

CITY OF NEWTON
BOARD OF ALDERMEN
TRAFFIC COUNCIL REPORT

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2009

Present: Victoria Danberg (Alderman), Jim Danila (Transportation Engineer), Jerome Grafe (Resident Member), David Koses (Transportation Planner), Jim Norcross (Police)

Also Present: Ald. Albright, Johnson, Linsky, Schnipper.

Others Present: Danielle Delaney (Clerk), Captain Mintz (Police), and Clint Schuckel (Associate City Engineer).

TC43-09 ALD. SCHNIPPER requesting the installation of a full traffic signal at the intersection of Walnut Street and Trowbridge Avenue before the opening of the new Newton North High School.

ACTION: Approve (3-2, Danberg, Grafe). This decision is subject to appeal through the end of the business day, November 25, 2009.

TC45-09 ALD. ALBRIGHT, JOHNSON AND LINSKY requesting a) to create a mid-block pedestrian activated crossing signal (between Trowbridge Avenue and Clyde Street); 2) to create a delta island at the opening of the NNHS ceremonial drive; and 3) To place turn restrictions at the ceremonial entrance; right turn in and out only.

ACTION: Denial (3-2, Danberg, Grafe). This decision is subject to appeal through the end of the business day, November 25, 2009.

NOTE: These two items were discussed together. Ald. Schnipper said that when the site plan was first created, one of the conditions was to examine traffic flow around the building and whether or not a traffic signal should be installed at the ceremonial entrance, located at the intersection of Walnut Street and Trowbridge Avenue. The DPW Engineering Division and the NNHS Design Team traffic/parking consultants have recommended the installation of a full traffic signal at the intersection since the site plan was approved by voter referendum in early 2007. The purpose of the signal is to allow for a pedestrian crossing, control traffic on Walnut Street, provide gaps in traffic, and make it easier for residents of Trowbridge to turn onto Walnut Street. This item received the support of the Public Facilities Committee.

Clint Schuckel gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation. The school is oriented with the theatre along the northern portion of the building, an academic area in the middle of the building, and the athletic area along the southern portion of the building closest to Hull Street. Elm Road is proposed to be a one-way street eastbound between Lowell Avenue and the loading dock, and a two-way street further east to Walnut Street. It is anticipated that service vehicles will use Elm Road to enter the loading area as well as to egress. The bus plan indicates that buses and special education vans will be dropping-off and picking-up students via Elm Road. The buses will exit Elm Road onto Walnut Street. It is also anticipated that service vehicles will use Elm Road to enter the loading dock and also to egress. A concern is that cars exiting turning left out of Elm

Road onto Walnut Street are very close to the signal at Walnut and Cabot Streets. It is possible that a road sensor could create a gap in northbound Walnut Street traffic to allow cars and buses to exit Elm Road. There will be more work on this issue in the future.

The ceremonial entrance opposite Trowbridge will likely be used by vehicles related to the Plowshares Program, visitors that come to the school for appointments, parents picking up students after practices, and athletic buses. Athletic buses will bring students from other schools to and from Newton North, and take Newton North students to and from away games.

Walnut Street is 34 feet wide and has a volume of approximately 15,000 cars per average weekday. Traffic studies show that 30% of cars are coming from the south. Mr. Schuckel noted that the usage of the Lowell Avenue parking lot for pick-up and drop-off may not be very high as experience indicates that some parents don't drop off their children that far away from the school.

Mr. Schuckel noted that approximately ten alternatives have been examined for the intersection of Walnut and the ceremonial entrance. One of the alternatives is the installation of a full traffic signal at the intersection of Walnut Street and Trowbridge Avenue; another is the mid-block pedestrian activated crossing signal between Trowbridge Avenue and Clyde Street. Also examined were advantages and disadvantages of an island at the opening of the ceremonial drive; and potential turn restrictions. Mr. Schuckel noted that when the Board approved this site plan, everything was done to narrow the driveway entrance as much as possible. It is 24 feet wide and the corners were kept as narrow as possible. The entrance is too small to create a raised island without widening the approach near Walnut Street. An option is a colored or textured island flush with the street.

The mid-block signal would not have control over the cars coming in and out of the driveway or in and out of Trowbridge. The Fire Department's concern regarding a raised island is that fire engine access from the south could be impacted when coming into the school. The rationale for the full signal is that it provides a pedestrian crossing at a more desirable location, which is closer to Trowbridge and provides controlled access to Walnut Street from Trowbridge, and stops traffic on Walnut Street. In Mr. Schuckel's view it does have the ability to discourage use of the ceremonial driveway because the traffic signal can be programmed to favor Walnut Street. Motorists would be forced to wait before exiting the site.

Mr. William Scully spoke in support of some neighborhood residents¹. Mr. Scully said that many of his suggestions have gone unheeded. He felt other options afforded better circulation that took into account the importance of traffic flow on Walnut Street. He felt that the driveway has been located at a bad spot from a safety point of view.

Nearly all residents in attendance (about 20) agreed that a pedestrian crossing light at mid-block would be preferable because the further north the crosswalk is located from the s-curve, the safer pedestrians would be when crossing Walnut Street, and that a signal closer to the s-curve puts students at greater risk from the occasional speeding vehicle. Some residents indicated their belief that the signal has an "energy of its own", and has moved forward whether or not it is the best solution. Residents note that the Engineering Division continues to recommend a full signal, despite the fact that only the school crossing warrant is likely to be met. Some residents of Trowbridge are highly concerned that a signal at the end of their street would encourage

¹ Mr. Scully is a professional traffic engineer. There was no indication at the meeting who Mr. Scully works for, or whether he was acting in the capacity of a paid consultant.

additional traffic on their street, as motorists seek a shortcut to Walnut and other streets. Immediate abutters are concerned that a full traffic signal will encourage more use of the ceremonial drive than would otherwise be the case.

Ald. Schnipper said that ambulances would often need to come to the building and asking, at this stage of the game, for a raised triangle at the ceremonial driveway is flabbergasting. It had been made clear that the intent is to limit the width of the entrance and to limit the amount of parking in the turnaround. She asked Traffic Council not to approve a raised triangle, as it would require a change in the curb line so to allow emergency vehicles to access the school. A change in the curb line may require a reopening the whole school site plan.

Jerome Grafe noted that he did not see Trowbridge as an attractive cut through at the outset, but does not rule the possibility at a later date.

Sgt. Norcross said that a big component that needs to be considered is that the School Department has to become extremely active in educating the incoming students and parents regarding where they should park, pick-up and drop-off, including informative mailings. Sgt. Norcross also noted that if a traffic signal is installed, it would be an on-demand signal. He also stressed that the traffic signal would give school buses an opportunity to exit onto Walnut Street. Finally, Sgt. Norcross stressed that having a traffic management program in place before the school opening is of the utmost importance.

Captain Mintz said that he has looked at accident statistics on Walnut Street and did not find reports of any major accidents along this section of Walnut Street. It was noted, however, that some cars were clocked at least 50 mph on Walnut Street. Last year at Trowbridge and Walnut there were zero accidents. Hull and Walnut had one accident, Walnut and Cabot one, and Clyde Street had two.

Mr. Koses said that without a signal at this entrance, all vehicles would be forced to drive all the around the school, and that would be a significant negative impact to other streets, such as Hull Street. Hull Street is already seriously impacted by High School-related parking and traffic. By restricting turning movements into and out of the ceremonial entrance, more vehicles would be sent onto Hull Street and other streets around the school, creating more air pollution, congestion, and conflict points with pedestrians. Mr. Koses raised the issue of the impact of the proposed signal to very close neighbors, and whether it would be safe for pedestrians to cross Walnut Street at the location of the proposed signal. Mr. Danila said based on guidelines, a traffic signal at this location would be safe.

Ald. Johnson felt the biggest problem is pedestrian safety, and was concerned that the proposed signal is located too close to the s-curve. Ald. Albright said that her research has shown that lights that are green all the time can be dangerous, as motorists do not expect them to turn red. Mr. Schuckel responded that a mid-block signal would only turn red if a pedestrian pushed the button, but a full signal at Trowbridge would turn red more frequently since pedestrians as well as vehicles would trigger the green light to turn red.

Mr. Schuckel said he has to render a judgment on what he sees as the facts. If some action is not taken soon, there will be no chance for anything to be installed before school begins in September 2010 because there would not be enough time for signal design, contracting, and installation. Mr. Schuckel recommended that the Traffic Council and the Board of Aldermen make a decision soon

Jerome Grafe said he supports pedestrian safety over vehicular convenience and is troubled by the handling of the warrants and other inconsistencies. He feels that pedestrians will cross at desired points and not assigned points. He would like to see conduit laid and the necessary utility work completed so as to not preclude an alternative option; full signal or otherwise. He would only support pedestrian crossing mid-block if it were controlled.

Alderman Danberg made a motion to approve TC45-09, which would create a mid-block pedestrian activated crossing signal between Trowbridge Avenue and Clyde Street, to create a delta island at the opening of the NNHS ceremonial drive, to place turn restrictions at the ceremonial entrance, and to allow conduit to be installed between the mid-block signal and Trowbridge Avenue, to permit easier installation of a full signal should it be subsequently be needed. The motion failed to carry with three Traffic Council members voting against (Koses, Norcross, and Schuckel). Jim Danila made a motion to approve TC43-09, which would install a full traffic signal at the intersection of Walnut Street and Trowbridge Avenue before the opening of the new Newton North High School. The motion was approved with two against (Danberg, Grafe). Mr. Koses noted that these decisions are eligible to be appealed within 20 days, by the end of the business day on Wednesday November 25, 2009. If appealed, an Aldermanic Committee of the Board of Aldermen would hear the items.

Respectfully submitted,

David Koses, Traffic Council Chair