

Traffic Working Group - Middle and High School

Minutes

March 11, 2022

DATE: April 19, 2022

TIME: 8:57 AM

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

The meeting was called to order by Roy Epstein at 8:00 am. Roy Epstein told the Committee the Select Board needs to take up recommendations and the trial extension at their Monday Meeting. He would like to talk about potential changes and get the Committee's perspective.

I. Approval of February 11, 2022 Minutes

Martin November moved that the Committee approve the February 11, 2022 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Larry Link. The minutes were approved unanimously.

II. Discussion and vote on recommendations to the Select Board for extension of the Parking Trial

Roy Epstein shared some general observations of the Parking Trial:

1. Where the temporary parking restriction signs fell down-people started parking at those locations again. The signs have been put back
2. There was still a large number of spaces available on the school side of Concord Ave.
3. When the Committee first developed the trial, it didn't know how many student parkers there would be. It seems the Committee can safely remove the restrictions on Underwood/Baker/Trowbridge.

Alex Thurston agreed with removing these streets. If this is a safety issue it needs to be referred to TAC. He is not in favor of the program for any streets.

Martin November said he would reiterate that in terms of the Middle School, the effects remain to be seen.

Roy Epstein said the trial is aimed at High School Students. There will be a parking lot for Middle School Staff. If there is spillover to side streets something would need to be recommended.

Alex Thurston said the old High School accommodated the parking. There will be a new opening at Trowbridge. Data collection is required to study the impact.

Larry Link said shouldn't have staff on side streets. Even though 53 placards were picked up, what's the best scheme for this setup that can be repeated in town? We have to have a reasonable plan that allows traffic to flow. The chicane on Myrtle works.

Roy Epstein said there is a chicane near the Chenery School but he thinks there is a better strategy. The goal would be to enforce dispersion.

Martin November said he appreciated Alex's point to think universally. He emphasized a focus on students and to restore status quo without impeding residents. Residents have been happy with the proposal. It pushed students to designated parking spots.

Roy Epstein said two issues are important to consider:

1. Make change to remove Underwood/Baker/Trowbridge
2. Extend the trial another month which would get us until the April vacation and do one more extension to get to the end of the school year.

Jeffrey Roth responded he echoed Alex's comments and he is voting against the proposal. Is there a better way to solve problems and deal with student parking? Having this limitation on Concord Ave., if the protected bike lane is implemented, could impact parking on Concord Ave. Eastbound on Concord is a real issue if the protected bike lane is implemented.

Roy Epstein said there is a similar program in place near the Butler School.

Jeffrey Roth responded it seems limited near the Butler School.

Jeffrey Held said he supports Roy's proposal. We successfully changed behavior. This is a unique situation around the school. Traffic and parking was pushed into the community. He stated that Watertown High is in a residential neighborhood and there is a permanent 7-10am parking restriction. If the trial isn't extended we could end up back where we were.

Larry Link said we have a list of things not done. Goden works because people are avoiding it. There is a deluge of cars during peak times. We have more issues to address, including talking to the High School about lottery design.

Martin November said parking is the least of worries. It was the easier thing to do. There are potential issues with the bike lane. The temporary parking lot becoming permanent. Pick up and drop off are real problems.

Alex Thurston said he echos Larry's comments. Students return later in the day and Oak Street becomes a real problem. Oak continues to be a safety issue. TAC should determine meaningful parking restrictions on these streets. The main issue is cars are parked on both sides of these streets.

Roy Epstein made a motion to remove Underwood/Baker/Trowbridge Streets from the trial.

Larry Link seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Roy Epstein made a motion to extend the trial as revised through April 29, 2022.

Larry Link seconded the motion

Six members of the Committee voted yes

Jeffrey Roth and Alex Thurston voted no

III. Discussion of Strategies for Drop Off and Pick Up

Martin November shared a video of Pick Up on Goden Street. The big picture is that the school was placed in an area that hasn't enough room for these activities. We have an F rated intersection. Traffic Engineers focused on campus access, not neighborhoods. Because a left turn lane was created, there is increased truck traffic up and down Goden Street. There are strong concerns of the proposed bike lane. There is very little room. Car doors are opening into traffic. In terms of solutions, we have to go back to looking at bus service. It needs to be user friendly and equitable. Another thing to think about is making some of these side streets one way. The problem is two way traffic on a street that is not designed to be a main road.

The pick up and drop off problems occur because the campus restricted access. The campus should be used for pick up and drop offs. It should be publicized that there is access for drop off and pick up on the campus. I have reached out to the Superintendent concerning this. The front parking lot was temporary, but now be permanent. This will impact residents who have dealt with this site for some time. This was promised green space. Dealing with the parking issues was a good first move. It was the least problematic.

Larry Link said the streets were 10 times worse in the afternoon. The streets are clear most of the day. Pick up and drop off is terrible. Oak Street should have a chicane like Myrtle. Goden should have an increased setback. Truck traffic needs to be examined. He has been working with the School Dept. on the busing issues. This not going to be solved quickly.

Jeffrey Roth said he felt like there are a lot of things besides parking. The real problem is too many cars to get through. Need to encourage more walking/biking. In regards to the protected bike lane, parking is not in the middle of the road. There is 11 1/2 ft of travel lane. The median does pose a challenge.

Martin November said his wife bikes to work. I don't think having them on the sides is appropriate. It is a solid median. One big challenge is right turns - the ability of drivers to see them. Suggest converting the median to a travel lane.

Jeffrey Roth said there are bike boxes at stoplights. The protected bike lane is an opportunity to provide students a safer way -it is a positive benefit.

Roy Epstein suggested bike lane plans is off topic for this Committee.

Martin November responded it was not off topic . It will impact parking on Concord Ave.

Larry Link said TAC had a meeting last night about this.

Martin November responded the TAC vote was 5-3. Clearly TAC doesn't agree.

Roy Epstein said he hopes TAC is taking these considerations into account.

Jeffrey Roth said he hoped this Committee would too.

Alex Thurston thanked Martin for the video. He wanted to echo that this is what happens at pick up on Baker and Hittinger Streets. This scenario will happen on Trowbridge. As a parent, will I encourage my child to walk? No-I will drive. Without a crossing guard, I am not sure how I would get past this.

Roy Epstein said Middle School is a wide open question. People may avoid the campus driveway. Side streets could become an extension of the Middle School parking lot.

Larry Link asked if the Committee got a response about the use of the driveway.

Martin November responded he left a message for the Superintendent and has not heard back.

Drop off and pick up should be moved to campus. This is the safest.

Roy Epstein said he thought the Committee should get feedback and an evaluation of driveway use. It is not out of the question to consider a redesign of the driveway.

Alex Thurston said cars that choose to drop off on campus. If we expect cars to wait to get off campus there needs to be a way to keep traffic moving.

Martin November said it is important to get input from police. There needs to be support during the half hour of pick up. There are still issues with drop off and pick up in the neighborhood.

Larry Link said there are issues with the bike lane, drop off zones, and the driveway. All are related and create issues with traffic flow. We have to contemplate these issues,

Jeffrey Roth agreed and is very interested in these issues.

Larry Link asked if Jeffrey Roth, Martin November and Alex Thurston could meet with him to discuss and examine these issues.

Roy Epstein thought this could work.

Martin November said he would be willing to coordinate it.

Patrice Garvin said this group would be a subcommittee and its meetings would have to be posted.

Larry Link reiterated that this Committee needs to integrate its thinking.

Roy Epstein said this Committee needs to start by determining the intentions of the School Dept. for the driveway. He also said that idling is a real problem. The idling law signs are posted at the Chenery. The State Law limits idling to 5 minutes.

Larry Link said that once the Middle School opens it can be designated a school zone.

Roy Epstein updated the Committee on the Concord/Goden traffic signal and the pedestrian locator tone. The locator tone has been replaced with a unit from a different manufacturer last week.

Martin November said residents appreciated the adjustment.

Larry Link asked about the space just before the crosswalk on Concord WB at the crosswalk. Drivers cannot see pedestrians if there is a car parked. The spot should be eliminated so pedestrians in crosswalk are visible.

Patrice Garvin said this would usually go through TAC.

Larry Link and Jeffrey Roth said they would look into it.

IV. Public Comment:

Anne Marie Mahoney, Goden St.: There is progress. Martin November hosted a neighborhood meeting which was a good opportunity for discussion. The widened median feeds into Goden Street. Public access is affected when we turn Concord Ave. into Student Parking. This blocks public parking for the rink, library and track. There is damage to property, noise, cars running over grass as they use neighborhood driveways to turn. There is damage from idling. Dirt on homes and windows.

Erica Wolf, Goden St.: Idling poses safety and traffic issues. I can't get out of my driveway. Drivers beep horns and race to the light. Pick up in the neighborhood needs to be reduced to reduce idling and the flow of cars on the street.

Roy Epstein responded that clearly this is a difficult problem. The pedestrian tunnel at Alexander Ave. would help. It is a future solution.

Martin November asked with respect to the bike lane and the "temporary" parking lot, what is the status?

Roy Epstein responded he didn't know when the bike lane will be brought to the Select Board.

Patrice Garvin said she didn't know when it was on the agenda.

Roy Epstein said there would be an update on the High School finances on 3/21. There is a funding/budget problem. Something will be reduced from the original scope of the project. The priority is what can be cut with the least impact.

Larry Link said nothing will happen until the Middle School is completed. If the parking lot is left, could this decision be reversed at a later date? Is that a reasonable way the Select Board could look at it?

Roy Epstein responded that the Building Committee has control over the project as long as it is under construction. The Building Committee wants to get the building done. This is a budget issue. The Building Committee is forced to consider cutting some work or transfer expense to the town.

Patrice Garvin said she voiced concern given promises made to residents in the neighborhood. There may be an opportunity to use funds. She is concerned because residents were promised some things.

Jeffrey Roth moved the meeting be adjourned.

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:29 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Wybieralla