

**Belmont Middle and High School Traffic Working Group  
Minutes  
October 15, 2021**

DATE: October 29, 2021  
TIME: 11:22 AM

Meeting called to order at 8:02 am.

**Attending were:** Roy Epstein, Chair, Select Board Representative, Patrice Garvin, Non-voting TA, Jeffrey Held, Resident, (Attending until 8:30 am), Larry Link, Resident, Ron Nayak, Resident, Martin November, Vice-Chair, Resident, Jeffrey Roth, Transportation Advisory Committee, (TAC), Representative, Alex Thurston, Resident, Mary Wybieralla, Secretary, Resident

Member absent: Kate Bowen, School Committee Representative

Roy Epstein announced Kate Bowen has resigned from the MHSTWG.

**I. Approval of Minutes**

Martin November moved to approve the Minutes for the October 8, 2021 Meeting, seconded seconded by Ron Nayak.

Minutes unanimously approved by roll call.

**II. Update on Traffic Signal/Signs and Lane Markings:**

Roy Epstein updated the Committee as follows:

The Concord/Goden stop line has been painted. There is also a "Stop Here" sign.

Additional left turn arrows have been painted on Concord Ave eastbound at Myrtle Street.

The "No U-Turn" sign has not been moved.

Regarding the traffic signal, it appears the hardware/programming faults have been resolved.

Questions remain concerning intensity of the lights, and whether it can or should be adjusted, whether louvers can be installed, and whether the flashing yellow arrow can be changed. The cost of labor to install still a question. The Building Committee is no longer responsible as the signals have been turned over to the town.

Martin November asked if the light intensity could change during the day.

Roy Epstein stated BSC recommended not to change anything.

Martin November asked if we could ask the vendor whether it could be adjusted according to ambient light.

Roy Epstein said we need to determine what is permissible or safe.

Jeffrey Roth said the flashing yellow is a problem.

Roy Epstein said the eastbound left turn arrow is green, then it switches to yellow flashing. It is annoying residents.

Jeffrey Roth suggested it is within the scope to look at louvers eastbound and west bound.

Larry Link wanted to make sure we are talking about the signals in all directions

Martin November made a motion to ask the TA to approach the Town Engineer/BSC to identify a process by which we could learn about our options for possible alterations to the signals at Concord/Goden including installation of louvers and control of brightness.

Motion seconded by Ron Nayak

Motion approved unanimously

### **III. Update on driver behavior and enforcement:**

Larry Link said there should be signs indicating that vehicles making right turns on Goden St from Concord should yield to pedestrians and bicyclists. There were cones moved to the front of the house at the corner of Goden/Concord.

Roy Epstein had a similar observation for right turn on red at Goden/ Concord. He asked Patrice Martin November said the “Stop here” sign and the stop line on Goden are universally ignored. Are there other markings? People pull up to the crosswalk.

Roy Epstein said he is hopeful that there is a process of adjustment. He observed that illegal U-turns were a significant issue when the High School opened but the number of illegal turns is now much lower. U-turns were a significant issue when the High School opened. The Police have ticketed on Orchard for parked cars creating obstacles, too close to corner, and blocking driveways. Cars have been ticketed on Oak for travel lane infractions.

A travel counter has been placed on Goden to count cars, and record speed.

Alex Thurston said he has observed Hittinger/Baker area at dismissal. There is a significant increase of traffic with back ups of 10-15 minutes. He would like the same monitoring occurring at Concord/Goden/Orchard/Oak to be done in the Hittinger area.

Roy Epstein said he mentioned Hittinger to Sgt Garabedian.

### **Driver Behavior: Accident Reports**

Roy Epstein received accident reports from the Police. The accident at Cottage/Concord was not caused by the pedestrian signal. A car stopped for the signal was hit in the rear by another vehicle. The accident was the result of a medical event.

Another accident involving a bicyclist hitting a car at the intersection of Waverley and Common. The bicyclist went through a red light.

Mary Wybieralla said there is a problem with bicyclists coming out into traffic, not stopping for stop signs or lights.

Larry Link said he doesn't know how you handle this issue. People need to monitor how pedestrians and bicyclists are moving. How do you teach judgement? There are a number of near misses every day. How do you prevent this?

Roy Epstein said Crossing Guards are important for the major intersections. He asked Patrice Garvin if Crossing Guards are Town or Police employees.

Patrice Garvin responded they are Police employees. There is a staffing issue.

Roy Epstein would like to see Schools make a concerted effort to make students aware that this is a problem.

Roy Epstein asked if a Senior Property Tax Work Off could be used to staff a Crossing Guard position?

Patrice Garvin said she will speak to the Chief of Police about this.

Roy Epstein asked about the Crossing Guard salary.

Patrice Garvin responded she was not sure, perhaps 15-20/hour.

### **IV. Potential Drop Off area:**

Roy Epstein said a potential new drop-off area could be on Concord Ave westbound adjacent to the jug-handle. That strip is presently reserved student parking. If identified used for additional drop-off, cars traveling eastbound on Concord Ave could make the U-turn, drop-off on Concord westbound, and head back where they started from.

Martin November asked for clarification. Is the intended behavior to make u-turn at Cottage then head back towards Belmont Center?

Ron Nayak asked if this was temporary because next year won't drop offs resume on campus?

Roy Epstein said we need clarification on this. His impression is that the School Dept. does not want parking or drop-off on campus.

Larry Link said he is not supportive of the u-turn at Cottage, even as a temporary measure. The School has basically outsourced student parking/drop-off to the neighborhood. We need a clear notion of what is expected after Middle School construction. What we have now is not appropriate.

Roy Epstein said the layout/design of the High School driveway may need to be redesigned to accommodate on-campus drop-offs properly.

He asked how the Committee wants to deal with the recommendation about the new designated drop-off zone.

Larry Link responded the U-turn at Cottage median break is problematic.

Mary Wybieralla said she could not support encouraging u-turns with pedestrian crossing light issues.

Roy Epstein said he would not make a motion recommending the new drop-off zone. The discussion on this topic ended.

Committee members raised questions about the pedestrian signal at Cottage Street.

Patrice Garvin responded that the town cannot get a better signal.

## **V. Planning for October 21, 2021 Forum on Student Parking in Neighborhoods:**

Roy Epstein shared slide presentation to use at the forum. The goal of this Forum is to gain input from residents and students. The focus is on residents who live in the immediate area.

Jeffrey Roth said it would be helpful to point out the specific student parking areas on the map in the presentation. Then indicate the side streets where spillover parking is occurring.

Larry Link said when the Middle School is completed, there will be a 50% increase in parking on campus. He said there could be some capacity for students east of Harris Field.

Roy Epstein responded the School Dept. is planning zero student spaces east of Harris Field. He does not know the total number of spaces to be constructed. He would send a request to Bill Lovallo for input on these questions.

Roy Epstein said Kate Bowen provided the following information from the School Dept.:

100 High School students ride the bus today,

In 2019 the ridership was 120.

Roy estimated there were approximately 125 students riding bikes to campus. This data implies most students are walking or being dropped off.

Ron Nayak asked what the total student population on campus will be when the Middle School opens.

Roy Epstein responded approximately 2000. There are 1500 students at the high School now.

Larry Link suggested we look at the bus program. Ask parents if the cost and routes were different, would it be an option. There should be incentives to use the bus. It could alleviate a lot of problems.

The system needs to be tweaked to increase bus ridership. Currently eligibility is 1.5 miles from school. May look at different routes. When we discuss parking, we should listen to resident preferences and proposals. We should certainly hear from students

Roy asked the Committee to send him suggestions for the Forum Presentation.

## **VI: Public Comment:**

Deborah Talanian, Goden Street: I've been walking the campus, looking at the Rugby field.

Why is this field being constructed behind the school? This area could fit 150-200 cars.

Superintendent Phelan has said he would do anything to keep the neighborhood safe. He didn't think parallel parking on Concord Ave. was unsafe? He said student parking on campus was problematic with school buses traveling on campus. The School Dept. took 100 public parking spaces. Perhaps buses could drop off westbound on Concord instead of pulling on campus.

Devote the rugby field to student parking.

Roy Epstein responded that the town has no authority over the School Dept.'s use of school property. We can relay the question of how the schools are balancing fields/parking. We can ask the question, but we have no authority.

Chi-Ting Huang, Goden Street: The flashing yellow left arrow is confusing. No other signals have it. It is annoying. The problem is the traffic situation is untenable. She observes trucks speeding to make the green light. This is a loud, busy intersection. There are idling cars at pick up, which is worse than drop off. There is parking on both sides of the street. It is impossible. There needs to be a comprehensive look at this intersection including its use by cars, bikes and pedestrians. Pedestrians used to cross at Orchard, cars entered at Underwood. We need to separate pedestrians and cars. Now all this pedestrian, car and bike traffic is concentrated in one intersection.

Roy Epstein responded the location of the driveway led to the design of the intersection.

The concentration of traffic is a consequence of having the driveway on Goden.

A macro change may not be feasible now.

This Committee needs to discuss student pick up.

Martin November stated the major issues appear to be increase bus ridership, examine parking regulations and do a peer comparison. What other towns have/have not student parking on campus. Which towns have residential permits. There are an overwhelming number of parents driving and dropping off. We need to look at this. We need feedback as to why people are doing this

Jeffrey Roth said it is a good point to point out the problem of idling cars. There are laws to prevent it.

Roy Epstein stated the idling law allows 5 minutes.

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden Street: If you put a residential parking limit around the school, where would they go? How do we get fewer cars dropping. When the Middle School opens safety needs to increase for the younger students walking to campus.

Roy Epstein said he will ask the School Dept what the drop off plan is for Middle School students. If there is no drop off on campus, it will increase the impact on the neighborhood. Alex Thurston said that when the Middle School opens, it will restore the level of traffic to previous years. It would be a good idea to get an indication of what is planned for Middle School from the School Dept.

Roy Epstein said the Middle School has the same hours as the High School. The flow of students to and from the campus will occur at the same time. The old High School had 2 exit points. He is unsure how it will be.

Jeffrey Roth said it makes sense to look at the bus. The bus is something that holistically needs to be looked at, especially for the Middle School.

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden Street: The School Dept has commandeered a residential street for school functions. No other neighborhood would put up with this. Everyone is expected to accept this situation. She expressed her frustration at a student parking in a manner that made it difficult for her neighbor to back out of her driveway. This particular student ignores requests not to park there. All this parking belongs on the campus. Four years ago, this neighborhood predicted this. The School Dept. didn't listen. Push these functions back on campus.

Roy Epstein stated the Forum on October 21st is an opportunity for residents to indicate what kind of parking restrictions they would accept. It is important to get a first reading of what residents are willing to consider.

Dave Coleman, (TAC): I have counted 42 cars with student parking stickers on Concord Ave. Estimates student parking usage at 50%. He realizes that parking on Goden is a special case.

Roy Epstein said if the School Dept. is ok with High School and Middle School sharing buses, it may be more efficient, could get the cost down, and ridership may increase.

Larry Link said perhaps the School Dept could establish "commuter lots" to pick students up. 5% is an incredibly small number of kids on the bus.

Roy Epstein said the bus question may require a separate forum.

Alex Thurston said the bus cost/timing is an issue. Kids on the northern edge of Belmont Hill-Lake Street are catching the MBTA 78 bus down Brighton and get off at the corner of Hittinger Street.

Martin November asked about the tunnel under the tracks. It would certainly alleviate traffic from the Winn Brook area.

Roy Epstein said he doesn't see a scenario where it will be built before 5 years.

Jeffrey Roth asked if someone could come to this Committee to discuss the bus.

Roy Epstein said he would check.

Jeffrey Roth moved the meeting be adjourned.

Ron Nayak seconded.

Meeting adjourned at 9:58 am

Jeffrey Held via email, added one comment for consideration :

Continue to monitor conditions through Fall, Winter and Spring. With inclement weather, expected increase in car drop offs and student driving and decrease in the # of walkers/cyclists and available spots, (due to snow).

—Spring brings an increase in # of student licenses.

Is there a way we can ask the School Committee to better incentivize use of buses?

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Wybieralla