200,000 grant limit	1 year
Chapter 90 Program	State provides municipalities with an annual funding source for improvements to and investments in local transportation networks	Newfield Road signage, pavement improvements	Town	Annual Chapter 90 Allocation (\$1,150,687 in 2020)	Annual allocation

Section 3: Short/Medium/Long Term Actions

Recommendations	Potential Funding Program	Time Frame	Construction Cost Estimate (based on historical projects)
Add No Left Turn and No Right Turn signage at Adams Street and Newfield Street and pavement markings	Chapter 90	Short	\$5,000 - 10,000
Add Bike lanes along Princeton Street/Tyngsborough Road	Complete Streets Program, TIP	Short	\$5,000 - 10,000
Add Rapid Reflecting Flashing Beacons to crosswalks at Cottage Row/Princeton Street, Wright Street/Princeton Street and Middlesex Street/Wright Street	Complete Streets Program, Shared Streets and Spaces Program, TIP	Short	\$200,000 - 250,000
Move Bus shelter/stop to Middlesex Street/Princeton Street Intersection	Complete Streets Program, TIP	Short	\$10,000
Upgrade pavement markings and signage, parking delineation	Complete Streets, Chapter 90 (Town-owned roadways), TIP	Short	\$20,000
Sidewalk installation/upgrades	Complete Streets, TIP	Intermediate	\$200,000 - 500,000
Additional Traffic Signals at Middlesex and Princeton and at Dunstable Road/ Upgrade to main signal technology	TIP	Long	\$1 - 1.5 million
Realignment of Dunstable Road	TIP, Complete Streets Program	Long	\$500,000 - 1 million
Realign Middlesex Street Approach to Princeton Street	TIP	Long	\$500,000 - 1 million
Building of gathering space on Dunstable Road (in conjunction with Dunstable Road Realignment)	TIP, Shared Streets and Spaces Program	Long	\$50,000 - 100,000
Building of gathering space at Intersection (in conjunction with Middlesex Street Realignment)	TIP, Shared Streets and spaces Program	Long	\$50,000 - 100,000
Consider alternative Exit/Entrance from Municipal Lot to Wotton Street	TIP	Long	\$100,000 - 300,000
Alternative Exit from Wotton Street to Tyngsborough Road	TIP	Long	\$1 - 2 million

Short Time Frame < 1 year, Intermediate Time frame 1-3 years, Long Time frame > 3 years