

CITY OF NEWTON

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

TRAFFIC COUNCIL REPORT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

Present: Candace Havens (Chair), Clint Schuckel (Traffic Engineer), David Koses (Transportation Planner), Ald. Christine Samuelson, Sgt. Norcross (Police)

Also present: Aldermen Burg, Danberg, Harney, Johnson, Lennon, Linsky, Mansfield, Parker

#335-05 ALD. JOHNSON requesting a study of the impact of visitors, in cars and bikes, to the Charles River walk-on the neighboring streets of Albemarle Road and Bemis Street and make recommendations for relief and safety for residents. (Ward 2)

60 DAY TRIAL APPROVED ON 6-15-06

ACTION:

APPROVED NO PARKING ON ALBEMARLE PER TRIAL 5-0

NOTE:

Clint Schuckel recapped the recent reviews in spring 2006 (held for better weather) and June (when the trial was initiated). Since that time “No Parking” signs were placed on the creek side of Albemarle Road. He saw few cars parked on the street during the trial and was not convinced that it had changed the situation, based on his observations. He felt that additional restrictions would not be better than parking allowed on one side only.

Ald. Johnson indicated that the parking situation on Albemarle has improved, but people continue to drive down the street and turnaround in neighbors’ driveways despite the “Dead End” signs. They often back out and many speed off, which she feels is dangerous. She has been in contact with State Representative, Kay Kahn who is working with her to improve landscaping and signing to alert bikers on the trail about the street ahead of them. She asked for the Traffic Council’s help in finding some way to discourage nonresidents not destined for the path, from traveling down the street.

Ald. Linsky agreed there needs to be advance warning to motorists and questioned whether a neck-down or some other traffic calming device could be effective. In response to his inquiry, Clint Schuckel expressed concern about the narrowness of the street and the potential problems for emergency access at this location.

Candace Havens reported a letter was received from Kristie Manning and Robert Moruzzi, expressing their support for the “No Parking” signs and their dismay at the continued stream of cars turning around and speeding up the street.

Neighbors present agreed that the “No Parking” signs have helped, but one noted a pole was knocked down by nonresidents turning around since the last Traffic

Council meeting. They also feared potential conflicts with bikers and general speeding that endangers children and property. Scott Nimkin, 22 Albermarle suggested yellow stripes on the road to catch driver's attention before they enter the street.

Ald Samuelson said it seems that people need to be aware sooner that it's not a through street. After discussing various attention-getting and traffic calming options, all agreed the better signing would be easy to install and could help with this effort. Clint Schuckel said he would place some additional signs at the end of Nevada so drivers would see them before turning.

The Traffic Council voted to make permanent, the trial "No Parking" on the east drive of Albermarle Road from Nevada St to the bridge. (5-0)

#146-06 DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, on behalf of Newton Corner Advisory Committee, requesting installation of 2 electronic speed display signs (both directions) on Pearl Street, just west of Emerson Street, using CDBG funding. (Ward 1)

ACTION: APPROVED 4-1

NOTE:

On behalf of the Newton Corner Advisory Committee, Newton City Planner Danielle Bailey presented a proposal to install two speed indicator signs on Pearl Street between Thornton and Emerson Streets. She said people speed on this street and CDGB funds are available to purchase and install such signs. She mentioned that this is a walk to school route and the sight visibility is poor. A slight hill also encourages speeding.

Clint Schuckel said the street varies in width along its length from 24-35 feet. No parking is allowed on the south side and the north side has a two-hour parking restriction from Monday through Saturday, 7 am – 7 pm. The street is a minor collector with 4,000 cars per day. The 85th percentile speed of most cars is more than 10 mph over the 25 mph speed limit. He was not convinced that the signs would be a long-term solution to speeding. He spoke with his counterparts in Brookline and Waltham and each used the signs only in school zones. H thought it best to limit their use to school zones where the speed limit changes by time of day (20 mph during pick up/drop off times).

David Koses agreed with the selected location and the need for traffic calming. He felt it was a rare opportunity to have a funded traffic calming device and the City should take the opportunity to try it out and then to check out the results prior to street reconstruction to see if additional/alternative methods are needed.

The Traffic Council voted to recommend approval of the installation as proposed. (4-1, Schuckel opposed)

#147-06 ALD. BURG requesting on behalf of Janet Schuster-Cardoza 1701 Commonwealth Avenue, installation of a STOP SIGN on the westbound carriage lane of Commonwealth Avenue, near Oldham Road. (Ward 3)

ACTION: HELD 5-0

NOTE: Janet Schuster-Cardoza, 1701 Commonwealth Avenue described the intersection of Commonwealth Avenue and Oldham Road as a dangerous one in which there is no way for drivers to tell who has the right of way. She said there are 3 public school buses and 2 private buses that drop off and pick up children each day and she is concerned for the safety. Cars use the carriage way to bypass Commonwealth Avenue and where the streets merge, she has witnessed accidents. Edwin Cardoza said there is no sign that tells people that the carriageway is a one-way street or that cars should not enter there.

Ald. Burg supported the petitioner's request for appropriate signing to assure it is a safe intersection for drivers and pedestrians.

Clint Schuckel agreed that a "Do Not Enter" sign is needed. At the morning peak, traffic on Commonwealth Avenue carries about 682 cars per hour, while there are 48 on the carriageway and 2 on Oldham Road. He described this complex intersection with Day Street, Fuller Street and Oldham Road, at Commonwealth Avenue and the carriageway. At Oldham Road, drivers on the carriageway cross paths with those on Commonwealth Avenue and farther downhill, they merge. He felt that a stop sign at Oldham and the carriageway was not the best solution and recommended a stop sign farther down the road where they merge. He recommended either a yield sign at the merge point or closure of the existing merge area, forcing a hard right turn off carriage lane, like other locations along Commonwealth Avenue.

Michael Zack, Oldham Road said fire trucks turn around in the street in this area and pose yet another danger at this location.

David Koses suggested a stop sign where the carriageway meets Oldham and a yield sign at the merger farther downhill. Candace Havens agreed with this solution, but also felt that there should be consistency at other intersections along the carriageway.

Ald. Samuelson wondered whether the Fire Department had concerns about the intersection. She also felt School Department personnel should weigh in on the issue, since they can change the location of bus drop-offs and pick-ups if there are safety issues. She also noted that there is a Commonwealth Avenue task force that has been studying related issues and could be consulted for guidance.

The Traffic Council voted (5-0) to hold review of the item until the Fire Department and School Department has an opportunity to provide input.

#177-06

ALD. DANBERG, PARKER AND MANSFIELD requesting that Ordinance X-106, approved by the Board of Aldermen on 9/7/04, be amended by deleting the parking meter zone it established on BOWEN STREET. (Ward 6)

ACTION: **DENY 5-0**

NOTE: Ald. Parker indicated that the neighborhood experienced problems in the past with too many cars parked in front of their homes, making access difficult and often precluding use of the streets by residents. He indicated that the neighbors are happy with the current situation and do not want meters installed. He also felt there were some mistakes in previous review and asked that the Traffic Council support the request to rescind approval of meters on a portion of Bowen Street.

To clarify the Traffic Council's original recommendation, Candace Havens reviewed the minutes of October 23, 2003 when the Council heard a request for 2-hour meters. The Council's final action was referenced by a Board order that was not available at the meeting. Clint Schuckel said he would provide proper documentation prior to review by the Board.

Ald. Mansfield agreed that the two-hour restriction in front of homes and designation of handicap space near the park entrance are good solutions for residents and visitors to the park. However, he felt that meters on the streets are not needed and serve mainly to generate revenue for the City. He couldn't recall other situations where meters have been approved so close to homes and feels the situation is fine the way it is.

Ald. Danberg noted that this street is unique in its mix of residents, patrons and employees of local businesses and that the multi-family residences put additional strain on the parking needs of the street. She supported the neighbors request to eliminate meters as approved for Bowen Street.

Petitioner, Suzanne Bender described the homes on the street as modest, two-family residences set up in two four-squares with limited on-site parking and shared driveways. She urged the Traffic Council to consider leaving the spaces between Bowen Street and the residences unrestricted so that the neighbors can use the spaces for overflow parking. She objected to the notion that the neighbors and/or guests might have to pay to park near their homes. She noted that the neighbors as well as the employees of the Dellaria Salon are actively using the spaces and that there appears to be a good balance among the needs in the neighborhood.

Clint Schuckel reviewed the site history and his recent findings. On the residential portion of this 22'-wide street, a 2-hour parking restriction was approved on one side and no parking approved on the opposite side; long-term parking was eliminated and emergency access was improved. He noted that parking is restricted from 9 am – 5 pm, so residents and their guests can park until 11 am and after 3 pm in front of their homes. Installation of handicap parking was approved near the park, but installation has been delayed until the proper ramping can be installed. Nine meters were approved on the south side of Bowen Street between Centre Street and the first house in front of the park; installation of meters was delayed because of lack of funds to purchase them. Since these

changes were approved on Bowen Street, other parking-related changes have occurred: (1) Seven 12-hour meters were installed on Centre Street between Homer and Bowen Street; (2) the City approved a change to the parking meter rate structure so long-term parking is 25 cents per hour and short-term parking is 50 cents per hour; since the meters approved for Bowen Street are long-term meters, the hourly rate will be 25 cents an hour. A recent license plate study of the parkers on this unrestricted section of Bowen Street shows that with one exception, those who park in these spaces are not local residents and many of the same cars park on this stretch on a regular basis. He summarized by stating that he felt that metering of parking on Bowen Street as previously approved, is consistent with prior Traffic Council and Board actions aimed at addressing village-wide parking needs by designating long-term metered spaces on the fringes of the village center for employees and freeing short-term spaces closer to stores for customers. He added that metering of Centre Street and not on Bowen Street creates a disincentive for use of the existing meters.

On behalf of neighbors who were not able to attend, Candace Havens acknowledged a letter opposing meters from neighbor, John Allen. She also received a letter signed by the neighbors, outlining the history of the parking situation since 2003 and stating their preference for maintaining free, unrestricted parking between their homes and Centre Street; the letter states that the neighbors need the parking for the demands of this dense, multi-family neighborhood, don't want to pay for parking near their homes, and dislike the appearance of meters. Overall, they feel things are working well as they are.

Anna Marie submitted a petition on behalf of the Dellaria Salon employees and customers that states the salon's desire to keep free parking for the convenience of their employees and customers, many of whom feed 2-hour meters. She said that employee parking is a problem and there is no place for their valets to park.

Jerry Gould, 20 Bowen Street said he feels like the existing situation is a happy accident and would like to keep unrestricted parking as it is. He feels things are much improved. John Kubera, 26 Bowen Street, echoed these sentiments.

Sgt. Norcross said that the Traffic Council looked carefully at the options for providing parking on the street and came up with a creative solution that has allowed residents and others to have better use of the streets. However, he stated that license plate studies don't confirm the neighbors' statement that they need the spaces on the street to meet their needs and he sees no justification for allowing free parking, especially near metered spaces on Centre Street.

David Koses felt the approval of the meters was in keeping with the Traffic Council's general strategy of encouraging short-term meters closest to the village center and longer term meters slightly farther away. He cited a similar situation on Sumner Street in which the Traffic Council and Board of Aldermen denied a request to allow free resident parking at meters in Newton Centre. He felt that it

would be inconsistent with past actions to allow free parking in these circumstances.

Candace Havens concurred with the neighbors' assessment that conditions in their neighborhood are much better now than in 2003 when they first approached the Traffic Council for relief and that sharing of the street has been successful. However, she also could not endorse free parking; she noted that revenue is a by-product of meters but their primary purpose is for managing parking and that free, unrestricted parking can invite unwelcome parkers; metering will ensure the spaces will be available for local users, especially nights and weekends. She also felt that creation of a written policy regarding parking meter placement near residential neighborhoods is needed to ensure similar situations are handled the same way.

The Traffic Council voted (5-0) to recommend denial of the request to rescind the previously-approved meters.

#215-06

DAN REILLY, 21 Bradford Road, Newton Highlands requesting "No Parking" on BRADFORD ROAD between 9 am and 11 am on weekdays. (Ward 5)

HELD 5-0

ACTION:

NOTE:

Dan Reilly indicated that the neighborhood has been affected as a result of restriction on neighboring streets. He requested a similar restriction on Bradford Road to protect the neighborhood.

Clint Schuckel said that restrictions on other streets have worked well to minimize commuter parking on residential streets and noted Bradford Road is 24 feet wide. During various times of the day during the week, he observed one or two cars on the east side of the street and one to six cars on the west side. He concluded that the street width is adequate to support one side street parking and the "No Parking 9-11 AM" zone that has worked well on nearby streets be used or no action taken.

Candace Havens noted that letters in opposition to the proposed restriction were received from residents Howard Zaharoff and Debbie Whitehill, 12 Bradford Road and Robert and Lisa Unsworth at 34 Bradford Road indicated they did not wish to see the problem pushed from street to street. Ron Mauri, 35 Bradford Road agreed that the anticipated problems have not materialized. He supported use of transit as a positive contribution to reducing auto usage and did not want further restrictions on the street.

Ald. Samuelson stated that Traffic Council has historically favored the least restrictive means of protecting neighborhoods when commuter traffic has become burdensome. She felt that the problem does not appear to have reached a point where it is causing access or parking problems for the neighborhood.

David Koses added that the proposed MBTA fare restructuring may alter Green Line usage, which may change parking behavior in the neighborhood.

The Traffic Council voted (5-0) to hold this item for up to six months or after the anticipated MBTA fare and parking changes take effect January 1, 2007, as well as to allow for consultation with residents on Bellingham Street, who also may be affected by restrictions.

#216-06 ALD. SAMUELSON requesting consideration of parking restrictions on SPRING STREET to facilitate plowing and emergency vehicle access. (Ward 5)

ACTION: HELD 5-0

NOTE: Ald. Samuelson said that the residents have had problems with snow plowing and garbage collection on this narrow street and were looking for some way to make it more accessible.

Clint Schuckel described Spring Street as 18 feet wide and too narrow to support onstreet parking on both sides. However, there was an insufficient number of vehicles observed parking to indicate whether a public safety issue exists.

Candace Havens was concerned about fire access and suggested no parking be allowed on both sides or that it be made a one-way street with parking only on one side.

David Koses expressed concern that one or two homes on this street have inadequate off-street parking, and the removal of all off-street parking could become a burden on residents.

The Traffic Council agreed that more information about from the Department of Public Works regarding their views on garbage collection and snow removal would be helpful.

#217-06 ALD. SAMUELSON & HARNEY requesting consideration of short-term parking meters on the east side of Washington Street in front of Newton-Wellesley Hospital. (Ward 4)

ACTION: APPROVED 4-1, Havens opposed

NOTE: Ald. Samuelson indicated that people park along Washington Street in this two-hour zone in front of the hospital and regulation of the use of these spaces is needed.

Clint Schuckel observed parking in these spots was at capacity by 7 am and remains used all day. He said this is the only free parking available in the vicinity. He felt the existing time limit is appropriate for short-term use and added that additional revenues would be generated by new meters.

Candace Havens expressed concerns about short-term use on this busy street. She felt the potential for conflicts with cars parallel parking people getting in and out of their cars is greater in shorter term parking spaces than in long-term spaces where the traffic calming benefits are realized without such conflicts.

David Koses supported installing short-term meters, but preferred four-hour meters rather than two-hour meters, since hospital appointments and visits often take longer than anticipated. He also suggested that an item be docketed which would increase the parking meter rate from 50¢/hour to \$1.00/hour at these meters only. This would make the parking rate more comparable with the rate charged by the Hospital to park in their public patient/visitor parking garage. He wondered why the City should be charging significantly less than the Hospital charges, particularly since nearly everybody who would park at these meters would be going to the Hospital.

The Traffic Council voted (4-1, Havens opposed) to approve the installation of two-hour parking meters at the current 50¢ per hour rate.

#236-06 CANDACE HAVENS, 25 Hunnewell Avenue, Newton requesting to rescind 4:30 – 6:30 restricted area of Vernon Street between Eldredge and Waverley. (Ward 1)

ACTION:

HELD 5-0

NOTE:

Candace Havens said the proposal is to clarify existing laws and signs. There are currently two sets of signs on Vernon Street. One is a two-hour parking restriction and the other prohibits parking from 4:30-6:30. She thought the signage was confusing and that a simple two-hour restriction would discourage commuters and allow parking for short stays for the residents and parents visiting Bigelow Middle School. She noted that she received two letters in support and two letters opposing the proposal.

Some neighbors on Vernon Street indicated that they would prefer the late afternoon restriction only because they are concerned about people parking on the street later in the day and taking the MBTA Express Bus into Boston for functions such as Red Sox games.

Candace Havens asked that the Traffic Council hold this item to allow the Bigelow School Safety Committee an opportunity to meet with the neighbors and see if there is a solution that addresses the needs of all concerned.

The Traffic Council took action to hold the item until the next regularly scheduled (5-0).

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace Havens, Chair
Traffic Council