

Belmont Middle and High School Traffic Working Group

Minutes

September 24, 2021, 8 AM

**RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: September 30, 2021

TIME: 2:14 PM

Attending were: Kate Bowen School Committee Representative, Roy Epstein, Select Board Representative, Patrice Garvin, Non-Voting TA, Jeffrey Held, Resident, Larry Link, Resident, Martin November, Resident, Jeffrey Roth, Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Representative, Alex Thurston, Resident, Mary Wybieralla, Resident

Members Absent: None

The meeting was called to order at 8:03 am by Roy Epstein.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Martin November nominated Roy Epstein for Chair, Mary Wybieralla seconded.

Kate Bowen nominated Larry Link for Chair, Mr. Link declined the nomination.

Roy Epstein was elected Chair by a unanimous roll call vote

Jeff Held nominated Martin November for Vice-Chair, Kate Bowen seconded,

Martin November was elected Vice-Chair by a unanimous roll call vote

Larry Link nominated Mary Wybieralla for Secretary, Kate Bowen seconded.

Mary Wybieralla was elected Secretary by a unanimous roll call vote.

Roy Epstein explained that meetings are subject to the Open Meeting Law. The Working Group will meet as often as necessary, perhaps bi-monthly or even weekly the first few months.

Roy Epstein reviewed the charge of the Working Group. The term of the Working Group lasts until June 30 of the year after the opening of the new Middle School.

IDENTIFY INITIAL TASKS AND DISCUSSION OF PRIORITIES

The Working Group began a discussion identifying priorities. Martin November outlined a variety of issues:

1. Pedestrian and Bike Safety. We need to ensure safe commutes to schools.
2. Significant vehicle traffic in the area.
3. Neighborhood Parking impacts the flow of traffic.
4. Student Parking overflow in the neighborhood
5. Concord/Goden Traffic Signal complaints-efficiency and brightness

Roy Epstein stated the charge of the Working Group is to examine traffic impacts related to the new Middle and High School. At some point the scope reaches a limit and the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) takes over.

The Working Group members raised questions basically to identify the boundaries of the Working Group's scope. Kate Bowen stated it would be helpful to know what is in the scope. Roy Epstein said he would prepare a statement further explaining the scope.

The Working Group continued a general discussion of scope:

Jeffrey Roth stated that TAC is focusing on safety improvements, such as traffic calming at Goden/Orchard/School Streets.

Alex Thurston would like to include the Hittinger Neighborhood. There are no signals or crosswalks on Hittinger Street. There are many pedestrians using Hittinger to access the High School. Roy Epstein clarified that the including Hittinger was a focus for the Working Group. That is the reason the charge requires a member from that neighborhood.

Jeffrey Held stated the Working Group needs to be mindful of the scope, and focus on safety.

Larry Link reminded the Working Group that the Hittinger Neighborhood did receive attention from the previous HSTWG.

Kate Bowen stated there may be some overlap. When you improve safety for Pedestrians/Bikes, you concurrently create vehicle issues. She also cautioned against scope "creep." In addition, she raised the benefits of a re-energized "Safe Routes" program for K-8 to educate and train younger grades for the longer distances as they move to Middle and High Schools, as well as to create a stronger culture of safety among parents/resident drivers. The Safe Routes program is funded by Commonwealth of MA grants.

Mary Wybieralla added that if we make safety the priority, vehicles will be inconvenienced but she is not sure that's a bad result.

Kate Bowen requested a map to help identify the geographic focus of the Working Group. Roy Epstein said a map would be provided.

REVIEW OF DATA COLLECTED BY RESIDENTS

Martin November reviewed a survey he conducted of residents in lower Goden and nearby streets.

1. Pedestrian/Bike Safety: Concord Avenue is well traveled, majority of cars not from Belmont. Recommends we support TAC recommendations for traffic calming.
2. "Illegal" Drop Offs: Students are being dropped off everywhere and anywhere.
3. The Cottage Street crossing is precarious.

Review of data will continue at next Working Group Meeting.

Roy Epstein offered several observations.

1. Traffic situation did improve after opening day as drivers become more familiar with the new lanes, signal and overall set-up.

2. Drop-offs remain a safety issue. Many drop-offs are occurring outside the designated drop-off zones. In particular, eastbound cars are pulling over just after the Concord/Goden signal and stand in the Concord Ave. pedestrian crosswalk. He suggests a “no standing or stopping” sign on Concord Avenue to keep the crosswalk clear.

3. The signs at the foot of Goden, restricting parking, helped with turning on and off Goden.

4. The drop-off signs eastbound on Concord are difficult to see.

5. Overflow parking is occurring on Oak and Orchard Streets

Martin November agreed drop-offs are a major problem that continues in the neighborhood. Questioned whether we want more restrictions. Better marking of the drop-offs and enforcement are needed or signs don't matter.

Larry Link stated setbacks on Oak Street are needed, and there are unsafe spots on Orchard Circle. The area of Eastbound Concord Ave. between Goden and Oak is a problem. Education is required. High School Principal might use email to remind parents where and how safest to drop off students.

Roy Epstein agreed the drop-off is poorly marked and requires more permanent or more structured signage. Kate Bowen asked if the Working Group is making specific regulatory solutions. Roy Epstein replied when the Working Group reaches consensus on a measure, we could make a motion and relay this motion to the relevant town authority.

Patrice Garvin stated that the intent of the charge was for the Working Group not to direct town staff. Many traffic recommendations would require action by the Select Board. Roy Epstein said the Working Group would refer questions and requests to her to get feedback from the appropriate departments. Department responses need to be prioritized and operational impacts have to be considered.

Larry Link responded that if it is a safety problem, the Town should move as fast as it can.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Deborah Talanian, Goden Street: favored restricting parking to resident only 7-9 a.m. Mon.-Fri for Lower Goden. She reiterated parking and drop offs for students should be on school site.

Roy Epstein responded the Working Group cannot control anything on School Dept. property. Residents need to go to the School Dept./School Committee with that request.

Ali Boroumand, Goden Street: drop offs on Eastbound Concord Avenue are a problem. Need data from afternoon pick ups. He/other condo residents cannot park anywhere because of the changes; they have no off-road parking at their homes.

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden Street: the safest place to drop off students is on campus. School dept has pushed this function into the neighborhood. Student parking on Concord have has cut off parking for residents at the track, rink, and library. Many of these residents are senior citizens.

Heather Barr, School Street: school could relax Tardy Rules and lessen the stress of getting to school.

DISCUSS MEETING SCHEDULE

The Working Group agreed to meet next week. Roy Epstein will poll the members for a convenient time. Kate Bowen requested that a scope list and map be available for the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Wybieralla