

Belmont Middle and High School Traffic Working Group
Minutes
October 8, 2021
8:00 AM

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: October 27, 2021
TIME: 9:00 AM

Attending were: Roy Epstein, Chair, Select Board Representative, Jeffrey Held, Resident, Ranganath Nayak, Resident, Martin November, Vice-Chair, Resident, Jeffrey Roth, Transportation Advisory Committee, (TAC) Representative, Larry Link (arrived 8:45 am), Resident, Alex Thurston, Resident, Mary Wybieralla, Secretary, Resident, Jon Marshall, representing Patrice Garvin

Members Absent: Kate Bowen, School Committee Representative

The meeting was called to order at 8:03 a.m.

Roy Epstein introduced new Committee Member Ranganath (Ron) Nayak

I. Approval of Minutes:

Motion to accept the minutes for the September 29, 2021 Meeting made by Martin November, seconded by Jeffrey Held. Motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

II. Update on scope of Committee:

Roy Epstein reviewed the revised statement of the Committee scope. Motion to approve made by Jeffrey Held, seconded by Martin November. Motion approved by unanimous roll call vote.

III. Update on Concord/Goden intersection and signal:

Roy Epstein provided updates on the following :

There have been hardware issues with the signal. The School Building Committee is responsible for warranty issues the first year of installation. The problems are being addressed. “no parking” sign was installed on Concord Ave. 20ft from the intersection. This was supposed to be a “no stopping/standing” sign. We will observe if the “no parking” sign will deter drop-offs. A stop line lost due to paving by National Grid still needs to be painted on Goden.

DPW is supposed to paint an additional left turn arrow and move a “left turn only” sign further down the median to cure emergency merging after the intersection.

Roy Epstein spoke to Bill Lovallo about the brightness of the signal and the louvers on the lenses. Roy Epstein is waiting for answers to these questions.

Martin November asked if the brightness could be adjusted according to the time of day.

Roy Epstein has asked for information on all dimming options.

Martin November stated there is a “stop here now” sign on Goden where the stop line should be.

Jeffrey Held stated a “stop here now” sign may be required on Concord eastbound before Goden.

People are also stopping too close to the intersection.

Roy Epstein stated a request has been made to move the no u-turn signs, particularly eastbound. The sign is currently on the opposite side of the intersection and may not be visible. Cones are being used on the westbound side to prevent u-turns to the side of the school driveway to drop off.

Jeffrey Roth asked if there were “baffles” on the lights, are louvers something additional?

Roy Epstein stated that louvers are something attached over the lens. Nothing is installed on lens at this time.

Martin November stated people are turning right onto Goden, immediately stop to drop off.

Ron Nayak said 40ft no stopping/standing from the intersection on Goden is required. If people are turning right and immediately stopping, police should be notified.

Roy Epstein observed that cars stopping on Goden at the crosswalk lead vehicles making the right off of Concord to cut the corner and come onto the sidewalk. Hopefully establishing a clear stop line 20ft back will help.

Ron Nayak also wanted to include a discussion of pedestrian traffic at dismissal. Pedestrians heading westbound out of the school campus are not utilizing the crosswalks. They are not waiting for the light to cross.

Roy Epstein responded that we have collected a lot of observations of morning activity.

Afternoon data needs to be collected.

Mary Wybieralla stated there are similar issues at the School/Goden crosswalks. Students are crossing without looking.

IV. Review Utilization of designated drop-off zones:

Roy Epstein observed the westbound drop-off zone has good utilization. Eastbound drop-off is used, but not nearly as much as it should be. Drivers have too many options before reaching the eastbound zone.

It is not illegal to pull over and let someone out of a car unless posted. It is not illegal to get out of a car that is waiting at a red light. There are a lot of behaviors occurring in good weather-that will be more problematic in the Winter. Hopefully these drop-offs will be well plowed and people will use them.

Jeffrey Roth said it is illegal to stop in a bike lane to let someone out of a car. It is an issue.

People are utilizing the bike lane as a drop-off zone.

Jeffrey Held suggested there should be an effort to better mark drop-offs.

Roy Epstein stated he suspects people know the drop-off is there, they just choose not to use it.

We should compile a list of issues to give to the High School Administration to forward to parents and students to further educate and encourage the use of drop-offs.

Jeffrey Held asked if with the increased use by parents/children of sidewalks and crossing, is there a plan by DPW to prioritize snow removal?

Roy Epstein responded there needs to be a meeting with DPW and the School Dept to talk about clearing snow banks at drop-offs.

Jon Marshall responded that it makes sense to set a meeting up with the DPW to discuss the new configurations in the area.

V. Jug-Handle:

Roy informed the Committee that the Building Committee has always assumed the jug handles was school property. This area has been incorporated in the design of the playing field area. The jug-handle will be eliminated by the end of this year.

20-25 cars park in the jug-handle during the day. After development, these students will park on side streets.

Roy Epstein noted student parking, which ends at the jug-handle on Concord Avenue, is largely unused. Students are using side streets closer to the school. He asked Sgt. Paul Garabedian about parking on Orchard and Oak Streets. Sgt. Garabedian said some tickets have been given on Orchard for parking too close to the corner. Oak Street appears to be the street of choice for student parking. If people park on both sides of the street, the travel lane is extremely narrow. The Police can ticket if a parked car leaves a travel lane less than 12ft. Tickets have been given for this on Oak Street.

The Police will not ticket for parking on side streets without a clear obstruction. If parking is restricted, students will move to another street. Is the situation unacceptable to residents? Is the street unusable, as Oak is at times? How wide a radius do we want for restrictions? It is necessary to have a Neighborhood Forum this month.

Jeffrey Roth stated that Orchard is unique because there are no sidewalks. It will be a problem in Winter.

Roy asked Ron Nayak, (Orchard St, resident), for his view of pedestrians. Ron responded that pedestrians are forced to the street. Cars are parked so close to driveways, residents cannot get out.

Roy Epstein responded that driveways cannot be obstructed. Students could be ticketed for this. Ron Nayak said Stone Road will be a problem. There is a stream of cars going down into a bottleneck at Orchard/ Orchard Circle, because Orchard is one way to School.

Roy Epstein asked how much of this was happening 2 years ago?

Ron Nayak responded it was happening. This is a problem in this neighborhood.

Mary Wybieralla stated parking for students has been moved off school campus and into the neighborhood.

Jeffrey Roth stated there are a lot of pedestrians. People walking out of school, ignoring the light signals. There needs to be an effort to educate students on crossing safely. Trying not to encourage automobile traffic.

Martin November responded to Roy Epstein's questions concerning parking on side streets. He conducted a survey and Oak and Orchard residents indicated a preference for a chicane, like Myrtle, or time limited parking.

Roy Epstein responded there are many ways to restrict parking. The first step should be a full airing of neighborhood opinion.

Martin November said we now have experience as school has been open for a month.

Roy Epstein stated the goal is to have an initial public forum. He recommended Thursday, October 21st.

Jon Marshall responded the date looked good. He will send post cards to the residents on the side streets. It would not be the usual 2 week notice.

Jeffrey Roth asked if this would coordinate with TAC- is there a potential overlap?
Roy Epstein responded we are only discussing the side streets, not touching Concord Avenue.
The specific issues on Concord - vehicle traffic, bike lane, and parking are TAC. The side streets we are discussing are Cottage to Orchard and Stone Road.
Jeffrey Roth said that some of the proposals TAC is working on impact on street parking.
Roy Epstein responded this may be only the first neighborhood meeting.
If this Committee agrees, Jon Marshall will work to notify residents.
Marry Wybieralla stated that School Street, Common to Goden, should be included.
Martin November stated the Hittinger neighborhood should also be considered.
Alex Thurston responded there is parking available on the south side of Hittinger. There is some spillover on Underwood street. Not observing parked cars attributed to the High School.
Jeffrey Held said that more students will have licenses in the Spring.
Alex Thurston stated students avoid parking here because of the difficulty getting out to Brighton Street.
Ron Nayak said the biggest safety problem is students looking for parking, going through lights. There is the potential for a student driver hitting a pedestrian.
Roy Epstein said the worst behaviors are clearly the u-turns on Concord, swooping drop-offs. The next stage is how to deal with inexperienced drivers in a dense traffic environment.
Communication with the school to address problems.

VI. Discussion of Concord/Cottage signal and crosswalk:

Roy Epstein had a discussion with Glenn Clancy about the pedestrian crossing lights at Cottage/Concord. This signal is considered state of the art and is compliant with Federal requirements. He asked if the light could be red and more visible to pedestrians. He was not given encouragement that it could be changed.
Roy Epstein said a sign has been posted on the westbound side of the intersection to prevent parking within 20ft of the crosswalk.
Martin November said there was an accident at that corner this week. It involved 3 cars. The first car stopped for a pedestrian, 2 cars rear ended the car.
Martin November said there was a sinkhole on the sidewalk on lower Goden where pipe was laid by National Grid. People are walking in the street.
Martin November noted the increase in truck traffic, particularly on Goden Street. He asked for an update on student parking on campus.
Roy Epstein responded that an email from Bill Lovallo says the plan for parking on east side of Harris Field is 0 student spots. The Planning Board called for 90 student spots west of Harris Field. This is half of the traditional level of student parking.
Martin November asked if they contemplate a drop-off on campus?
Roy Epstein said that is a School Dept. question.
Jeffrey Roth said the "no access" signs at Underwood Street are blocking the curb cut to get onto the path. Can someone mention this to the Police? Can these signs be relocated?
Alex Thurston said there are a lot of trucks on Hittinger, with the bike traffic, there have been a lot of close calls. Residents are concerned that drivers are ignoring signage restricting travel up

Baker Street in the morning. Approximately 1/3 of the traffic is traveling against the posted sign. Enforcement is needed. A safe bike route is needed on Hittinger. There are sidewalks but no safe biking infrastructure in place.

VII. Public Comments:

David Coleman, TAC: Agrees with Alex Thurston. Hittinger Street needs major work. Bikes go against the traffic, crossing on the left side. People are using Baker because of the access to Bright Road. He said that the Assistant Principal informed him 162 students applied for 100 parking stickers. 87 stickers have been picked up. Between Underwood Street and Orchard Street there are 30-35 student cars. He count 2 cars with stickers in the Jug-Handle.

When discussing a neighborhood forum for side streets it's good to differentiate from Concord Ave. TAC will have a forum on Concord Ave, and could coordinate with our forum. It might be good to ask the High School to alert holders of parking permits to attend the forum.

He has noticed pedestrian crossings seem to have shortened the wait time for signals. It is down to 20 seconds. Seems to be an improvement and a good step. He mentioned Heather Barr volunteered to coordinate with Safe Routes to School to facilitate education for pedestrians and bicyclists. Their focus is Elementary and Middle School. He is concerned with impatience by students with the light cycle. The removal of the crossing guard at Orchard crossing has increased these transgressions. He is also surprised by the Jug-Handle revelation.

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden Street: Shared her observations of Goden street Wednesday afternoon. Cars parked on both sides of the street, cars parked at the corner, driveways blocked, cars pulling into driveways to turn around, unable to back out, impassible for the trash truck. An emergency vehicle was blocked because of parked, idling cars waiting to pick up students. A High School student jumped out of a car to direct traffic so a fire truck could get up the street. It is not safe. These actions prevent access to a public Street. This is a bad decision by the School Dept. Residents told this Building Committee and the School Dept. the solution is to put student drop-offs on campus and have student parking on campus.

Roy Epstein recommended bringing these issues up at a School Committee meetings. This is a situation created by the School Dept. and it is reasonable to consider asking the School Dept. to provide assistance with traffic enforcement.

Anne Marie Mahoney questioned at what point is it acceptable to commandeer a public street?

Deborah Talanian, Goden Street: You can educate as much as you want, outliers always exist. There are too many dangerous situations. There is an open median, too many large trucks. It's difficult to cross at the Goden/Concord intersection.

She added that School Superintendent Phelan stated that "if it gets to be too much... we can change..."

Ali Boroumand, Goden Street: Roy Epstein mentioned that u-turns were a problem. I am thinking that some of these u-turns are happening because all of the student parking is on the

westbound side of Concord Ave. Students are turning to access westbound parking. Cannot put all of the parking on one side of Concord Ave. and not let them u-turn.

Martin November mentioned 2 accidents in the neighborhood.

Roy Epstein will ask for the accident reports for the last month from the Police.

Roy Epstein said the next meeting should include planning a short presentation by the Committee at the Public Forum.

Ron Nayak asked if we should expand the scope to pedestrian traffic.

Roy Epstein said pedestrian safety is the scope. It is the presence of traffic that creates unsafe situations for pedestrians.

Meeting adjourned at 9:52 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Wybieralla