

Proposal: Marshall Street Safety, Drainage and Aesthetic Improvements

We provide before and after redesign renderings below.



## BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY

We believe the improved street will be an inviting space for the entire neighborhood. What is currently a liability in terms of safety and aesthetics will be transformed into a welcoming space for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers alike. Improving safety and aesthetics will help unify the street with the surrounding historic neighborhood and will serve as a catalyst for other “forgotten” streets in the West End and elsewhere in the city. We’ve met with and received support from: Anne Pringle, Western Promenade Neighborhood Association; City Councilor David Marshall who represents Marshall St.; Jon Hinck, City Councilor At Large and a West End resident; Rob Wiener, Historic Preservation Compliance Coordinator; David Margolis-Pineo, Deputy City Engineer, Public Services; and Bruce Hyman, Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator, Transportation Division. We also presented our ideas at a recent neighborhood potluck and gathered over 50 signatures supporting the project. See attached. Literally everyone we’ve talked with has expressed unreserved enthusiasm for improving Marshall St.

## SUPPORTING PROJECTS

With the idea of supporting the goals of the larger Marshall Street project, the West End Condominium Association, a six-unit building located at 21 Marshall and 134 Neal Sts., undertook a \$12,000 project this summer to remove asphalt and install brick walkways and driveway to city specifications, and turned other asphalted areas into plantable ground, for aesthetic and increased surface permeability purposes. Before and after photos of this project are provided below.





November 6, 2014

Honorable City Council Members::

The residents of Marshall and Neal Streets have grown concerned over the last few years about the condition and safety of Marshall Street. We formed a committee to identify problems and suggest possible solutions, meeting with several city council and staff members in the past twelve months to get their input and guidance. We combined the suggestions of those city officials together with our own to develop a vision for Marshall Street that not only addresses structural and safety issues, but aesthetics as well, with a goal of improving a neighborhood space that we believe will benefit residents throughout the West End.

# PROPOSAL: MARSHALL STREET SAFETY, DRAINAGE AND AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENTS

## INTRODUCTION:

Marshall Street is a one-way, one-block connecting street between Brackett St. and West St. near Maine Medical Center. It suffers from issues of pedestrian safety, poor drainage, traffic risks, and poor lighting, as well as a neglected appearance, with worn asphalt curbing, partially missing sidewalks, and overall poor street design. It is nonetheless a popular strolling spot for neighbors and workers taking a midday break and has a vibrant and friendly neighborhood feel. Neighbors on and adjacent to the street have come together to support a demonstration project that will be useful to the city's future planning for a variety of residential and mixed residential-commercial applications. Following very useful, detailed conversations with a variety of city staff, we propose a conversion to a "woonerf", or shared street, with improvements made to slow traffic, improve the quality and aesthetics of the streetscape, and increase permeability for some relief of drainage issues. Combined, these efforts will make Marshall Street a friendly and safe neighborhood space for pedestrians, cyclists, and even cross-country skiers, who will share the street with slow-moving vehicular traffic.

## PROBLEM AREAS:

**Drainage:** Some of the street's fundamental problems originate from a non-existent drainage system. Runoff deposits and freezes at several low spots along the entire street during the winter. This causes partially frozen puddles to consume sidewalks and the ends of driveways. Snow melt exacerbates this problem during thaw cycles. Spring rains cause large puddles to collect and mix with seasonal blooms, adding foul smelling biological decay to the difficulty of traversing the street.

**Safety:** Poor drainage combined with narrow or non-existent sidewalks makes Marshall Street a dangerous route for pedestrians, who must take to the street because there is no consistently suitable and safe sidewalk. Patchy street lighting results in a dark walkway at night for pedestrians and hiding spots for burglars, who have perpetrated minor thefts and car break-ins.

**Traffic:** Marshall Street is a short-cut route between West and Brackett Streets, and the only approach to a Maine Medical parking lot located on Marshall St. The posted speed limit is 15

mph, but this limit is ignored by most vehicular traffic. Pedestrians necessarily walking on the street because of unusable sidewalks risk collision with speeding vehicles.

**Aesthetics:** Marshall Street is situated within the West End Historic District. This district consists of pedestrian-friendly streets, many with mature trees and public green spaces befitting the neighborhood's historic character. With Marshall St.'s lack of consistent sidewalks and poor quality of those that exist, and little permeable space for trees and grass, Marshall Street is strikingly lacking in the aesthetic character of much of the historic West End.

## SOLUTION AND BENEFITS:

Re-engineering of the street to a “woonerf” or shared street design, of the type pioneered for Munjoy Heights, with elimination of sidewalks, creation of a grass esplanade and narrower street, and appropriate design changes to slow vehicle traffic and improve access for pedestrians and cyclists. We propose the following:

**Street-narrowing:** Narrow Marshall Street to the minimum width required for one-way vehicular traffic with shared accommodation for pedestrians and bicyclists. At 32 feet across, Marshall Street is, for much of its length, an unnecessarily wide street for a one-way street, encouraging motorists to use it as a quick cut-through. The slower pace and decreased volume of traffic resulting from narrowing the street will give it a greater feeling of neighborhood, along with improved accessibility and safety.

**Drainage:** Construct a natural and permeable drainage surface. A wide grass esplanade with tree plantings along the west side of the street will support the street's drainage and aesthetic concerns, replacing the current intermittent sidewalk adjacent to Maine Medical Center's parking lot and buildings. Increased local absorption will ease surface conditions and reduce runoff to treatment facilities.

**Use of Shared Street Design:** Modeled on the Dutch concept “woonerf”, the shared street design will benefit vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians. The first step in the redesign will include removal of crumbling sidewalks where they exist, with creation of a wide esplanade to narrow the street, providing for grass and tree plantings and runoff absorption. Cues inherent in the revised street, including curb extensions at the entrance to Marshall at West St., will slow vehicles and create safe shared access. Excessive curb cuts into the adjacent Maine Medical parking lot will be removed. Lighting will be improved to ensure pedestrian safety at any hour.