

DATE: November 24, 2021
TIME: 12:11 PM

**MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, AUGUST 16, 2021
HIGH SCHOOL TRAFFIC WORKING GROUP
5:00PM**

Attending: Anne Paulsen, Resident Co-Chair; Mary Wybieralla, Resident; Larry Link, Resident; Marty November, Resident; James MacIsaac, Police Department; Sargent Paul Garabedian, Police Department; Bill Lovallo, Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee; Roy Epstein, Belmont Select Board; Glenn Clancy, Community Development; Jay Marcotte, Department of Public Works; Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator; David DeStefano, Fire Department.

Vice-Chair Anne Paulsen called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM

Discussion and recommendation of restructuring of the High School Traffic Working Group membership and charge

Roy Epstein met with residents of Lower Goden St. The group talked about how to reorganize the High School Traffic Working Group to make it better equipped to confront pending issues. There was general agreement that the charge of the High School Traffic Group should be changed and the life of the committee should be extended until the Middle and High School building is completed. The consensus was that the current membership is too cumbersome. The suggestion was to remove Town staff from the charge of the committee and all Town matters will go through Patrice Garvin or her designee. If there are specific issues that affect a Town Department, then the relevant department head can be invited to participate. There was a request to include additional residents, especially from Lower Goden St. Epstein said, if agreed upon, he would be willing to chair the new committee.

Marty November, resident of Goden St., said the main focus of the newly charged group should be safety at the intersection and on both sides of Goden St. He would agree that they need to strengthen the effectiveness of the committee by making it more representative and expanding the scope to include the High School, Middle School, Burbank and Chenery areas.

Ann Paulsen reflected that the next item will be the election of the Chair and then the Selectmen will be responsible for choosing the new committee members.

Enforcement of traffic in the four school neighborhoods

Chief MacIsaac reported that he had a meeting with Sgt. Paul Garabedian and Katherine O’Leary today. Belmont Public School principals have asked for traffic enforcement from Belmont Police at all schools. He noted that the Police Department is currently understaffed and it’s a challenge to provide officers for all schools. But he said, whenever possible, they will make every effort to have Belmont Police present at the schools. Crossing guard staffing is better than last year so he’s hoping the crossing guards, coupled with officer surveillance at the beginning of the school year, may free up the need for additional officers throughout the school year.

Ann Paulsen asked Chief MacIsaac if there is communication between the PTOs and principals to remind families of the driving restrictions in the school areas. MacIsaac said the schools have already sent information through the list serves. He said his biggest concern is with illegal U-turns and drop off issues.

Ann Paulsen feels that we should further investigate other long-term solutions to the problem other than increased police presence.

Chief MacIsaac reported that there would be a traffic control officer and school crossing guard at the Orchard St. light, and a police detail the first few weeks at the entrance of the High School. He reiterated that it will be a challenge to supply officers to all the other schools.

Heather Barr asked if we had numbers on how many drivers, walkers and bus users are expected for September? Sgt. Garabedian said that the 100 student spots on Concord Ave. that were allocated are expected to be filled. Only buses, handicapped drop offs and teachers will be allowed on campus.

Epstein announced that the School Department plans to propose a drop off plan on August 26th. Right now, Garabedian said they are still trying to identify a location for drop offs.

Larry Link asked if there will also be an officer on the corner of Concord and Goden? Garabedian replied that for the first two weeks of school, the high school hired a police detail to help with drop off in front of the high school and there is also a crossing guard planned for Orchard St. Even though there is a dedicated crossing signal there, they decided an extra crossing guard would be needed. There will also be a parking control officer at the high school to make sure students have the pass to park in the correct designated spaces and officers on bicycles and in regular route cars will be dispatched at both the middle and high school.

Epstein asked when the traffic signal at the foot of Goden will be put in operation? Bill Lovallo said it will go into flashing mode this week. If the Town makes the decision, it could be put into full operation by Labor Day.

Epstein said that Chief MacIsaac told him that police can only enforce posted parking regulations. We may need a sign to restrict parking by students on Goden St.

Larry Link said we need to be pragmatic for beginning of school. He asked if temporary signs could be erected on Goden for the first three weeks of school. MacIsaac replied that temporary emergency signs could be erected but permanent signs need to be approved by the Select Board and agreed upon. Temporary signs cannot be in place for more than a month.

Erika Wolf, lower Goden St. resident, fears that if there is an absence of parking signs, people will go faster and cut throughs will be more common.

MacIsaac suggested the consideration of a disincentive approach. He suggested limiting the area for drop offs to dissuade parents from driving their kids to school. Marty November agreed with MacIsaac. If we make things easier more people will do it.

Mary Wybieralla said they are planning to have residents as observers around the schools. COVID has increased the number of parents driving their kids to school. They don't want their kids on buses. She agrees that parked cars do slow cars down.

MacIsaac reminded people to retain flexibility. Adjustments will need to be made as we proceed. Parking restrictions should be put in place after observations are gathered. For instance, the pending Concord Ave. traffic lights may slow traffic on Concord and Goden.

Glenn Clancy cautioned that we may need to leave traffic lanes open at signalized intersections.

Bill Lovallo said the recommendations from the Middle School and High School Building Committee did not include parking restrictions. Epstein suggested that we get a separate opinion about this from the BSC Group.

Ann Paulsen said it appears that we will not resolve the plan for parking today. The Select Board should work with residents to develop a plan.

Motion was made for Larry Link to collaborate with Glenn Clancy to make a decision about erecting signs on Goden St. intersection. Motion was approved by quorum of members.

Epstein said the Select Board will revisit the charge of the High School Traffic Working Group as soon as possible.

Discussion of timing of drop offs

Larry Link reported that there are ten hotspots between Concord and School St. that need evaluation on drop off and pick up zones. It may take 4-6 weeks to evaluate the needs of these areas.

Ann Paulsen asked if it is possible to use citizen observers to evaluate the drop off and pick up areas? Paul Garabedian replied that traffic officers are at these areas everyday and residents lodge complaints to him regularly by e-mail. MacIsaac said that the Police Department will also be using traffic counters and that this data can be used to evaluate the zones. Ann Paulsen suggested that the Lower Goden St. neighborhood utilize citizen observers and then report back to this committee and the Select Board.

Temporary Bike Lane

Sgt. Garabedian said that the School Superintendent is currently working on a bike lane plan. There is a plan to hold a public meeting about the bike lane in the near future.

Traffic calming initiatives with special attention to stop signs on Orchard and School

The question was asked by a resident if it was possible to assign resident parking permits in Belmont? MacIsaac said that historically, Belmont has not elected to go that way. However, he added that the Police Department will do whatever the community wants. Glenn Clancy said they did a resident parking pilot program on Sycamore a few years back. The scope was limited; permits were only issued to the teachers in a very small area. The project was initiated as a deterrent because we did not have the capability to actively enforce the parking restrictions. But Clancy said that times change and this could be a topic of discussion later on.

Clancy said that parking restrictions can slow down traffic if done correctly. A case study is Myrtle St. Parked cars were used to force drivers to slow down to maneuver around the street. He said as long as we are not restricting parking outright on Goden, the Myrtle St. approach could be used as an effective model. But he knows

that residents in that area don't want parking on their street. An option may be to let students park in designated areas during school hours.

Larry Link thinks that if restrict turns from Concord to Myrtle on out-of-town cars that we should start earlier than 8 am. Clancy replied that the current restriction was based on Wellington traffic. Time restrictions have to be declared based on demand.

Ann Paulsen asked if there will be any forward motion on traffic counting on Orchard and School St.? Glenn replied that there is a need to get consensus from the neighborhood. Ann asked when he thought the public discussion could take place? Clancy told her to work with Patrice Garvin on notifying the public about meetings. He said he will first get feedback from the BSC Group to help us focus our plans.

Larry Link asked Glenn Clancy what he would recommend for Goden/School, Orchard/Goden and School/Orchard intersections? Glenn said that he would suggest implementing a four way stop control. But all work has to comply with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) issued by the State. Patrice Garvin will work with the Select Board to move the issue forward.

Motion was made to schedule a public hearing regarding other mitigation suggestions from the BSC Group on the traffic study for School and Goden St. Motion was approved by a quorum of members.

Bill Lovallo reported that the signalization sequences at these intersections have been tentatively designed and the design is subject to change. He said the design can be found on the construction reports and the plan was sent out to Goden St. residents. Clancy said he would send the signalization sequences out to the committee.

Bill Lovallo said he would work with Glenn Clancy to erect signs on lower Goden near Concord to restrict parking. Glenn said he would like to first confirm with the designer to see if signage is recommended before the decision about signs are made.

Marty November recommended involving residents from Lower Goden. Lovallo confirmed that he will inform residents of this area. This intersection needed signalization before the new high school project was started.

It was agreed that once additional info is received from Clancy, Lower Goden St. residents will be invited to a meeting to discuss the implementation with the committee. Bill Lovallo suggested setting up a special meeting to debate signage. He suggested that Marty November set up a time for this meeting in the near future.

Erika Wolf, resident, is concerned that traffic volume would be increased on Goden due to new signals. She wants to hear about what plans are in place to decrease the speed on Goden. She suggested reinvestigating the trial runs of no right turns off of Concord Ave.

Glenn Clancy replied that the restriction on turns is part of the issues planned for discussion with the public in the fall. If you want to restrict right hand turns, you need to get buy-in from neighborhood.

It was agreed that the planned public meeting should include the whole safety package including addressing no right turns.

Ann Paulsen said they should join forces with TAC to present a broader scope of the neighborhood safety issue in October. Bill Lovallo thinks it would be good to limit the number of meetings in order to keep the public involved.

Motion was made that the High School Traffic Working Group collaborate with TAC to coordinate all the issues at hand and Larry Link be the liaison between the committees. Motion was approved by a quorum of members.

Discussion of temporary bike lane on Concord Ave.

Ann Paulsen asked if there is there a way to clarify the delineations of the bike lane? Clancy the reason that bike lanes haven't been painted is because TAC had intended to resolve this issue by April 2021 but they waited because the concept hadn't been approved yet. He does not expect the bike lanes to be repainted until next Spring.

Ann Paulsen thinks we need to keep the bike lane safe for people in the Fall. Clancy suggested that Larry Link work with TAC on the bike lane issue.

Motion was made to investigate repainting the bike lanes temporarily on Concord Ave. Motion was approved by a quorum of members.

Approval of meeting minutes

Minutes will be taken up at the next meeting

Next meeting will be held on August 30th.

Motion to adjourn was approved by a quorum of members.

*Minutes are as approved by Vice-Chair Anne Paulsen