
MEMORANDUM

TO: Middle and High School Building Committee
FROM: Roy J. Epstein
SUBJECT: Removal of Temporary Parking Lot
DATE: January 7, 2022

This memorandum explains my request that the Building Committee consider revising its plans for the temporary parking lot at BHS. The lot, which has 54 spaces, is scheduled for complete removal relatively soon. However, this decision was made several years ago when the expectation was for 90 student parking spaces west of Harris Field. That parking was eliminated and it fell to the Traffic Working Group—Middle and High School, working with the Select Board, to serve as the de facto parking authority to cope with on-street student parking. Significant capacity constraints for on-street student parking are likely to emerge in the next year or two. Decisions by the Building Committee about the temporary lot will greatly affect the student parking situation.

The scarcest resource in Belmont is space. Efficient management of space is critical for our community to function well.

Students now park in the Concord Ave. “corridor”, which includes: i) school side of Concord Ave from Mobil station to Underwood St; ii) jug handle; iii) Underwood pool lot and drop-off zone; iv) the chicane pattern on Myrtle Street and a smaller number of spaces on Cottage St; and v) spots on opposite side of Concord Ave. east of Goden St.

The Select Board has adopted parking restrictions to channel parking to the corridor and essentially make it impossible for students to park on other side streets near BHS.

The corridor has a capacity of approximately 140 cars. In recent weeks it has been approximately 90% full (about 125 cars).¹ The corridor is not restricted to student parking, so some of the cars may be other drivers, especially as one goes towards Underwood St on the eastbound side of Concord Ave. The number of student parkers increases in the spring, as more students get licenses. While there are about 15 empty spaces now, these could well disappear by springtime.

There are more student drivers this year than last year, which likely reflects the increased enrollment at BHS. If enrollment continues to increase to the levels forecasted pre-Covid, demand for student parking will also increase.

A new rink proposal is likely to be presented in 2023. If it is approved, parking in the jug handle parking (and possibly on Concord Ave along the jug handle) may be impossible during the construction period. Alternatively, even if parking is still possible during construction, those spaces may be needed for the construction workers. The corridor does not have open spaces to make up for loss of the jug handle.

These factors raise the question of how to manage student parking if the demand exceeds capacity in the corridor.

Inadequate student parking is not a trivial matter. Running out of spaces in the corridor will be viewed by many students and parents as unreasonable and inequitable. Charging a fee to park in the corridor that would be high enough to deter a sufficient number of drivers will be viewed as onerous and unreasonable.

¹ One needs to count cars in late morning because many student parkers do not arrive by 8 am. The number of bicycle riders to BHS has not increased since last year, and it appears that the number of bicycle riders has not increased from 2019 despite claims sometimes made to the contrary.

Schemes to ration parking spaces, whether limited to the corridor or possibly including side streets, will be viewed as arbitrary. They would also create burdensome administrative and enforcement issues for the town.

Running out of capacity in the corridor would be a problem best solved if the Building Committee and the School Dept. retained a portion of the temporary lot. This would appropriately rebalance the use of space in the vicinity of BHS given the constraints on the immediate neighborhood. It would also avoid creating even more problems and pressure on the town, students and their families, and residents of side streets.

Keeping the 25 spaces (roughly the capacity of the jug handle) furthest from Concord Ave. would be a meaningful increase in our parking capacity. The setback from Concord Ave will allow screening with the same number of trees. It would require a minor adjustment to the location of two trees. The layout can be illustrated with the tree location plan included at the end of this memorandum.

The construction of the temporary lot did not include curbing or a full depth base under the asphalt. Nonetheless, it is serviceable now (including during the winter) and will remain so for quite a few years before maintenance is required.

We have a one-time opportunity to keep some of the temporary lot as a permanent supplement to the parking capacity of the corridor. Having adequate student parking is a matter of **town-wide** importance. I hope the Building Committee will solicit representative **town-wide** public input before making a final decision on the lot.

This memorandum expresses my views alone. It does not at this time represent a position of the Select Board, the Traffic Working Group—Middle and High School, or any other town committee because none of these bodies has discussed the issue.

Current Tree Plan

