

CITY OF NEWTON

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

TRAFFIC COUNCIL REPORT

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2006

Present: Jay Harney (Board Representative), Candace Havens (Chair), David Koses (Planning), Rosalie Myers (Clerk), Sgt. Norcross (Police), Clint Schuckel (Traffic Engineer)
Aldermen present: Pres. Baker, Lennon, Sangiolo, Vance
Others Present: School Safety Officer, Dawn Hough

#HP-9 TRANSPORTATION PLANNER requesting relocation of handicapped parking space recently approved in West Newton Square from north side of Washington

ACTION: **APPROVED (5-0)**

NOTE: David Koses said the relocation of a handicap parking space to the south side of Washington Street will offer better handicap access to businesses in West Newton; at the present time, there are two handicap parking spaces on the north side and none on the south side. Clint Schuckel noted that the signing for the handicap space nearest the courthouse was removed during construction in the street. All agreed that that a space on each side of the street would balance the needs of more users in the square and voted unanimously to approve relocation.

#146-05(2) TRAFFIC CHAIR CANDACE HAVENS & ALD. VANCE on behalf of the Bigelow Traffic Safety Committee requesting a review of the Park Street intersections at Cotton, Sargent, Franklin, and Church Streets as possible site for additional stop signs, crosswalks, and sidewalks to make the Park Street corridor a safer route for Bigelow School students. (Wards 1 and 7)

ACTION: **NAN (4-0, Schuckel absent)**

NOTE: Candace Havens noted that the Traffic Council discussed neighborhood concerns on October 20, 2005 and no formal action was requested or taken. Since then, several specific proposals have been submitted and are included in this agenda. She asked that the Traffic Council take formal action on this item. The Council voted (4-0, Schuckel absent) to recommend no action on this item.

#215-05 CANDACE HAVENS (Traffic Council Chair) & ALD. VANCE AND BAKER requesting 60-day trial of the following:

1. No parking/tow zone all days on west side of Park Street between Arlington and Vernon Streets
2. Ten-minute loading zone on east side of Park Street between Arlington and Vernon for an hour around drop-off and pick-up times.

3. Elimination of 7-9am restriction on Arlington Street between Park Street and 135 Arlington Street. (Ward 1)

ACTION: **APPROVE AS AMENDED (5-0)**

NOTE:

Candace Havens said the changes proposed in this trial were intended to improve circulation and parking around Bigelow Middle School and took place during January and February 2006. Bigelow Principal, Todd Harrison said that the tow zone has effectively discouraged drivers from dropping off their kids on the westerly side of the street and that traffic moves smoothly along the “Live Parking” zone at drop-off and pick-up. He also felt that the on-street parking that is now available to teachers has helped them considerably and that he has been monitoring both frontages to make sure his staff and parents are properly parked. Overall, he felt the trial was a success.

Maaiké Hoving, 135 Arlington Street, felt that parking on Arlington Street was worse for the residents and backs up past the school in front of residences. She said sometimes people park in front of Burr Park, blocking the only ramp to the park.

Mark Greenberg, 121 Arlington Street said some commuters wait until 9 am and park in front of their houses. He felt there needed to be some delineation as to where the longer term parking is allowed.

Colleen Conboy, 129 Arlington Street said that since the trial, more cars are parking in front of houses, and added that cars speeding are a problem. She requested better enforcement.

David Koses disagreed with the practice of restricting parking for commuters on residential streets and felt some should be allowed. With good public transportation in the area, he is concerned that limiting commuter parking will cause a reduction in local transit services.

Ald. Lennon concurred that there is a need for delineation of the two parking restrictions on Arlington Street and suggested a crosswalk be installed to demark the change and also to guide students in one path across the street. He noted that there is a need for parking along the park for sports activities at various times and wondered whether a 3-hour parking zone would address neighborhood concerns as well as provide some limited parking during special events. Ald. Baker concurred with the intent of a 3-hour restriction.

Clint Schuckel pointed out that crosswalks currently are installed at the discretion of the Public Works Department. Crosswalk guidelines, which are under review, require ramps and sidewalks on either side of the street. Since there is no ramp on the Bigelow side of the street, a curb cut would need to be installed. He also noted that there are restrictions on Arlington Street between Waverly and Park

Street from 7-9 am and 3-6 pm. He felt the section between the steps to Burr Park and Park Street could hold 12-15 spaces. He observed 12 spaces taken and 8 had Bigelow stickers and did not object to a non-resident cars parked in the residential section of Arlington Street.

After lengthy discussion, the Traffic Council voted to recommend the following actions to address traffic and circulation issues in this area:

Park Street: between Arlington and Vernon Streets:

- Approve tow zone on the westerly side and “Live Parking” on the easterly side north of curb cuts from 8-9 am and 1:30-3:30 pm on school days, excepting election days (5-0).

Arlington Street:

- Rescind existing 3-6 pm restriction on the south side between Park Street and Waverley Avenue (5-0).
- Rescind 7-9 am restriction and approve 4:30-6:30 pm restriction between Park Street and 135 Arlington Street on the south side on weekdays; add “No Parking” zone all days in front of steps to Burr Park (5-0).

NOTE: The 7-9 am restriction will remain on Arlington Street between Waverley Avenue and the proposed “No Parking” zone in front of the Burr Park steps; the two sets of restrictions on Arlington Street will be separated by the “No Parking” zone.

A motion to approve a 30-day trial of 3-hour parking zone between the entrance to Burr Park and Waverley Avenue failed (2-3, Schuckel, Koses, Norcross opposed).

#380-05 CANDACE HAVENS, PRESIDENT BAKER, ALD. VANCE, on behalf of the Bigelow Traffic Safety Committee request consideration of a 4-way stop at Church and Park Streets. (Wards 1,7)

ACTION: **APPROVE AS AMENDED(3-2)**

NOTE: Candace Havens said this proposal is one of a series of proposals aimed at making Park Street a safer walking corridor for children. Since the previous review, a crosswalk was installed at this intersection. In response to a question that arose during previous discussion, she noted that the speed limit on Church Street from Waverley Avenue to Park Street is 20 mph and from around Park Street to Oakland Street, it is 25 mph.

Clint Schuckel said the traffic is relatively even in all directions, but the volumes do not meet state warrants; there were about 200-250 cars per hour on Church Street and 160-170 cars traveling on Park Street from 8-9 am. He cited 21 pedestrians between 8 and 9 am during the study and 2 crashes in the past 2 years; one was with a parked car. He noted that a stop sign is not needed on one leg of the intersection, since it is a one-way street moving away from the intersection. He did not support adding stops signs in this intersection.

Resident Ivan Samuels, 169 Park Street also opposed adding 2 stop signs, but thought one more stop sign on Church heading west would improve overall safety in the intersection, since it would allow cars heading north on Park Street to see cars traveling west on Church Street from Waverley Avenue. He also thought it would help to have a line in the road to delineate where people can drive on the alongside parked cars between Park and Eldredge Streets.

Bill Schwartz, 102 Vernon Street agreed that the angle of the streets makes visibility difficult at the intersection and that a stop sign westbound on Church Street would be beneficial. He didn't feel there was a lot of foot traffic through Kenrick Park, aside from school children.

Terry Yoffie, 363 Waverley Street said there is driver confusion at this intersection which can be a danger to pedestrians, particularly kids. She felt stop signs would clarify who has the right-of-way.

Pres. Baker stated that in an effort to preserve pedestrian safety the whole corridor should be considered, with priority to pedestrian traffic. He also saw merit in adding stop signs, given the street geometry and volume of pedestrians. He thought road redesign might be the best solution, but also suggested consideration of a stop line to reinforce the existing stop sign on Park Street.

Ald. Vance was not concerned that adding stop signs at Church Street would shift a significant amount of the traffic to Franklin Street because he felt that Church Street is a more logical connection to the destinations where people want to go and felt it could be considered independently.

Richard Belkin, 149 Park Street pointed out the streets do not line up and are hard to cross. He added that the path through Kenrick Park needs plowing in the winter to make it more usable.

Sgt. Norcross expressed concern that the decisions of the Traffic Council be guided by standards, such as those established by the State warrants for stop signs. Police records show 2 accidents in 2 years, which are insufficient to warrant stop signs and he did not support adding any at this intersection.

David Koses and Candace Havens supported the addition of stop signs at this intersection due to the volume of pedestrians, the evenness of the volumes on each of the streets, the proximity to schools, and existence of a crosswalk. Chair Havens, also felt the changes in grades and curves in the road give further justification for the need for stop signs to clarify movements.

Ald. Harney supported adding safe crossing for children and felt some action needs to be taken, whether a 2-way or 3-way stop, and preferred a trial. Clint

Schuckel expressed concern about having a trial because it causes additional driver confusion when the signs change and could result in accidents.

A motion to add 2 stop signs failed (2-3, Harney, Schuckel, Norcross opposed).
A motion for a trial for stop signs failed (2-3, Havens, Schuckel, Norcross opposed).

After brief discussion, the first motion was reconsidered and the Traffic Council voted to recommend approval of 2 stop signs on Church Street at this intersection (3-2, Schuckel, Norcross opposed).

#381-05 CANDACE HAVENS, PRESIDENT BAKER, ALD. VANCE on behalf of Bigelow Traffic Safety Committee request consideration of stop signs (crosswalk(s)) at intersections at Park and Sargent Streets. (Wards 1,7)

ACTION: **NAN (4-1, Harney opposed)**

RECOMMEND COMPLETION OF SIDEWALKS ON EASTERLY SIDE OF SARGENT STREET BETWEEN PARK AVE AND PARK STREET

NOTE: Candace Havens described the intersection as a very difficult one in which Sargent Street doglegs around the intersections with Park Street and Park Avenue. The sidewalks are incomplete on the easterly side of a curve in the road which forces kids to cross the street where there is no safe crossing. She referenced a letter from Lori Yarvis and Ty Burr, 114 Sargent Street describing the dangers of this intersection and urging the Traffic Council to have the hedges trim where they encroach on sidewalks and to add stop signs and crosswalks while completion of sidewalks is sought.

Clint Schuckel said that the Commissioner of Public Works is investigating a new proposal for betterments that would have the city pay 100% of the sidewalk installation costs and the property owners would pay for 100% of curbs installations instead of sharing the total cost 50/50. This would foster the timely completion of sidewalks throughout town.

Pres. Baker noted that sidewalks are in the city's right of way and asks that the Traffic Council alert Public Safety Committee about such issues.

Terry Yoffie said that crossing at this intersection is the biggest problem for school children. She stressed the need for a solution that reduces confusion and improves safety as children run across the street where there are no sidewalks.

Officer Hough noted that crosswalks don't assure safety. They sometimes give people a sense that cars will stop when they don't always do so. She did not support installing crosswalks or signs at this intersection.

Ald. Lennon suggested completing the sidewalks and teaching children to remain on one side of the street until they reach an existing stop sign or intersection where it is safe to cross.

Roxanne Mayer, 86 Sargent owns a home without a sidewalk on the east side at the curve. She is unwilling to pay for installation of a sidewalk in front of her home because at a previous Newton home, she said that city crews replaced a perfectly good sidewalk with a deficient one. The Traffic Council discussed options for crossing and stop signs in the area and could find no option that would improve safety beyond completing sidewalks and trimming shrubbery.

The Traffic Council voted to recommend no action on the proposal to install crosswalks or stop signs at this intersection (4-1, Harney opposed). The Traffic Council also voted to request installation of completion of the sidewalk by the Department of Public Works on the east side of Sargent Street south of the Park Street intersection (5-0)

#382-05 CANDACE HAVENS, PRESIDENT BAKER, ALD. VANCE on behalf of Bigelow Traffic Safety Committee request consideration of 4-way stop at Park and Franklin Streets.

ACTION: **NAN (5-0)**

Candace Havens described the character of this intersection as similar to that of Church Street in terms of grade changes and curves in the road that make visibility a challenge. However, the road is wider which helps visibility in some places and a crosswalk connecting to Kenrick Park was added since the previous review. She suggested that if stop signs aren't used, that crosswalk signs to the left of the crosswalk (or double-sided signs) would alert drivers sooner of the upcoming crosswalk.

Clint Schuckel pointed out that the traffic volumes at Park and Franklin are significantly lower than those at Church Street and are unequal with 22 southbound vehicles, 203 northbound, 81 eastbound and 38 westbound from 8-9 am on the study day. Twelve pedestrians also were observed during that time. In answer to question about speeding, he noted that stop signs aren't considered traffic calming devices and are not used to control speed.

Ald. Baker saw this intersection as one in a system of streets that relate to one another, but did not want to encourage traffic on Park Street in such a way that would cause it to be used instead of Waverley Street.

Ald. Vance did not expect stop signs on Church Street to force traffic onto Franklin Street. He also felt the width of the road helps visibility on Franklin Street.

In comparison the Park/Church Streets intersection, there is less traffic, it is farther from the schools, and has slightly better visibility. As such, the Traffic Council did not feel it was an appropriate place for adding stop signs and voted to recommend no action on this item (5-0)

#389-05 ALD. SANGIOLO, HARNEY requesting creation of a blue zone in front of the Williams School on Grove Street where current bus drop off zone exists.

#389-05(2) ALD. SANGIOLO, HARNEY requesting the creation of bus drop off zone where current blue zone exists on Grove Street. (Ward 4)

#389-05(3) ALD. SANGIOLO, HARNEY requesting No Left Turn Monday-Friday during school hours from new blue zone. (Ward 4)

ACTION:

HOLD for 60 day trial (5-0)

NOTE:

These items were held in October 2005 pending completion of a trial in January and February 2006. Since the conclusion of the trial, Ald. Sangiolo felt the situation had improved, although not perfect. She said that traffic on Hancock Street also had been relieved. Ald. Harney noted that circulation around the school has always been bad and he was eager to see more kids walk to school. He added that all schools have unique problems which should be looked at individually. He pointed out that some of the parents create problems with their bad driving habits and expressed disappointment that few children walk to school.

Clint Schuckel feels the trial has been a success in many ways. Many parents and teachers have played a role in its success. Initially, there were problems with the buses on the streets and there have been problems with cars passing the busses when they have their stop signs out. Some parents still cross the street mid-block and walk their children across traffic between cars. An alternative to allow buses to enter the blue zone first would possibly improve upon the situation.

Officer Hough said that the crossing guards are there to cross children and not to direct traffic. They can only stop cars to allow children to cross. The crossing guard reported that many cars turn left into the cutout and drive past buses which are loading children. She agreed it would be better to let buses in first to minimize conflicts.

Principal, Christine Moynihan felt that the situation is much safer, but requires regular supervision. At times it has reduced traffic on Hancock Street. She counted between 75-91 cars passing the front in the morning and between 30-35 picking up in the afternoon. She has seen a decrease in the number of cars parking, although there are still cars parked on Myrtle Street. Now, more parents stay in their cars and pick up their kids by the door.

Parent, John McDermott said residents of Hancock and Fern Streets feel things are better. Another parent, David Foster noted he saw cars making illegal U-turns

into cutout. Deborah Gelch assembled a survey that showed most parents feel the situation is safer and more efficient. She added that parents are not crossing at Myrtle Street as much as they did in the past.

Candace Havens thought the buses should be given priority use of the blue zone as a policy that favors public transit and walking. For this system to work, parents and school staff will need to ensure that during PM dismissal, school buses would always enter the cutout before any other vehicles are allowed to enter. . Candace Havens contacted Ken Temkin, School Transportation Coordinator, who was unable to guarantee the buses could arrive early because of other scheduled stops. Good communications with parents and some additional monitoring would be needed to make it work.

Principal Moynihan confirmed she could communicate changes with parents through weekly emails and the bimonthly school newsletter and would be willing to pursue improvements during the upcoming months. Some internal changes will need to be made to allow children who take the bus to be dismissed first and she agreed to coordinate communications and timing of changes with Clint Schuckel and Officer Hough.

The Traffic Council approved another 60-day trial with (1) a blue zone for the length of the two existing zones on the west side of Grove Street, with school buses receiving priority use of the cutout, (2) no left turn permitted from northbound Grove Street into the blue zone, and (3) drafting of an agreement to formalize arrangements for the upcoming year. The results of this trial will return to Traffic Council in May 2006. (5-0)

Other business:

The Traffic Council agreed to hold its next meeting on April 27th, since the regularly scheduled meeting date is on the Newton Public Schools spring break.

The meeting was adjourned at 11 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Candace Havens, Chair
Traffic Council