

DATE: January 14, 2022
TIME: 11:22 AM

**Traffic Working Group - Middle and High School
Minutes
December 3, 2021**

Attending were: Roy Epstein, Chair, Select Board Representative, Jeffrey Held, Resident, 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: Patrice Garvin, TA

Roy Epstein called the meeting to order at 8:04am

I. Approval of Minutes: October 29, 2021

Martin November provided edits.

Larry Link provided an edit.

Ron Nayak moved to approve the Minutes as amended.

Martin November seconded the motion.

The October 29 Minutes as amended were unanimously approved.

II. Update on Concord/Goden Traffic Signal:

Roy Epstein and Patrice Garvin met with Sam Offei-Addo, Traffic Engineer, BSC, and the vendor who maintains this Traffic Signal. Residents at the bottom of Goden Street still have complaints with the operation of the Signal.

Roy Epstein will share the BSC report on the signal. When the signal was set up, the pedestrian audible tone was set up with a night-time setting from 8:00pm-6:00am. This function has changed to 8:00pm-7:00am on all 8 poles. The audible signal has a default volume which increases when other noise, like wind, or trucks, is detected. The daytime volume was lowered for 2 of the poles on the south side of Goden St.

The Traffic Engineer will have to come out again assess.

These audible tones are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Turning the audible tone too low is not an option.

The traffic engineer noted that the stop line on Goden was further back than it is supposed to be, which can affect the sensor in the camera that controls the signal phasing. The stop line has since been moved to the correct distance.

The pedestrian phase, when all lights go red, is only supposed to be activated when button is pressed. It has been observed to go on when no one is there to press the button. This did not occur during the site visit. If it recurs, the vendor will be notified.

Limiting the light spread from the signal was discussed. The option of a mechanical louver is not suitable because it could trap debris like leaves or snow, which would block the light.

Another option is an Optically Programmable Lens, which uses a system of lenses to control the light. It is more expensive. Given the geometry of the location, it is not certain it would be possible to concentrate the light so that it would be only visible from Goden Street and not the houses.

Larry Link said that this is a very complicated situation/solution. It seems the process should immediately be placed with the Town Engineer. The process to correct the situation is taking too long. Roy Epstein responded the system is under warranty for a year-until September 2022. Adjusting these signals requires technical training. Any adjustments to these signals during the warranty period will be done by the vendor. Adjustments to these signals requires sign-off by the Town Engineer, and the actual work done by the vendor. After the warranty expires, any adjustment would also be done by the vendor, because there are no in-house personnel with the technical training.

Alex Thurston questioned if there were quotes for the optical adjustment option for the signals.

Roy Epstein responded that Optical Programming would cost approximately \$20,000. Alex Thurston asked if the town is aware of any other signals in town with the same Signal Head.

Roy Epstein responded that the signals at Moraine/Trapelo uses a similar system to limit vertical light spread. The Goden/Concord signal is a horizontal light spread issue.

Alex Thurston expressed concern that if this work is completed, a precedent will be established for other areas of town.

Roy Epstein responded that he is not aware of other complaints in town of this nature.

Jeffrey Roth said that limiting the spread of the light beam has safety implications for bicyclists and pedestrians approaching the intersection. He encourages the Traffic Consultant to consider these factors as well.

Roy Epstein said the manufacturer is going to make a diagnosis of the spread of light. The Engineer will determine what is acceptable.

Martin November asked if the town was using just this one contractor, are we putting this out to bid.

Roy Epstein said there are 4 companies in the Boston area that do this work. The town is using the company used by the Building Committee.

III. Parking Restrictions: Roy Epstein emphasized that everything proposed is to be a trial to see if the situation improves. The proposal was shared with some further refinements.

There is a lot of congestion on certain side streets from student parking. Student parking on the school side of Concord needs to be utilized more than it is today. We should not ban student parking on just one street. There needs to be a reasonable radius of streets. The goal is to identify streets to restrict student parking with minimal imposition on residents. There are streets students are not currently utilizing. Students will move to these streets after restrictions.

Roy Epstein recommended: Exempting Cottage and Myrtle from the trial as they already have posted parking restrictions.

While we focused on the High School, School Street is congested during Wellington drop-off, 8:15-9:00am. If School Street is posted 7-10am, it would be a conflict with that activity. It is recommended that a sign posting a 9-10am restriction on School Street. Police could manage this.

There is no student parking on Underwood/Baker/Trowbridge. Expects that some students would park there when the restrictions are posted.

It is reasonable to trial the proposal to see if student parking moves to Concord Ave. The trial could start January 1, 2022. The trial could run for a month, and we could assess it.

The Schools are willing to advertise the proposal. Signs could be posted stating “Commercial vehicles excepted”.

Martin November asked about teacher parking on School St. Will the restrictions impact it?

Roy Epstein responded that teachers could get a placard. We can accommodate teachers.

We should emphasize to the public that the idea here is to try something minimally invasive. Don't anticipate this as a wholesale change to parking in Belmont. It is to restore “status quo”. We are responding to a change in status quo brought on by no student parking on campus.

Larry Link said if you exclude Myrtle, the current situation will allow students to park. He anticipates students will figure it out. We also need to understand that Louise and Emerson will have increased traffic and parking. Can we identify the ring road, (jug handle) and Underwood Pool lot as available to students?

Roy Epstein said the jug-handle is school property. We have no jurisdiction to designate its use. The Building Committee changed plans to preserve the jug-handle. It has not been formally allocated in the parking lottery. The pool parking lot has 10 spaces-9 are unrestricted. Signage states 4 hour, pool only. The DPW should put a different sign to make it clear parking is available.

Regarding Louise and Emerson, if parking on Oak/Orchard/Goden is restricted, the majority of those cars will fit on the school side of Concord. The overflow distributed on a larger area will have much less significant impact on the neighborhood. The Oak situation unlikely on other streets. Parking will be spread around and become less of an issue.

Larry Link stated his estimates were 25 parked cars on Orchard/Goden, 15 on Myrtle. These cars will probably go to upper Goden and Orchard.

Roy Epstein responded as long as they don't all go to the same place, the results may be acceptable.

The goal is the dispersion of parking.

Roy Epstein ask Jeffrey Roth whether TAC was considering parking as part of the Concord Ave. striping plan.

Jeffrey Roth responded that if more parking is available more people will use it. Adding additional spaces will have safety implications. TAC hasn't really discussed a specific location.

Larry Link said he would "walk it". Trying to accommodate student parking because the School Dept. took it away. Looking at unused parts of Concord Ave. that could be used.

Roy Epstein said the Public Forum for this Proposal is scheduled Thursday, December 16th. An announcement will be circulated to students and parents. Community Development will mail postcards to abutters. This Committee will meet immediately after the Forum. The Forum should end at 8:30pm. The proposal could go to the Select Board Monday December 20.

Jeffrey Roth asked what are the penalties for tickets? What is the penalty for a violation?

Roy Epstein responded right now it's 15 dollars. He proposes it be increased to 25 dollars. He believes it requires action by the Select Board. The main issue is awareness of these restrictions and people will comply.

Jeffrey Roth responded that 25 dollar tickets make sense.

Larry Link asked for an explanation of the process. How are you going to distribute placards? How is staffing going to accommodate this process? What is the end date of the trial?

Roy Epstein responded the Police have a laminator, and can make and put up signs. People could stop by the Police Station to pick up placards. We could say 4 weeks is the trial period. Permanent signs require Select Board approval.

Larry Link asked if residents will need proof of residence and licenses to obtain placard from the Police.

Roy Epstein said there will be one placard per household.

Larry Link said we are opening the door for other neighborhoods in Belmont.

Roy Epstein responded that other neighborhoods don't have a new problem.

This proposal stands on its own to restore the status quo near the high school.

IV. Resident Comments:

Lisa Pargoli, Precent 4: I question why the Light Dept. wouldn't be able to adjust the lights. Why can't we train people in the Light Dept. instead of paying the company to do it? Why was it not vetted out to other 4 companies?

Roy Epstein said the Light Dept. does not adjust the lights. They use a vendor.

Lisa Pargoli said you are supposed to get competitive bids.

Roy Epstein responded the pricing will be competitive.

Ali Boroumand, Goden Street: This group was reformed because of this intersection. You need to make it clear who residents could talk to. Need to confirm that after adjustments the baseline is good. Windy days-you can hear it. The walk signal is louder after adjustments.

Roy Epstein said there were zero adjustments to walk signal. The actual adjustment is with a software package which runs on a laptop plugged into the pole. It requires software and training. It is now done by the vendor.

Ali Boroumand said the daytime schedule is 7am-8pm. What is the rationale for 8:00pm? Are there regulations? If you hand off responsibility for this signal please let residents know.

Carolyn Bishop, Orchard Street: The biggest problem is pick-ups. Parents parking, students leaving trash and walking in yards. I am extremely concerned about exempting commercial vehicles from these restrictions. Southern, (eastbound) Concord-there is not much parking there. There are the drop-off, and bus stop. Kate Bowen's study indicates there are more students driving in this town than Brookline, and Watertown. Student Parking doesn't seem to be an issue in those towns. We need to think of alternatives. We need to look at the cost of the bus, bring the cost down. Assumption that 90 spaces west of Harris Field is a terrible waste of land. We need to prevent commuter parking in the jug-handle.

Roy Epstein said we have always recognized that pick-up and drop-off is a problem. When the bad weather arrives, we'll get a better sense of the problem.

The commercial exemption does not apply to contractors at the school site.

The 90 spaces are entirely the School Dept. The Planning Board required the 90 spaces. This is going to be reconsidered.

Advocate charging for student parking. Realistically can only institute a fee for parking if you can control the student's next best alternative

Bus fees-this Committee wants to take this up. We want to work with the School Dept.

Carolyn Bishop is concerned it is a lottery. Prefers parking permits issued for need.

Roy Epstein said hopefully the School Dept. will be receptive to changes and suggestions.

Chi-Ting Huang, Goden Street: We asked the Building Committee to adjust the lights. We were told it was set to a lower setting. Now it has been turned over to the Town and we appreciate that the Committee is trying to adjust this. The current adjustment is much quieter. The "beeping" is sensitive to planes, trucks, and wind. It gets louder.

Is there a specific person we can address these issues to?

Roy Epstein said to send an email to him.

Stephanie Pawlowski, Orchard Circle: Feel strongly the parking restrictions should be in place. It is hazardous with parking along the circle. Advocate that the trial be done for 2 months-through the winter months.

Roy Epstein responded that in terms of duration, the plan is to trial it for 4 weeks and see if another 4 weeks are required.

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden Street: Thank you. Appreciate the desire to restore status quo. The intersection/signals are too large for the neighborhood. Belongs in Boston. The 2 lane driveway doesn't belong in a neighborhood. There was no public hearing concerning this. Everything the residents predicted has happened. It is time to look at the driveway configuration.

Roy Epstein said the driveway is still an open question. The long term plan is drop-offs on campus. Tom Gatzunis has indicated this will be accommodated when construction is completed

Heather Barr, School St.: Emphasizes that School be included in discussions. The School could do a better job identifying options. There should be a faculty/student liaison. Perhaps a representative from the School Sustainability Committee could be included in the process. Include people who live far from the school. It is good long term to represent people driving and dropping off.

Roy Epstein said this Committee has been publicizing our proposal. We have communicated with the School Committee and Superintendent Phelan.

Heather Barr said that Isaac Taylor is a good representative for the School. Maybe a Vice Principal who could be close to it. Help students understand the uses and why.

Roy Epstein said students did not attend the October Forum. We can't force people to attend.

Heather Barr responded better communication is required.

Corinne McCue Olmsted, Stone Road: Appreciates the work of the Committee. It all comes down to safety and convenience for residents. They don't have full use of the street. The issue varies by

street/neighborhood. We should start small and expand as needed. For example: upper Stone Road, Orchard Circle to School, Underwood, Baker, Trowbridge-blanket approach not needed. I polled the neighborhood-40 houses and received 19 responses. Orchard St. to Concord deals with drop-offs and pick-ups. Orchard Circle to School St. -6 houses, 4 responses: 2 in favor of restrictions, 2 against restrictions. Orchard St. (School to Circle), 2 houses responded: 1 in favor of restrictions, 1 against restrictions. Upper Stone Rd: 6 houses against restrictions, 3 houses in favor of restrictions, 2 houses had no opinion.

Residents on Stone Road consider speed/traffic the major issue. Asking if possible, no parking restrictions on upper Stone Road during the trial.

Roy Epstein polled the Committee.

Mary Wybieralla said if the residents on upper Stone Road do not want restrictions, we should remove this street from proposal. Expects it could change.

Martin November said if the residents don't want restrictions, it's not unreasonable to remove Stone from restrictions. This is a fluid situation. Not a problem now, when the Middle School opens, it could be a problem.

Larry Link said he is fine excluding it. Excluding it doesn't hurt, it can always be added later. Cars now have a clear shot down Stone Road without parking.

Martin November moved to exclude Stone Road from School Street to Orchard Circle from the Proposal. Larry Link seconded the motion.

Five Committee Members voted in favor

Alex Thurston, Jeffrey Roth, Jeffrey Held had left the meeting.

Corinne McCue Olmsted suggested parking stickers be used instead of placards. One sticker per car, one placard per household. It is important to have communication with students. Members of the neighborhood are willing to "paper" the neighborhood to ask students "Why do you drive to school? Why do you park here?"

Roy Epstein said the School will do outreach for the 12/16 Forum.

We will discuss the specifics of the placard systems.

This will be a short run trial.

Deborah Talanian, Goden St.: The left turn lanes and lights take up valuable space relative to drop-offs. Drop-off on campus is not going to solve the problem. What is affecting from-off is the Goden/Concord light.

Roy Epstein said the Goden/Concord traffic light is not coming down.

Larry Link said he liked the 2 month trial idea. This would cover the bulk of the snow season. Put a bookend on it, put a deadline.

Larry Link moved that the trial continue through the last day of February, 2022.

Roy Epstein seconded the motion.

Five Committee members voted in favor.

Alex Thurston, Jeffrey Roth and Jeffrey Held were absent.

Roy Epstein will modify the proposal to exclude upper Stone Road and extend the trial until the end of February.

Meeting adjourned 10:07am

Respectfully Submitted,
Mary Wybieralla

