

## West Hartford Pedestrian and Bicycle Commission

Edward Pawlak, Chair  
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April 19, 2024

Mayor Shari Cantor  
Town of West Hartford  
50 South Main Street  
West Hartford, CT 06107

Dear Mayor Cantor:

I am writing on behalf of the West Hartford Pedestrian and Bicycle Commission to express our deep disappointment with the latest plans for West Hartford Center that were revealed at public meetings last week. What is most distressing is the degree to which the design features from prior plans that favored pedestrians and bicyclists have been removed and supplanted by modifications that benefit automobiles. Even though it is *people* who make the Center a vibrant commercial destination, the latest plans allocate the majority of space to *automobiles*, which not only create unsafe conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, but also detract from the charm of the Center.

At present LaSalle Road is 70 feet wide. The "Option A" plan presented to the public earlier this year dramatically shrunk the road width to 36 feet. But the most recent "Design Direction" plan shows a 60 foot wide road, which means that 24 feet of public right-of-way space has been taken away from people for automobiles.

Currently Farmington Avenue is 60 feet wide. The "Option A" plan would have reduced this to 38 feet, but the "Design Direction" plan shows a 50 foot wide road. Twelve feet of space has been taken away from people and given to automobiles.

The consequence of these major revisions is that these roads will be much wider than necessary, and there will be far less space allocated for people (sidewalks, dining, benches, pocket parks, etc.). There will no longer be room for separated bike lanes on Farmington Avenue. Safe cycling to the Center, which would reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, will not be feasible.

The driver behind the auto-centric design of the latest plan is the conversion of most of the parallel parking shown on the earlier plan to diagonal parking lanes on both roads. The diagonal parking lanes are 18 feet wide, while parallel parking lanes are only 8 feet wide. The slight bump in the number of on-street parking spaces created by this change dramatically shrinks the space left over for people. Moreover, it is completely unnecessary, since the town's consultant acknowledged that unused parking spaces are plentiful in the Center, even during times of peak demand. Diagonal parking lanes are less safe because of the difficulty seeing cars and people when backing out of the lane.

The town's consultant showed us what a human-scale redesign of the Center could look like ("Option A"). Sadly, the town appears prepared to reject this design in favor of one that maximizes on-street parking at the expense of "people" space.

The new auto-centric design is in conflict with many important aspirations town leaders have expressed in the recent past. The new plans are inconsistent with the town's Complete Streets Policy, and its goal of becoming a gold level bicycle friendly community, because they do not include low-stress bike lanes, unlike prior plans. The automobile-friendly plans clearly conflict with the town's goal of being a sustainable community, as defined by the Sustainable CT program. Wide roads are dangerous for pedestrians who choose to cross outside of crosswalks (a very common practice in the Center), and thus are inconsistent with the town's goal of becoming a Vision Zero community. The narrow sidewalks and dining areas will be insufficient to accommodate all of the new pedestrian traffic that will be generated by the recently approved large residential developments in and near the Center.

It is one thing to express aspirational goals for our town. It is much more difficult to take actions that, although they will benefit all of the visitors to the Center, may be unpopular with small but powerful stakeholder groups. Yet that is what leadership is all about. Strong leadership requires vision and courage. We implore our town leaders to seize this generational opportunity and endorse a human-scale plan (Option A), and reject one that overwhelmingly benefits automobiles. Let's make our Center even better, a commercial and cultural resource unlike any other in the region.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E.M. Pawlak', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Edward M. Pawlak, Chair  
West Hartford Pedestrian and Bicycle Commission

cc: Town Councilors  
Mr. Rick Ledwith, Town Manager  
Mr. Duane Martin, Director of Community Development  
Mr. Greg Sommer, Town Engineer  
West Hartford Pedestrian and Bicycle Commissioners  
Mr. Jack Dougherty, Bike West Hartford