

DATE: July 10, 2023
TIME: 9:34 AM

**Traffic Working Group - Middle and High School
Minutes
November 4, 2022**

Attending were: Roy Epstein, Chair, Select Board Representative, Jeffrey Held, Resident, Larry Link, Resident, Martin November, Vice Chair, Resident, Jeffrey Roth, Transportation Advisory Committee, (TAC), Representative, Alex Thurston, Resident, Mary Wybieralla, Secretary, Resident

Member Absent: Ron Nayak, Resident

The meeting was called to order by Roy Epstein at 8:02am.

Roy Epstein reviewed agenda items.

I. Review of Parking Restrictions near BHS:

Roy Epstein began the discussion by giving his impression of student parking. The situation has been considerably improved. The opening of the school driveway for drop off has been heavily used. Drop off on side streets has been manageable. The Parking Restrictions program is largely working in the morning. In the afternoon, I haven't observed queuing on Goden Street. The driveway is being used for pick-up. My one concern is that parking is getting full. Student cars are parked past Becket Rd. We've been all right so far because there has been capacity on Concord Ave.

Alex Thurston said he believes the construction workers are now parking on the building site.

Larry Link said he has sent a note to Sgt. Garabedian. Some students are pushing limits.

Roy Epstein responded that we will know more after next week. If the Rink passes, the jug handle will not be available for parking.

Larry Link asked if we had hard numbers for parking availability for the Middle and High School.

Roy Epstein said he had numbers for spaces. It seems the number exceeds staffing.

II. Review of Concord Ave. Striping and Parking near BHS:

Roy Epstein said the new Striping on Concord Ave. has generated a gigantic number of emails to the Select Board.

The cross hatching, (diagonal striping), past Goden St. on Concord Ave. is effective in preventing drivers from pulling over. Drop off areas are working "ok". Eastbound on Concord, there are up to 3 cars in drop off at the same time. Westbound there are up to 4 cars. The drop off zones are probably bigger than they need to be now but we will need them for the Middle School opening.

I requested that the cross-hatching be adjusted at the median openings at Emerson, Louise, and Edgemoor to make U-Turns easier.

Martin November said in terms of drop off issues, it is incredibly hard to control. People are still dropping off in the striping area. It is difficult to contain. The drop off in front of the school has made a difference.

Roy Epstein said that generally the situation is better than last year.

III. Update on Concord/Goden Traffic Signal:

Roy Epstein said the signal on Concord/Goden is causing queuing on Goden that can extend beyond School Street. The consulting Traffic Engineer agreed and suggested timing changes. The new timing needs to be implemented in the controller box. There may be a solution to get this implemented.

Martin November said we are getting focus on moving cars. Drivers are “gunning” down Goden to beat the green light. Increasing turns would increase this.

Roy Epstein said we just have to experiment to reduce or eliminate the U-Turns on lower Goden.

IV. Discussion of Middle School:

Roy Epstein presented a drawing from the Building Committee showing driveway access at Goden and Hittinger to the campus when the Middle School opens. Both driveways are 2-way access. Roy asked Bill Lovallo if it was possible for a middle school student to be dropped off at the Goden St. driveway, enter the High School entrance, and be able to walk through the building to access the Middle School. Bill Lovallo told him the School Dept. has not responded. The simplest path would be drop off and allow students to through the building.

We do have some sense of the new traffic behaviors. The traffic engineers projected that:

42% would enter the campus at Hittinger

58% would enter the campus at Goden

They projected:

370 vehicles entering at Hittinger

520 vehicles entering at Goden

The projections for exiting the campus are:

12% exit at Hittinger

88% exit at Goden

These numbers indicate the expectation in the morning is 370 cars enter at Hittinger, but only 75 cars exit. Alex Thurston said they put zero thought on how Trowbridge St. will be utilized. This neighborhood bore the brunt of all the traffic entering the High School. Trowbridge will be key for cars exiting, at least for the Middle School side.

Alex Thurston said that the instance where the construction crew parked there in October, the addition of those parked cars slowed traffic quite a bit. This will be an evolving discussion- whether parking restrictions are considered.

Roy Epstein said he thinks the issue will revolve around drop off. To me, the ability to traverse the building would be valuable to improve the flow of traffic in this area.

Larry Link said he wondered if we had the same issue on Goden. The school should really do something educating parents.

Roy Epstein said one possibility is to rely heavily on Concord Ave. drop off zones. If they really are in demand, they could be lengthened.

Alex Thurston said it depends on the Middle School side, the flow of traffic, and the impact of the Goden/Concord entrance-exit.

Roy Epstein said the Concord/Goden signal’s central role is to stop all traffic allowing students from all directions to cross Concord Ave. There is no signalization at Hittinger. I am concerned with streams of traffic from 3 directions with students crossing without traffic controls. Why Nelson Nygaard didn’t discuss is a mystery.

Larry Link said Underwood could be used by parents. There are no signals.

Alex Thurston said with turn restrictions, it doesn’t matter what sign you use, people turn anyway.

Alex Thurston said I know the Police are frequently at Goden. Do we know what makes the most sense with Hittinger open. When the High School opened, the area was flooded with Police Officers-not sustainable. We should talk to them.

Jeffrey Roth said there are a lot of people biking there. We should think about it when the Middle School opens. A drop off for both schools on the High School side is a good idea. It would work and seems like an easy option.

Following up on the bike counts-what are these counts compared to? The protected bike lanes are having a traffic calming effect. There is a wide-range of users for that. The bike counts might not be realistic.

Are you comparing the numbers to last year?

Roy Epstein replied yes. The bikers to the High School numbers are down from last year.

Jeffrey Held asked if we are getting future information. Is there any way we can't repeat history and get in front of it? Can experts refresh information to give us clarity as to what to expect?

Roy Epstein said Nelson Nygaard are no longer retained. I am not sure what we would ask them, not sure what the charge was.

Jeffrey Held said they should have built in patterns for expectations. We can be reactive. We formed a committee to react. I would think the school would want to be proactive rather than reactive.

Roy Epstein said he would start with Glenn Clancy. I'm concerned this Middle School entrance is an orphan. There was a budget to install the Concord/Goden signal. There is no budget or resources for Hittinger.

Alex Thurston said he was not sure a signal is needed. We've had students crossing there for 50 years.

Larry Link said the school has not developed a plan. The school should come to our group to indicate their thinking. Safe Routes to a school is now up to High School. I don't know why we can't do some thinking with Safe Routes. They've done mapping to show where students are coming from.

There needs to be work on how we get more kids on buses.

Martin November said he would be happy to reach out and see what we can find.

Roy Epstein said if we had a database of incoming 7th and 8th graders, we could sample parents as to how they plan to get to school.

Larry Link said that is a sample of the Lexington Survey.

Martin November said I think we shouldn't pass by the 800+ cars projected to enter the campus.

Larry Link said to remember of the two lots - 200 is the rough count of staff cars.

Roy Epstein said that at least 130-140 cars are now dropping off in the driveway. This is not a factor for the Middle School.

Larry Link said we've offered to help with the survey. I talked to Safe Routes. If I were a High School or Middle School parent, once the busing costs are: 2 children- \$1200

3 children- \$1800

I think we're going to see other options.

Martin November said that is his point. This area has an 1890s infrastructure. We're trying to solve a problem- making the bus as accessible/inexpensive. The number of cars in and around the campus is dangerous.

Alex Thurston said the Hittinger neighborhood in the morning is a cut-through. Traffic is a problem

Larry Link asked if we discussed a portion of Underwood Street as a drop off.

Alex Thurston said he thought it would be favored as a drop off. I do not think Underwood will want parking restrictions.

Martin November said the Chenery has an aggressive Crossing Guard. I know resources are slim. We need to make sure safety is paramount.

Jeffrey Roth said the key difference with Underwood now is there is a wide path. Drop off there encourages kids to walk the rest of the way. It's a direct shot to the Middle School.

Roy Epstein said we need to gather as much information as we can to determine drop offs on side streets near Hittinger. Whether the Underwood path is desired remains to be seen.

V. Busing-High School and Middle School:

Roy Epstein said the School Dept. made 4 proposals for Bus Service:

1. Students in grades 7-12 will not be transported. There are currently 306 students transported.
2. Grades 7-12 transported only if you live 2 miles from school. The reduction in total ridership with this proposal is 194 students.

3. Grades 7-12 transported only if you live 1 1/2 miles from school The reduction in total ridership with this proposal is 95 students.
4. Grades 7-12 no transportation. (492 students)

The School Committee did not make a decision. Meg Moriarty is going to talk to the Superintendent. There is time pressure. The contract with the bus company would be up in the middle of December. Martin November asked if there flexibility with the size of the bus.

Roy Epstein said most of the cost is associated with the driver, not the size. Routing needs to be looked at. The existing bus service to the High School is limited. Now that the Middle School will be in the same spot, the routing should be able to change.

Martin November asked if the contract locks in the number of drivers.

Jeffrey Roth asked if all the scenarios were the same cost.

Roy Epstein said there was no exploration of pricing.

Martin November said we need to be thinking about school start times.

Larry Link responded start times is a complex consideration. When the bus fees began, there was an initial subsidy to encourage riders. Is it out of consideration to possibly do this again?

Roy Epstein said he didn't think it's impossible. The school budget will be worked out in the middle of February. They were combining reduction of services, reduction of fees and a decrease of the general fund. We need TAC and the School Dept. to work together on this.

Martin November said we need to decrease cars on the streets. I am happy to reach out on this.

Larry Link responded that we've done this. We need a team to go through the numerical information.

VI. Turning Restrictions:

Roy Epstein said recommending these restrictions raises concerns that go beyond the scope of this committee.

Martin November said this is not dissimilar from the Hittinger discussion. The decision was made to put the entrance/exit to the school on Goden. These 1890 streets are not equipped to handle the volume of cars. There are significant safety concerns. Bicyclists are navigating two-way traffic. It is not safe. It is dangerous for students. The sidewalks are poor. Cars are turning onto Goden from Concord with a great deal of speed. Turn restrictions do impact other streets. There is a similar restriction on Myrtle. There should be restrictions on Goden, Oak and Orchard. The situation will improve by reducing cars coming through the neighborhood. We are not prepared for 800 cars. The decision was made to locate the school there. It creates an urgency with safety improvements. I don't want to sit on a committee without impact. Make the bus attractive. Make driving unattractive.

Jeffrey Roth asked what was the time for these restrictions.

Martin November said it should mirror the Myrtle restriction. We are seeing the congestion from 7am-9am. The afternoon traffic is more dispersed. The real issue is the morning. There is cut-through traffic. Not allowing a right turn from Concord to these streets will help.

Jeffrey Roth I think the challenge is reducing cars.

Martin November said the challenge is how do we manage the number of cars. Trying to reorient our thinking around safety issues. The current traffic configuration is not working. We need an open forum with residents. The long term solution should be to reduce cars because these streets can't handle the volume.

Roy Epstein said there is no issue with speeding comparable to other parts of town, but he has a concern that cars would turn on Oak and end up on Goden. Town wide impacts would have to be studied.

Martin November said analysis of traffic is impacted by Covid. My issue is that I am less concerned about cars and am more concerned with safety of students. Having a one-way for two hours is an appropriate trade off. I think the focus should be on safety. This is the purview of the committee. Our charge is safety.

Jeffrey Roth said he agreed. I think it is appropriate to be less convenient for cars. If it becomes inconvenient, parents/students will pursue other means to get to school. The priority should be safety over cars.

Larry Link said he was open to looking at everything. If you restrict cars, may be creating a safe passage to school for bikes and pedestrians to school. There is a fair amount of single occupancy vehicles coming through the neighborhood. We need to consider residents ability to move. You are essentially funneling everyone up Bright Rd. Are we prepared to deal with the volume there?

Martin November said our goal should be to make it as safe as possible. I worry about where the traffic will go later. All things hinges on enforcement. Bright is a larger road. I understand the issue of dispersion. I suggest an open forum to discuss with residents these proposed restrictions.

Larry Link responded discussion is good. The restrictions may have to go all the way down.

Martin November said start with the immediate neighborhood.

Larry Link said he recommended going all the way down. A wider audience might reveal insight to driver behaviors.

Martin November responded that he didn't think that made sense. We have a focused proposal. One of the issues with the existing restriction on Myrtle, is that there was no input from residents of Goden and Oak. These streets were impacted by these restrictions.

Roy Epstein said an initial proposal in 2019 for one way on Goden, southbound, resulted in issues.

Mary Wybieralla responded that there were similar restrictions throughout the town. Specifically near schools. Why is this not a consideration for these streets with their proximity to schools?

Roy Epstein said there is a peak period issue. The signal light needs an adjustment. We need to see if it makes a difference at all. Bicyclists coming down Goden, could go down Myrtle or Oak. There is contention between cars and bikes. This is an intense problem for 15-20 minutes.

Martin November asked if we could hear feedback from residents. We could limit comments to one minute. Would like to make a motion to have a public forum.

Roy Epstein said this doesn't require a motion. Timing is very difficult with holidays and Town Meeting.

Martin November offered to come up with a date.

Resident Comments:

Erika Wolf, Goden Street: I am concerned to hear we could keep this street status quo. There are more cars coming through every day. It really is a big problem. There is a different problem every day. It is not a question of if there is an accident, it is when. There is a public record of residents stating there is a safety issue. It is frustrating to hear after 3 years that "we'll fix the signal...". People will figure out the restrictions. Behavior can be shaped. I takes leadership to do this.

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden Street: Historically Goden Street has asked for mitigation. We can't wait. Look at the other 5 schools in town. Restrictions make it safer. We need to do something.

Deborah Talanian, Goden Street: I feel we should have no access from School St. from 7-9am and 2-4pm. At a few public meetings I directed comments to the Superintendent to consider one-way on campus. Eliminate the entrance at Goden. The Green signal at Goden/Concord has influence 2 accidents. Cars are racing to make the light. It should be flashing red. We should be discouraging cars.

Roy Epstein said he would consult with Patrice Garvin and Glenn Clancy about resources for a traffic/engineering study.

VIII Myrtle Street Restrictions:

Roy Epstein said Myrtle Street was not included in the parking restrictions because of the chicane on Myrtle. I emphasize trying to balance safe transportation through this area. I didn't see the inconvenience with student parking at the bottom of Myrtle.

Deborah Galli, Myrtle Street: Myrtle Street should be considered for the same restrictions. Lower Myrtle residents respectfully asks to be included in the neighborhood parking plan.

Blanca Lain, Myrtle Street: Safety is the main concern, especially with student drop offs. When the Middle School opens, there is increased risk with drop offs. We cannot look at streets in isolation. I am doing work, the contractors have to beat the High School students to park.

Dan Halston, 10 Myrtle Street: I do honk safety is the number one issue. There should be parity. I cannot back out of my spot. Drivers are frustrated. Drivers “gun” their cars up and down Myrtle. Here should be a holistic approach. With respect to the chicane, it was pushed because of the narrow street, and emergency access. I support both, chicane and student restriction.

Roy Epstein said the Committee debated chicane on all side streets. For several reasons we adopted the system we did. We wanted to get students to use Concord Ave. we couldn’t achieve it if we just had chicanes. I have observed Myrtle. I don’t see a safety issue. I consulted with the Police. There are six students parked in legal parking spaces. Anyone can park there. The police cannot enforce such a short restriction. If Myrtle wants to remove the chicane, the Select Board could consider it. The current system of restrictions could be relaxed. I do not see a compelling case.

Larry Link said the consistency of layout and rules-may not get consistent behavior. Removing the chicane and right turn restriction is not appealing.

Martin November said the point he wanted to make, rather than the safety issue, is the equity issue. There are limited parking spaces and residents have not access. Returning those spaces makes sense. Resident access is important.

Larry Link said if safety is not as big an issue, if we restrict Goden, won’t cars go up Myrtle? Eliminate the right turn, increase volume of cars going up Myrtle, not just equity of parking, it’s equity of safety.

Roy Epstein said the Committee has lost its quorum and the meeting is effectively adjourned. Dan Halston volunteered to ask residents about removing the chicane.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Wybieralla