

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2009

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chairman), Lennon, Albright, Salvucci, Gentile and Mansfield

Absent: Ald. Yates and Lappin

Also present: Ald. Johnson and Linsky

City staff present: Thomas Daley (Commissioner of Public Works), Josh Morse (HVAC Technician, Public Buildings Department), Nick Parnell (Public Buildings Commissioner), Clint Schuckel (Traffic Engineer), and Shawna Sullivan (Committee Clerk)

Public Hearing

#27-09 NATIONAL GRID petitioning for a grant of location to install and maintain 5' ± of 8" gas main in NORWOOD AVENUE from the existing 4" gas main in Norwood Avenue at 108 Norwood Avenue northerly to the existing 8" gas main in Norwood Avenue.[12/22/08 @ 2:00PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 4-0 (Lennon, Mansfield not voting)**

NOTE: Harold Cooper, National Grid Permit Representative, presented the grant of location petition to the Committee. The request is for 5' of 8" gas main to connect an existing 8" gas main to an existing 6" gas main to provide system reinforcement, as the pressure is unstable in the area. The gas mains in the area are now feeding the Cabot Elementary School and this grant of location is the final step for National Grid to convert the school to gas.

Ald. Salvucci asked if the school was able to use gas service without the additional connection. Josh Morse responded that the school could use gas without this connection but the connection will provide insurance against drops in gas pressure. Ald. Salvucci then asked when the conversion would be complete. Mr. Morse explained that the gas lines are installed but the burner is not installed yet. It is Mr. Morse's expectation that the project will be completed within the next month. Commissioner Daley inquired if he should anticipate a request for a street opening in the winter. Mr. Cooper responded that it is his understanding that the City would like this work completed as soon as possible. The work would take a couple of days at most. The Chair suggested an emergency preamble in order to expedite the installation of the connection. Ald. Salvucci moved approval of the item and approval of the emergency preamble. Both motions carried unanimously.

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#34-09 BETH GOLDBAUM, 111 Blake Street, Newton 02458, appointed as a member of the SOLID WASTE COMMISSION for a term of office expiring January 1, 2012. (60-days 04/03/09) [01/21/09 @ 1:09 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 4-0 (Lennon, Mansfield not voting)**

NOTE: Beth Goldbaum joined the committee for discussion of her appointment to the Solid Waste Commission. Dr. Goldbaum developed an interest in the environment and particularly solid waste, working on an environmental committee at Temple Emanuel. She

attended the last few Solid Waste Commission meetings and is familiar with the work of the Commission. Although Dr. Goldbaum does not have expertise in solid waste, she does have a strong science background.

Ald. Albright asked Dr. Goldbaum if she had any opinion regarding whether the City should go out to bid on the trash contract. Dr. Goldbaum responded that she does not have enough information on the topic to give an informed answer. Ald. Schnipper pointed out that the Solid Waste Commission has already made a recommendation concerning whether or not to go out to bid on the contract. Therefore, Dr. Goldbaum will not be involved in that discussion at the Solid Waste Commission. Ald. Albright moved approval of the appointment, which carried unanimously. The Chair thanked Dr. Goldbaum for her willingness to serve on the Solid Waste Commission.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#40-09 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to transfer funds in the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds. Transferring the funds from MWRA assessments to utilities as follows: Sewer Fund transfer \$53,000; Water Fund transfer \$38,000. [01/27/09 @ 6:05 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-0 (Lennon not voting)**

NOTE: Public Works Commissioner Tom Daley presented the item to the Committee. It is a request to transfer funds within the Water and Sewer Enterprise Funds to cover additional costs for fuel. When creating this year's budget, the department did not have the figures for the fuel and diesel contract. The department increased its budget by 16% but that was not enough to cover the fuel costs for the remainder of the year. The proposed transfer is for additional estimated costs associated with fuel for the Utilities Division of the Department of Public Works. Mr. Daley stated that there is good news for the upcoming budget year as the prices for next year are significantly lower. Ald. Albright moved approval of the item, which carried unanimously.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#41-09 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting to appropriate and expend one million dollars (\$1,000,000) from Free Cash for the purpose supplementing the snow and ice budget in the Department of Public Works. [01/27/09 @ 6:05 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 5-0-1 (Lennon abstaining)**

NOTE: The Commissioner of Public Works provided the Committee with information on most recent storm. The Commissioner stated that due to the timing of the storm, the City saved an estimated \$122,000 by not having to call out the private contractors to plow. The storm was very lengthy but did not generate a lot of snow per hour. The Commissioner made the determination that the city forces could keep up with the storm.

Ald. Mansfield stated that his experience with the contractors has not been wonderful. The contractors seem to be doing too much. They have been plowing the street very wide, which means there is more snow on the sidewalks for residents to shovel. Ald. Mansfield also reported that the number of passes the plows are making has increased and the plows are driving the wrong way down the street, which is very dangerous. He felt that perhaps the contractors' plowing routes should be expanded, as they seem to have too much time. Ald. Albright and Johnson concurred with Ald. Mansfield's statements.

The Commissioner responded that the City is paying the contractors by the inch and not by the hour. He is not concerned with the number of passes the plows make, as it increases public safety if the roads are clearer. The Commissioner does encourage the plow drivers to push the snow back as far as possible to create wider streets. Ald. Albright asked if it was possible that the plow routes need to be expanded. The Commissioner will look at that possibility at the end of the season for next year. The Commissioner was concerned to hear that the plows were driving the wrong way down a street and will speak with the contractors. Ald. Gentile does not share the concerns of Ald. Mansfield, Albright, and Johnson. He would prefer the streets to be as wide and as clear as possible.

Committee members asked how much of the requested \$1 million is already spent. The Commissioner estimated that the department spent approximately \$400,000 on the last two storms, which leaves \$600,000 for additional storms. He stated that any unspent money would be returned at the end of the winter.

Ald. Albright questioned whether the City plowed to an excess. The Commissioner has monitored every plowable event and has not seen significant excess. The level of response is typical to other communities. The main roads are plowed until they are down to bare pavement and side streets are not as well plowed. Ald. Schnipper suggested a debriefing by the Commissioner at the end of the snow season. It will give the Commissioner an opportunity to access all of the information and determine if it would be beneficial to change any routes. The Committee and the Commissioner were agreeable to the suggestion. Ald. Salvucci moved approval of the item, which carried unanimously.

REFERRED TO PUBLIC FACILITIES AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

#42-09 HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting to appropriate and expend two hundred twenty five thousand dollars (\$225,000) from Bonded Indebtedness to the Building Department for the purpose of replacing a boiler at Angier School.
[01/27/09 @ 6:04 PM]

ACTION: **APPROVED 6-0**

NOTE: Josh Morse and Commissioner Parnell from the Public Buildings Department presented the request for funds to replace one of the boilers at Angier Elementary School. The Chairman asked if the new boiler could be moved once it was installed, as the Angier School is the first on the list of school buildings to be replaced and it would seem unreasonable to install a boiler in a school that is going to be demolished unless it can be reused at another location. Mr. Morse responded that the boiler could be used in a number of buildings but the best fit would need to be determined.

The current boiler is original to the building, making it over 75 years old, and is cracked in a number of different places. There are two other boilers in the school but one boiler has the same severe leaks and the other is leaking but operational. The second boiler will serve as back up to the new boiler. The life expectancy for the new boiler is approximately 30 to 35 years. Mr. Morse also pointed out that the new burner for the boiler will be a combination oil/gas burner.

Ald. Gentile would like something in writing that the new boiler will work at various locations. He requested that the letter be specific in terms of locations. Commissioner Parnell stated that other boilers have been moved to different locations; therefore, he has no qualms about providing a letter. The Commissioner will provide the letter to the Board before the next scheduled Finance Committee meeting. With that, Ald. Albright moved approval of the item, which carried unanimously.

#224-06(2) ALD. LINSKY, ALBRIGHT & JOHNSON, BAKER & SCHNIPPER requesting further deliberation on the conditions set forth in the Site Plan Approval Board Order relating to the Newton North High School project, considering possible expansion and modification of the conditions.

ACTION: **HELD 6-0**

NOTE: Conditions 4 and 5 of the site plan approval board order for the Newton North High School project call for further study to determine what effect limiting turning movements in and out of the ceremonial entrance and Elm Road would have on traffic circulation on Walnut Street and safety improvements on Walnut Street. The conditions further state that the design team shall also look at providing pedestrian safety improvements and if that study recommends a traffic signal, the City shall consider it. The Chairman does not anticipate a formal position to be taken on the pedestrian and traffic improvements at this meeting. There is a question that Mayor need to docket a separate item for the cost of the light; therefore, this is not a decision point but should be an informative discussion

Clint Schuckel provided a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee, which is attached. The presentation included the traffic and traffic circulation goals for the project. The goals include providing safe and convenient access for pedestrians, bicycles, and buses, as well as dispersing vehicle access points around the site. Mr. Schuckel provided information on the parking demand at the school. There are 400 parking spaces on the Newton North site and there is a current need for 550 parking spaces. Due to this demand there will probably be a need for off-site parking; however, not in front of any residences. Mr. Schuckel reviewed the traffic patterns around the school. The studies show that 30% of the cars coming to Newton North arrive from the south and 70% of the vehicles arrive from the north. There are five access points around the school for cars around the site. Service vehicles will use Elm Road to gain access to the loading dock. It is an operational decision on how the service vehicles access the loading dock from Elm Road. The school buses and special education vans will pick up and drop-off at the theater entrance on Elm Road. Originally the special education vans were to use the ceremonial entrance; however, it was determined that it could be construed as discriminatory to have the special education vans use a different entrance than the school buses. The athletic buses will still use the ceremonial entrance for pick up and drop-off of the athletes. It has not been finalized how the buses will get out of Elm Road onto Walnut Street after drop-off or pick up.

The Traffic Engineer would recommend creating a standard intersection at Hull Street and Walnut Street. The current pedestrian crossing is 90' with an island in the center. The new intersection would be achieved by moving the curb lines and removing the island, creating a 41' pedestrian crossing. The cost for this alteration would be between \$30,000 and \$45,000.

The Traffic Engineer presented the six alternatives provided by Traffic Solutions in conjunction with Mr. Schuckel. The options are for the intersection of Trowbridge Avenue, Walnut Street, and the ceremonial entrance at the new Newton North High School. The alternatives are included in the attached presentation with the pros and cons of each option.

Ald. Gentile was surprised that there was any kind of issue with the buses and vans picking up at different locations. It is unfortunate that they have to use the same entrance. He suggested getting further information on why the change was necessary. Ald. Gentile also asked if there was any discussion regarding a center island at Trowbridge Avenue and Walnut Streets. Mr. Schuckel looked at an island but it would eliminate a left hand turn when exiting and entering Trowbridge Avenue. However, he will look at and sketch out an atypical island that is 8' to 10' wide that may allow the turn. Ald. Albright felt that the neighbors would also be interested in an island at that intersection. Ald. Albright informed the Committee that a letter from the Newton North neighbors was submitted during the meeting. The letter is attached and summarizes their preferences for safety improvements to Walnut Street. Ald. Salvucci pointed out that any island in the center of Walnut Street may impede fire engine access to the school and the nearby residences. Ald. Albright voiced her support of a left turn restriction at the ceremonial entrance. She also felt that a mid-block crossing between Clyde Street and Trowbridge Avenue was the most appropriate location for a pedestrian crossing. Ald. Johnson stated that the further south a pedestrian crossing is located, the less pedestrian traffic it is addressing, as there are a significantly smaller number of the students coming from the south. If the pedestrian crossing is located between Clyde Street and Trowbridge Avenue, it will be much closer to the bus stop. She also felt that it was the intent to minimize the use of the ceremonial entrance for drop-off and pick up. She believes that if a traffic light is added it will draw attention to the ceremonial entrance. Ald. Albright asked if there were plans for a signal at the mid-block crossing. Mr. Schuckel stated that it would be a pedestrian activated warning signal and not a full light. Ald. Albright requested that Mr. Schuckel look at a full pedestrian signal at the mid-block location.

Ald. Gentile pointed out that there is not really any way to know what type of improvements are necessary until the new school opens. He would be in favor of being as restrictive as possible when the school opens and removing restrictions, if they are not needed. Ald. Salvucci asked the Traffic Engineer what alternative he would recommend. Mr. Schuckel felt that it is best to allow access when the school opens and put restrictions in, if they are needed. He does not share the fears of the residents that Trowbridge Avenue will become a cut through to access Newton North High School. A light at the intersection of Trowbridge Avenue, the ceremonial entrance and Walnut Street would be a deterrent because the City can control the length of the signal. The signal could be synchronized to create a substantial wait time for vehicles exiting the ceremonial drive. Ald. Mansfield asked if the light at Cabot Street could be changed to address concerns about back up on Walnut Street, which would not allow buses to exit left onto Walnut Street from Elm Road. Mr. Schuckel will investigate the various possibilities related to the Cabot and Walnut Street intersection. Ald. Lennon believes that the full signal at the ceremonial entrance provides the safest opportunity for vehicles and pedestrians.

The Traffic Engineer will come back to the Committee with costs and sketches for the alternatives and suggestions. The Chair plans on continuing discussion on this item in March. She thought it would be helpful to address the pedestrian crossing issue in time for the 2009/2010 school year. Ald. Salvucci moved hold on the item, which carried unanimously.

#385-07 ALD. SCHNIPPER AND GENTILE updating the Public Facilities Committee on the progress of the Newton North High School Project. [11-21-07 @ 10:23 AM]

ACTION: **HELD 6-0**

NOTE: Ald. Schnipper and Gentile provided the Committee with an update of the Newton North project. Ald. Schnipper presented a drawing of what the proposed bump out of the athletic wing to accommodate the proposed bathrooms would look like. The bathrooms will be located on two floors and will address the need for bathrooms that can be accessed from outside when the building is closed. The bathrooms will also serve the performance gym area within the school. The drawing did not give a clear picture of what the bathrooms or bump out would look like. Ald. Schnipper was disappointed that there were no costs estimates to accompany the drawings. She will request a better depiction of the proposed bathrooms and a cost estimate for the next Committee meeting. Ald. Gentile added that the exterior brickwork was scheduled to begin on February 2, 2009. The item was held for further discussion at the next meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chairman

NNHS Site Plan Approval: Traffic/Parking Conditions

Clint Schuckel

City Traffic Engineer

City of Newton Public Works Department
Engineering Division

Public Facilities Committee

February 4, 2009

Outline

- Review NNHS site access, Elm Rd
- Board Order Condition # 4
 - Walnut St, including Hull St intersection
- Board Order Condition # 5
 - Walnut/Trowbridge/NNHS driveway intersection
- Question/Answer

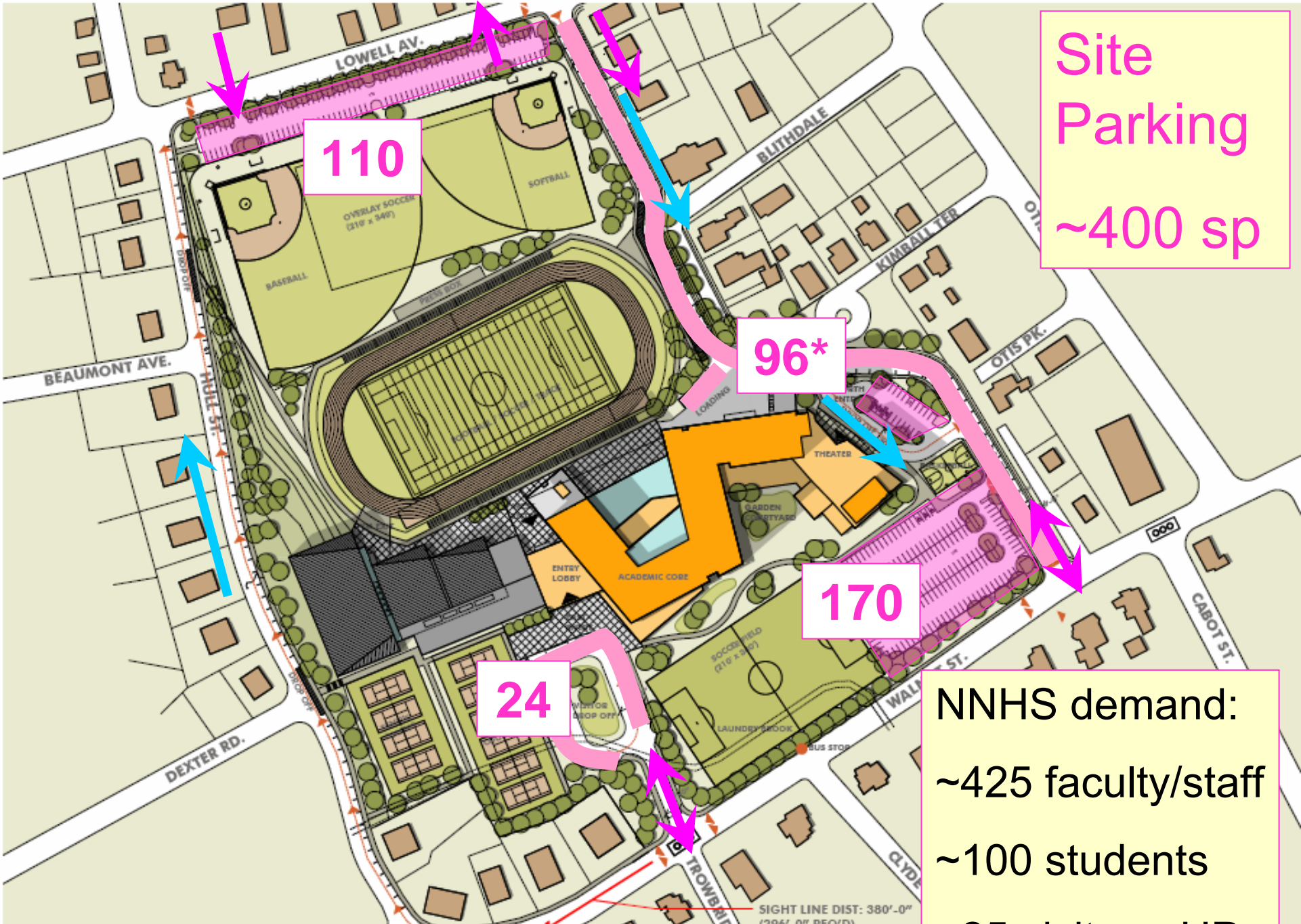
Site Plan Board Order # 224-06

There are 7 traffic/parking-related conditions for a “comparative design”:

- ✓ 3d: Elm Road: \leq 30 feet wide for max. buffers (2/6/08)
- ✓ 3e: Lowell Ave: drop-off area or alt. vehicle entrance, Elm Rd: alt. traffic patterns (2/6/08)
- ✓ 3f: Hull St: create drop-off areas (2007)
- ✓ 3j: Walnut St: create alt. bus drop-off area (2007)
- ☺ **4: Walnut St: safety improvements Mill to Cabot**
- ☺ **5: Walnut St/School Driveway signalization**
- ✓ 7: School Driveway: No added parking spaces (2007)

NNHS Traffic/Circulation Goals

- Provide safe, convenient and preferred access for pedestrians, bicycles, and buses
 - Walnut St crossing for points south & east
 - Facilitate bus egress onto Walnut St
- Disperse vehicle access points and parking around the site
 - Over time, drivers will use the fastest route (they are smarter than traffic engineers)



110

96*

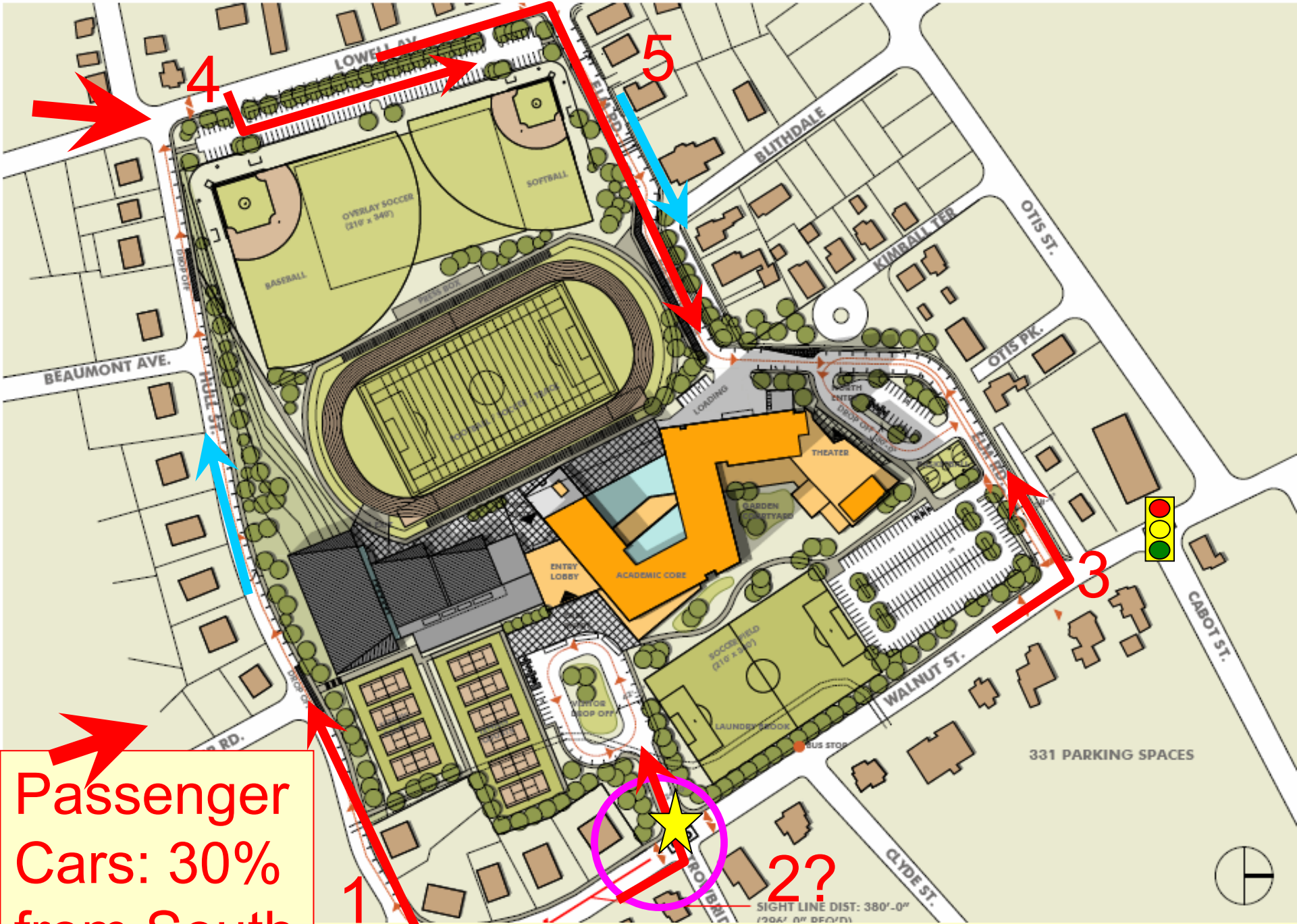
170

24

Site
Parking
~400 sp

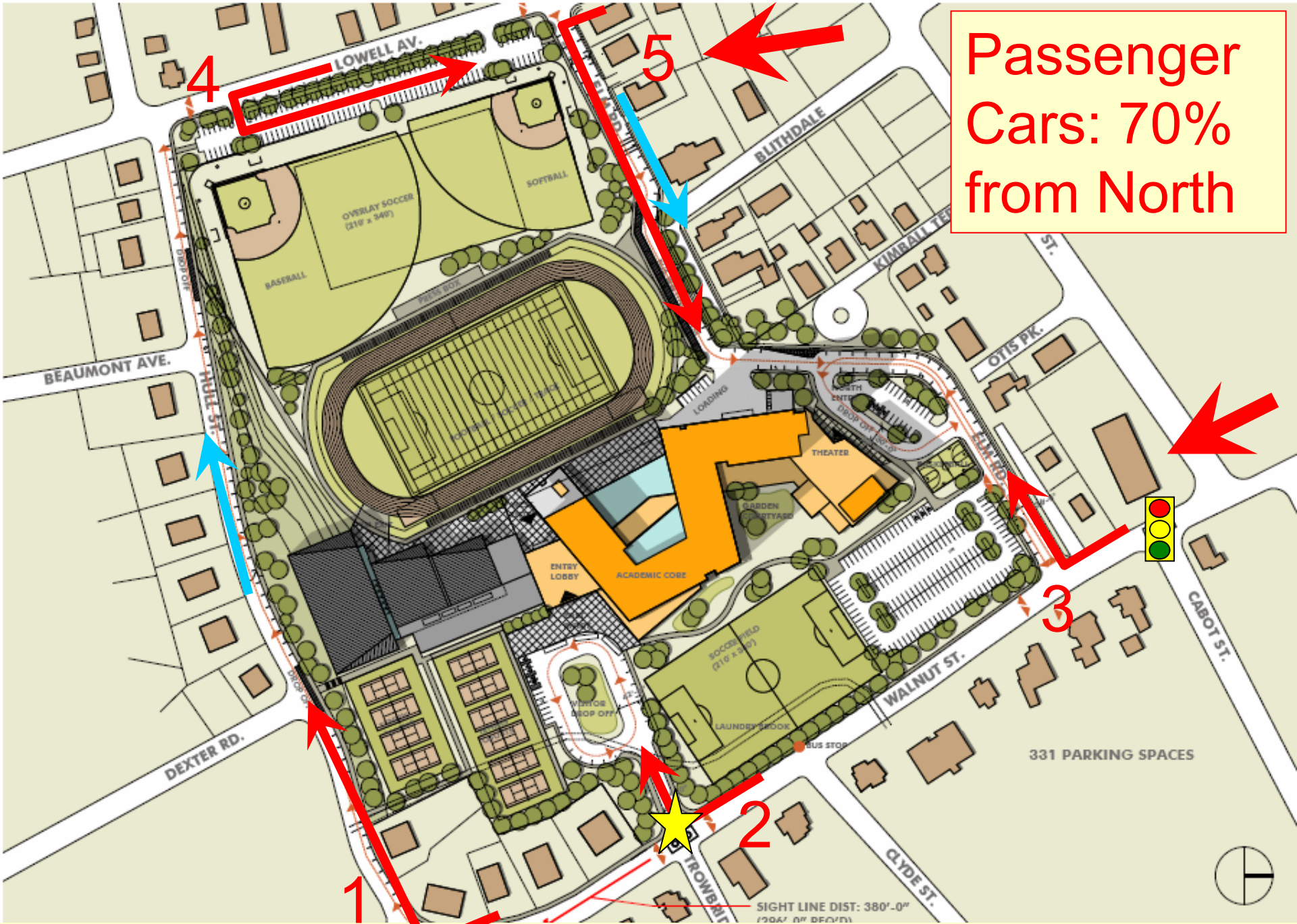
NNHS demand:
~425 faculty/staff
~100 students
~25 visitors, HP

SIGHT LINE DIST: 380'-0"
(294'-0" BFOV)



Passenger Cars: 30% from South

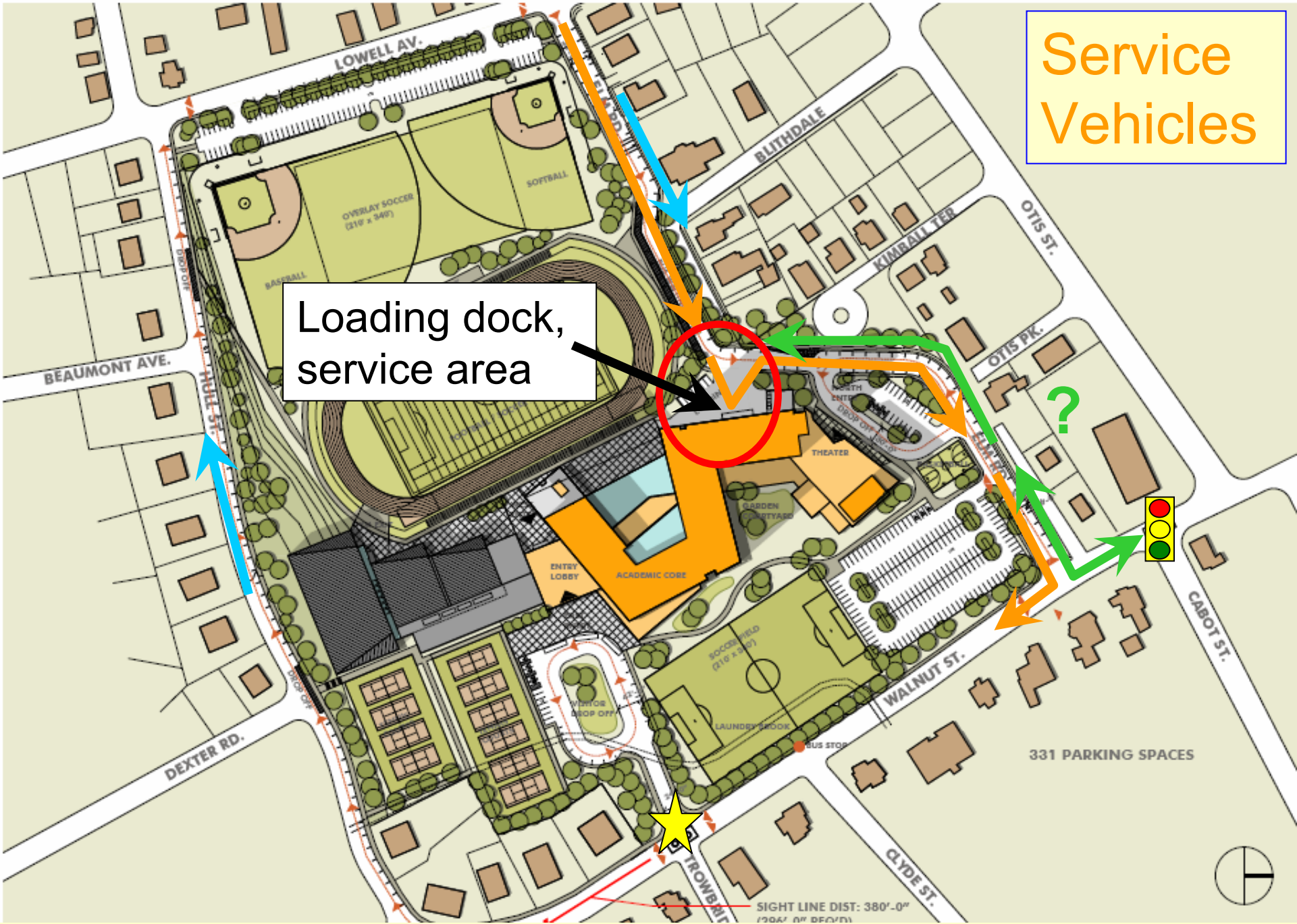
Passenger
Cars: 70%
from North



SIGHT LINE DIST: 380'-0"
(294'-0" BFO/D)

Service Vehicles

Loading dock, service area



SIGHT LINE DIST: 380'-0" (294'-0" BFO/D)

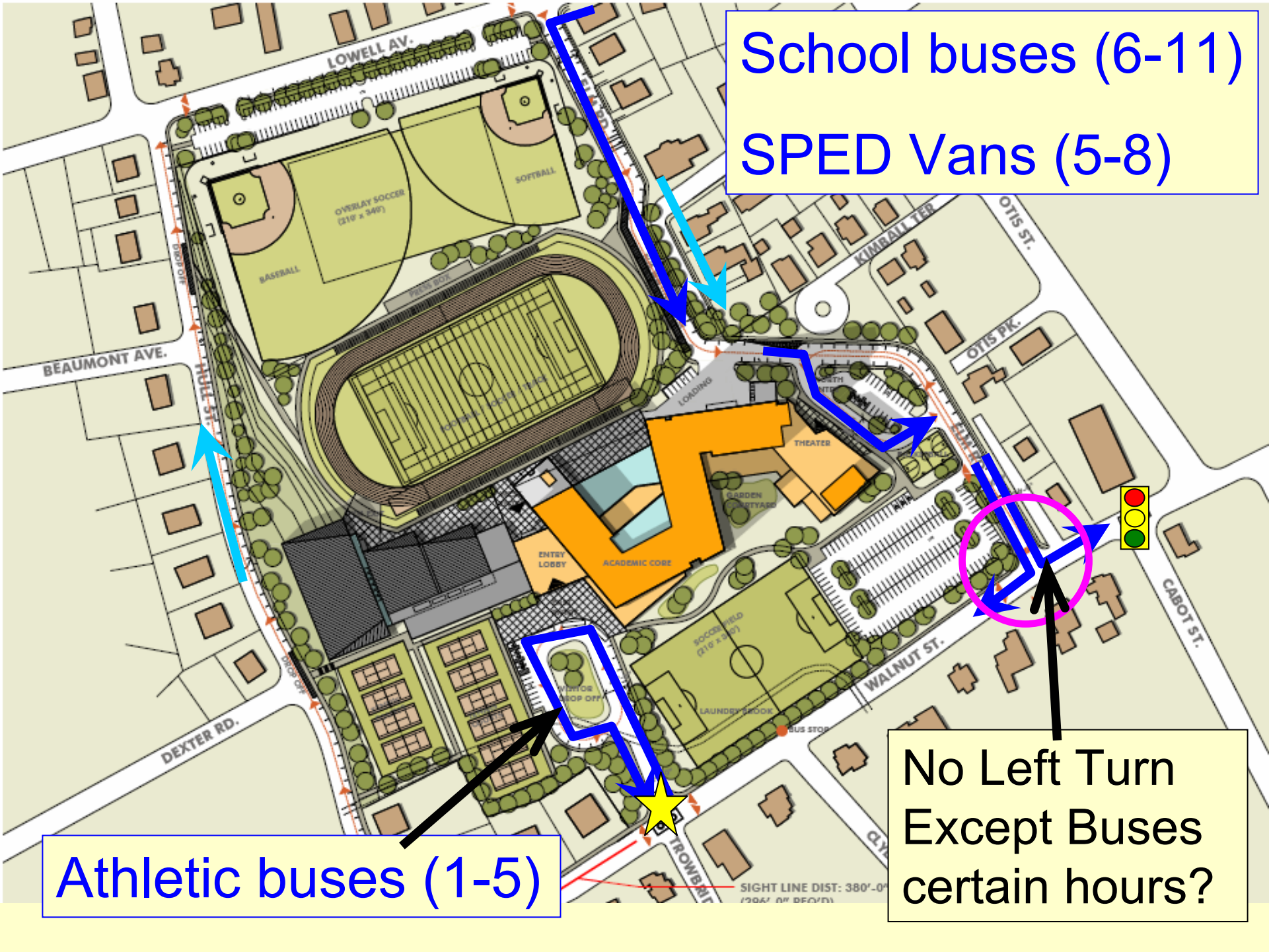
331 PARKING SPACES



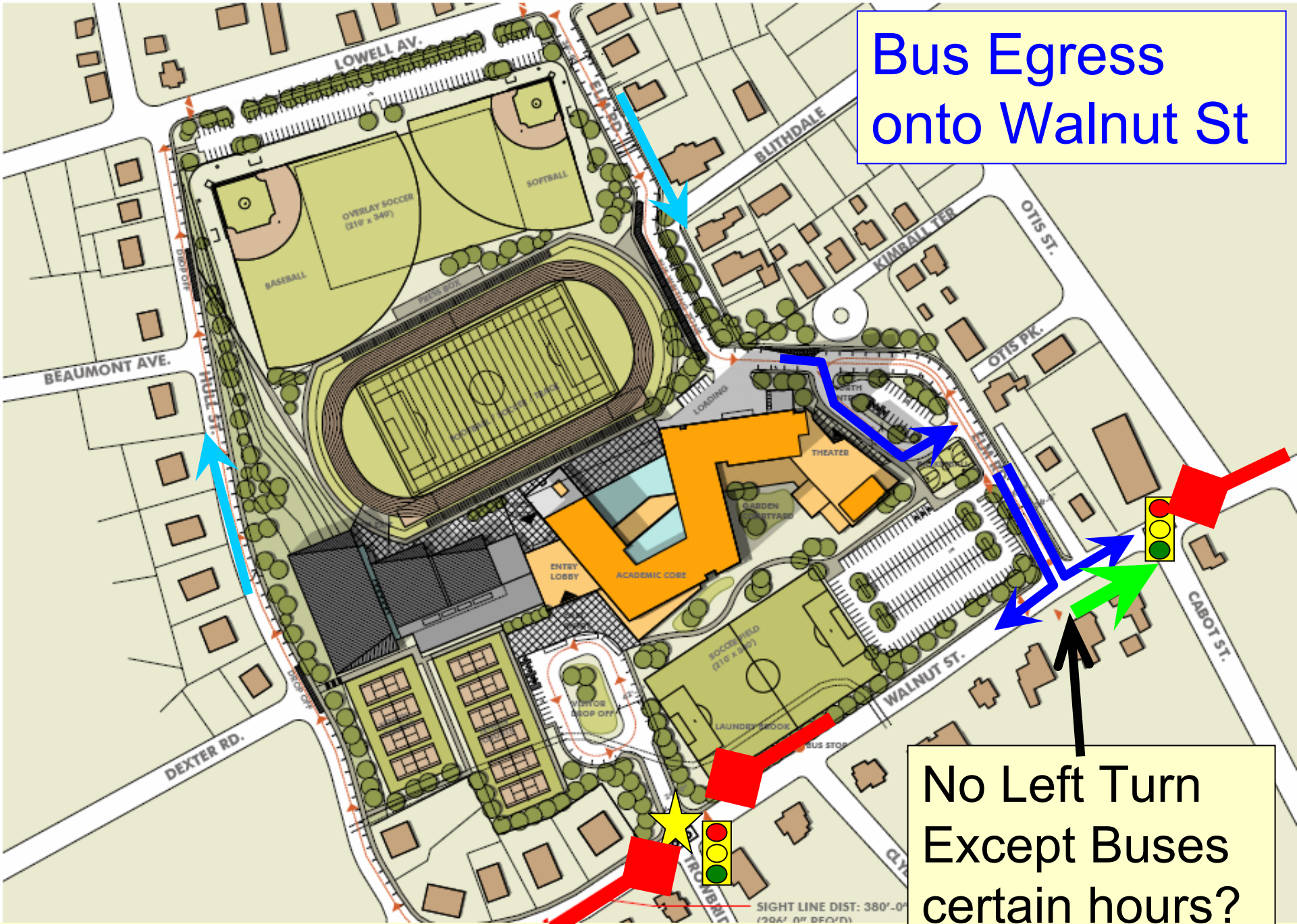
School buses (6-11)
SPED Vans (5-8)

Athletic buses (1-5)

No Left Turn
Except Buses
certain hours?



Bus Egress
onto Walnut St



No Left Turn
Except Buses
certain hours?

Elm Road

- **Public way** between Lowell Ave & Kimball Terrace
 - Traffic Council has jurisdiction over parking, direction of flow
- **School driveway** between Kimball Terrace & Walnut St
 - School Dept. has jurisdiction over parking, direction of flow
- The design of Elm Road accommodates various traffic flow/parking options, as intended
- Elm Road parking & traffic flow remain under study, with some decisions likely deferred until after the new school opens and the old school is torn down

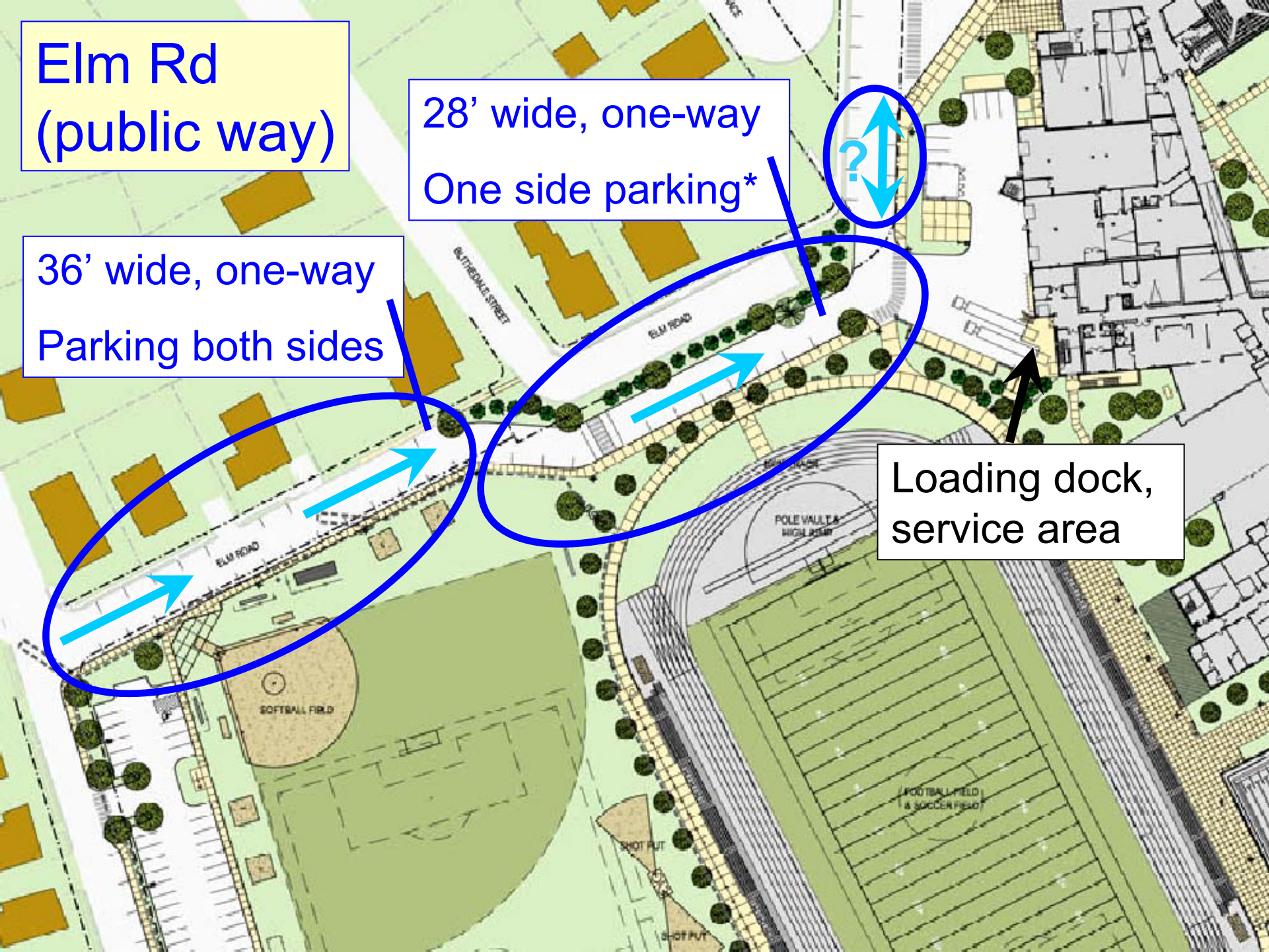
Elm Rd
(public way)

28' wide, one-way
One side parking*

36' wide, one-way
Parking both sides



Loading dock,
service area



Board Order # 224-06, Condition # 4

4. “The Public Works Commissioner shall recommend to the Board of Aldermen possible street improvements to promote safety on [Walnut Street from Mill Street to Cabot Street](#), including at the intersection of [Hull Street and Walnut Street](#). Such street improvements might include, but not be limited to, signage and the narrowing of the intersection at [Hull Street and Walnut Street](#). Such improvements as approved by the City shall be undertaken as soon as possible and in no event later than the Project's opening.”

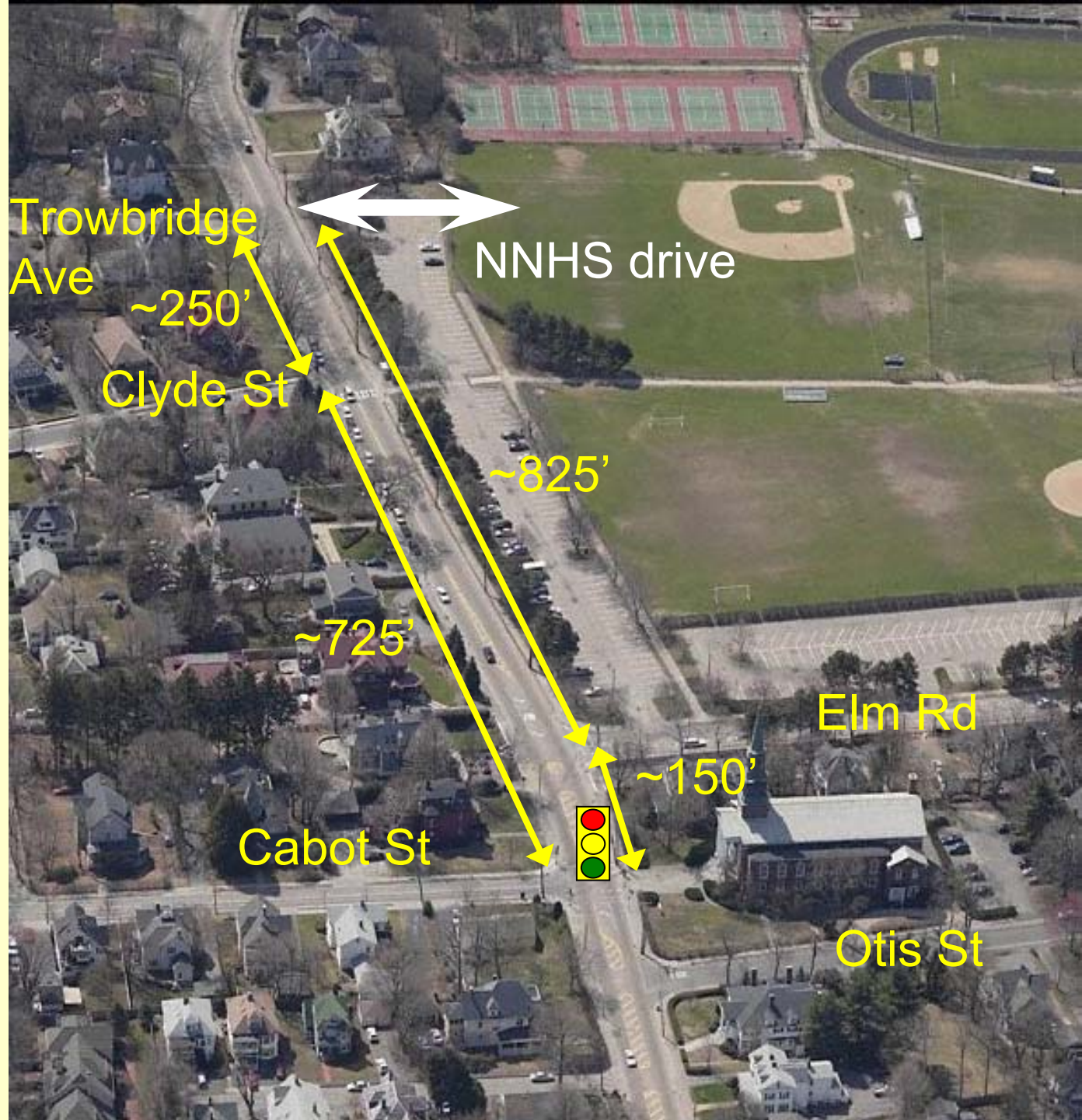
Walnut St near NNHS

- Approximately 15,000 cars per day
 - (vs. ~7,000 per day on Lowell Ave)
- 34' wide +/-
- Speed limit is 25 mph
- Design speed is 40 mph

Walnut
St.
looking
south
from
NNHS



Walnut
St.
looking
north
from
NNHS



Walnut St @ Hull St

Kirkstall

503

Hull St

90 feet

508

515

Walnut St




SEE CORNER AND SURROUNDING AREAS FOR MORE
HULL ST. - WALNUT ST. INT.
 SCALE: 1" = 16'
 DECEMBER 2011



Kirkstall

503

Hull St



~41 feet

508

515

Walnut St




SEE CORNER AND SURROUNDING AREAS FOR MORE
HULL ST. - WALNUT ST. INT.
 SCALE: 1" = 16'
 DECEMBER 2011



Board Order # 224-06, Condition # 5

5. “The Design Team shall study the effect on traffic circulation if the turning movements are limited to a right turn into and out of the driveway to the project entrance on Walnut Street (Alt. 3,6), and shall also study providing a pedestrian crossing north of such driveway.

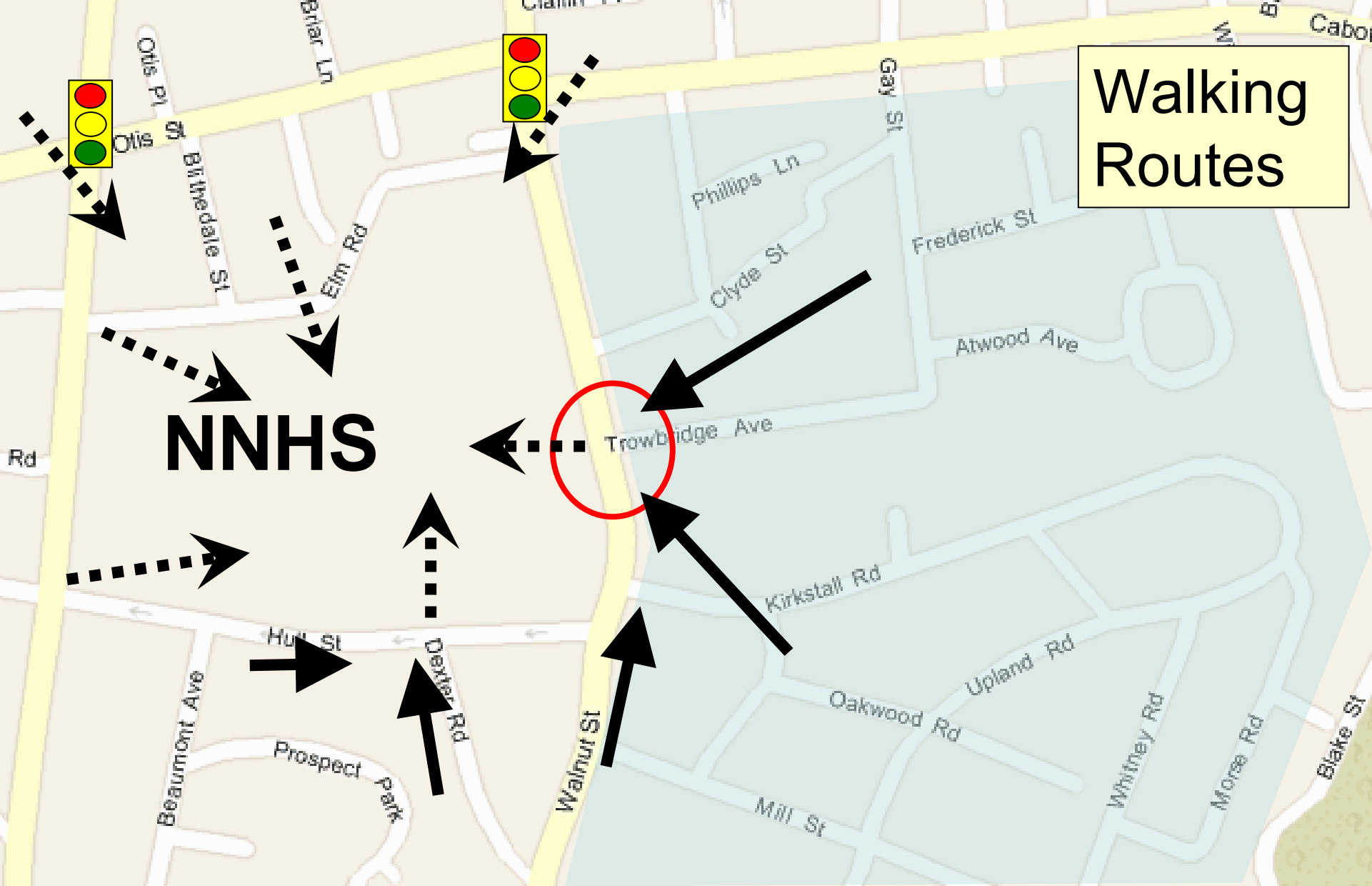
(Alt 1-6)

If the results of the said study so recommend, a traffic signal shall be considered by the City at such driveway. If approved by the Board of Aldermen, such signal shall be operational at the time of the Project’s opening.” (Alt. 2-6)

In other words...

- NNHS site plan Board approval + Jan '07 referendum has already established location of a NNHS driveway across from Trowbridge Ave
- Condition # 5 asks:
 - Should school driveway turns be restricted to right-in and right-out only?
 - Should a pedestrian crossing be provided there?
 - Should there be a traffic signal at, or near the school driveway?
 - If yes, should it operate as a pedestrian crossing only, or for both pedestrians and vehicles?

Walking Routes



A pedestrian crossing is less attractive the further it moves north from Trowbridge Avenue

NNHS Vehicle Trips

- Traffic study estimates 550-600 cars travel in/out of site during peak pick-up/drop-off hour
 - AM: 350 cars (60% in), 250 cars (40% out)
 - PM: 250 cars (40% in), 350 cars (60% out)
- Traffic assumptions
 - 5% increase over 2006
 - Counts from 2006 when NNHS had 2000+ students
- Geographic distribution:
 - 70% from North
 - 30% from South
- Focus on AM peak
 - Coincides with commuter peak
 - Higher peak in cars due to after school activities

NNHS 2008-2009: 1,865 Students

- Walk/bike (?%)
- School bus (13% have bus passes)
 - 18% (235) of 1,304 eligible > 1 mile away
 - Actual ridership is lower
- Carpool (?%)
- Drive alone (?%)
 - Drop-off or park off-site
 - Drop-off or park on-site

Walnut/NN driveway/Trowbridge Ave Alternatives

- Alt 1: No signal, no turn restrictions
- Alt 2: Mid-block pedestrian crossing signal, no turn restrictions
- Alt 3: Mid-block pedestrian crossing signal, w/ delta island
- Alt 4: Full signal, no turn restrictions
- Alt 5: Full signal, w/ no side street thru movement
- Alt 6: Full signal, w/ delta island



Alt 1

Alternative 1: Painted Crosswalk

- Pros
 - Lowest cost
 - Less delay for Walnut Street
- Cons
 - No controlled crossing for pedestrians
 - Crossing location is less attractive for pedestrians
 - Long delays for vehicles to turn left onto Walnut St
 - Does not create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd



Alt 2

Alternative 2: Mid-block Crossing Signal

- Pros
 - Improves pedestrian safety over Alt. 1
 - Helps create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd
 - Lower cost than a full signal
- Cons
 - Crossing location is less attractive for pedestrians
 - Long delays for vehicles to turn left onto Walnut St



Alt 3

Alternative 3: Mid-block Crossing Signal, with Delta Island

- Pros
 - Does not rely solely on enforcement to restrict turns
 - Helps create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd
 - Lower cost than a full signal
- Cons
 - Crossing location is less attractive for pedestrians
 - Long delays for vehicles to turn left onto Walnut St
 - Increased traffic on Hull St (~60 cars during AM peak)
 - Confusing to visitors, buses, etc. arriving via northbound Walnut St



Alt 4

Alternative 4: Full Signal

- Pros
 - Controlled, more convenient crossing location for pedestrians
 - Helps create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd
 - Provides controlled vehicle access onto Walnut St where delays can be managed
- Cons
 - Higher cost
 - Allows direct access from Trowbridge Ave



Alt 5

Alternative 5: Full Signal, with posted restrictions

- Pros
 - Controlled, more convenient crossing location for pedestrians
 - Helps create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd
 - Provides controlled vehicle access onto Walnut St where delays can be managed
- Cons
 - Higher cost
 - Relies on enforcement to discourage access from Trowbridge Ave
 - Increased traffic on Hull St (~60 cars during AM peak)
 - Confusing to visitors, buses, etc. arriving via northbound Walnut St



Alt 6

Alternative 6: Full Signal, with delta island

- Pros
 - Controlled, more convenient crossing location for pedestrians
 - Helps create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd
 - Provides controlled vehicle access onto Walnut St where delays can be managed
 - Does not rely solely on enforcement to restrict turns
- Cons
 - Higher cost
 - Increased traffic on Hull St (~60 cars during AM peak)
 - Confusing to visitors arriving via northbound Walnut St

Midblock Crossing Alternatives (1,2,3)

- Pros
 - Less cost than a full signal
 - Provides signalized pedestrian crossing for Walnut St (2,3)
 - Helps create gaps in Walnut St traffic for Elm Rd
- Cons
 - Location ~65 feet north of driveway less attractive for pedestrians to use
 - Long delays for vehicles to turn left on Walnut St

Right In/Right Out Alternatives (3,6)

- Pros
 - Does not rely solely on enforcement to restrict turns
 - Less delay for cars to enter/leave school driveway
 - Discourages use of Trowbridge to access school
- Cons
 - Long delays for vehicles to turn left onto Walnut St
 - Shift of 60 cars during AM drop-off to Hull St, increased vehicle miles of travel
 - Does not allow left-turns in or out of the site, may complicate “wayfinding” for those unfamiliar with area

Full Signal Alternatives (4,5,6)

- Pros
 - Provides best location for pedestrian crossing
 - Provides controlled vehicle access onto Walnut St where delays can be managed
- Cons
 - Higher cost
 - Without island or new restrictions, provides direct access from Trowbridge Ave to school driveway



Letter to the Members of the Newton Board of Aldermen
Re: Traffic Control at Trowbridge Ave and Walnut St.

On Sunday, February 1, 2009, more than 20 residents of Trowbridge Ave and Walnut St. met to discuss the six options which had been prepared for the city by Traffic Solutions. The goal was to share with each other and the Ward 2 Aldermen our priorities and concerns regarding the options, and to explore whether there was a consensus among the residents. The ideas expressed at this meeting are summarized below.

The priorities of the group were 1) safety, with regard to both pedestrian and automobile traffic, 2) avoiding the use of Trowbridge as an extension to the Ceremonial Drive, 3) discouraging the use of Trowbridge as a primary drop-off location, and 4) the impact on residents' ability to access Walnut St. Due to the small size of Trowbridge, items 2 and 3 have both safety and quality-of-life aspects.

The six options are different assortments of three features. 1) traffic signal, either full, pedestrian, or none; 2) left turn lanes; 3) through-traffic restrictions from Trowbridge to the Ceremonial Drive. We discussed how these features might affect our priorities.

There was consensus that the full traffic light would negatively impact all of the priorities. Although it would facilitate Trowbridge residents' entry to Walnut, it would cripple the access to Walnut for residents south of Trowbridge, including Walnut St and Kirkstall. Further, the light would result in encouraging use of Trowbridge as both a drop-off location, and an extension of the Ceremonial Drive. Additionally, because the light would be green to Walnut traffic most of the time, there was concern that it would actually increase the danger due to excess speed coming out of the S-Curve on Walnut. Drivers, coming upon a green light, tend to accelerate in order to avoid being caught by the light changing. The Newton police have cited excess speed as a major safety problem at this location.

The design committees have consistently stressed the importance of distributing drop-off activity around the periphery of the site. The traffic light, combined with left-turn lanes, provides a clear indication that this is the designated entrance to the school. This is counter to the design goal, and would have significant negative impact both to the neighborhood, and to the efficiency of Walnut St. as one of the few north-south corridors in the city.

The traffic engineer has previously given expectations that the light would result in backup of traffic for 600 feet, extending almost back to Mill St. It was felt that left turn access could also result in significant backup during rush hour. Because of the limited visibility coming out of the S-Curve, there was significant concern that this would increase the likelihood of rear-end collisions, particularly with the number of inexperienced drivers coming to the school.

Due to the excess speed of Walnut St. traffic, and limited visibility coming out of the S-curve, it was felt that the location of a cross walk mid-block would provide additional safety for students and others crossing Walnut St. A pedestrian light would have added safety benefits for pedestrians, although it would have the negative result of increasing use of Trowbridge as a drop-off location.

There was unanimous agreement that providing a physical barrier to through traffic from the Ceremonial Drive to Trowbridge was of critical importance. At other meetings, both the police and north-side residents have stated that signage alone has proven insufficient. Note that the streets on the north side of the site were isolated from Elm Road for this purpose. With the drive angled intentionally to meet Walnut at Trowbridge, the islands in alternatives 3 and 6 are the only options shown that meet this criterion. The enforced right turn only access would help the smooth flow of traffic along Walnut St. during rush hour, although it is probably not needed at other times of day.

At the conclusion of the meeting, there was total consensus that of the six options presented, Alternative 3 was the one which most effectively meets the safety and other concerns of the residents on this side of the site. We strongly encourage the Board of Aldermen to consider these issues. If any of the Board members would be interested in hearing more detail on how we reached this consensus, we would appreciate the opportunity of meeting with you.

Thank you for your consideration,

(Signatories on following pages)