

CITY OF NEWTON

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

TRAFFIC COUNCIL REPORT

Thursday, October 20, 2005

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

Aldermen Present: Baker, Fischman, Lennon, Sangiolo, Vance

#HP-7 ALD. SANGIOLO requesting on behalf of Louise Toney, 103-107 Hancock Street, a handicap parking space in front of her home on Hancock Street (Ward 4).
(#264-05)

ACTION: **APPROVED 3-1-1 (Schuckel opposed, Koses abstaining)**

NOTE: Clint Schuckel reported there is a “No Parking on school days from 7 am – 4 pm” restriction in front of the petitioner’s house, but did not know why it was created. He was concerned about installing a permanent parking space in such a zone, though it is proposed on the wider part of the street. The Mayor’s Committee on Persons with Disabilities reviewed the proposal and recommended approval because the petitioner’s front door is very difficult for the petitioner to get to; the driveway is on a slope on the opposite side of the house and she must walk uphill to the front door.

Sgt. Norcross contacted the Registry of Handicapped Division and said it is illegal for a person with a handicap placard to park in a “No Parking” zone. Persons with placards are exempt from time-restricted parking, e.g., a one- or two-hour limit.

Ald. Sangiolo said the petitioner intends to use the space primarily for loading and unloading and did not intend to park there all day. She also recognized it would be available to others with placards and not exclusively for her use.

Alderman Samuelson felt that if parking for this purpose is already allowed, the space should be designated for handicap use so others understand why a car is permitted to park there.

David Koses was reluctant to recommend approval without knowing the outcome of possible changes under discussion at Public Safety and Transportation (such as a one-way street) or without receiving a written report from the Mayor’s Committee.

Candace Havens was concerned about establishing a long-term space where parking would not otherwise be allowed, although sympathetic to the needs of the petitioner.

The Council approved the request (3-1-1, Schuckel against, Koses abstained).

#HP-8 JOANNE MEAD, 5 Marshall Street requesting a handicap parking space in front of 5 Marshall Street, Newton Centre. (Ward 6)

ACTION: NAN 5-0

NOTE: The petitioner did not provide an explanation of her request or attend meetings of the Mayor's Committee or Traffic Council. Clint Schuckel visited the site and saw no basis for approving a special space, since there is little demand for on-street parking in the immediate area. The Traffic Council voted to take no action on this proposal.

#413-04 ALD. FISCHMAN requesting on behalf of MARILYN PEREZ, 5 Bound Brook Road requesting relocation of "No Parking" sign to location beyond driveway to provide cars from blocking driveway. (Ward 8)

ACTION: APPROVED AS AMENDED (4-1, Koses abstaining)

NOTE: The Traffic Council initiated a 60-day trial of a "No Parking" zone in front of 5 Bound Brook Road in September 2005. Clint Schuckel said the trial appears to be a success; he did not see any cars parked in front of the house or beyond it and there were no cars blocking access to the street. While restricting parking in front of one house it not the Traffic Council's policy, in this situation the majority agreed that it is a minimal measure to secure safer access to the entire street. The Traffic Council voted (4-1, Koses abstained) to recommend "No Parking, 8-4 on school days" on the north side Bound Brook Road from the corner at Dedham Street westerly to the property line of 5 Bound Brook.

#146-05 ALD. BAKER requesting a Stop Sign on Cotton Street @ Park Street. (Ward 7)

ACTION: APPROVED 4-1, (Schuckel opposed)

NOTE: Cotton Street resident, Alan Steinberg, 42 Cotton Street, said there is speeding and reckless driving on Cotton Street, which connects Centre and Waverly Streets. He and other residents observed an increase in traffic on their street since the reconstruction on Centre Street and increase in BC students. There are many small children in the neighborhood and many that walk to school from the neighborhood. They are concerned about their safety, especially on the section of the street west of Park where there the road curves on a slope; without a stop sign, cars race around the curve and north onto Park without slowing down. Drivers and pedestrians can't see each other long before the streets cross.

Clint Schuckel presented traffic counts, which are very low and do not meet State warrants for a stop sign. He said a stop sign at this location was denied in 2001 by a previous Traffic Council. He saw four pedestrians at 8 am and did not see a justification for approving a stop sign under the State guidelines.

Other residents agreed there are dangers posed by cars traveling relatively fast on the road, especially on the curve and the problem was not one of quantity, but of quality. They noted that without regular enforcement in the area, that some means of discouraging use of their street as a cut-through was appropriate and suggested a stop sign or speed bumps. They didn't feel warning signs had helped and were concerned about the safety of their families. Cotton Street resident, Leslie Bock, 47 Cotton Street, lives on the curve of the street as it approaches Park from the downhill side and said cars have driven onto her lawn more than once. She and her husband park their cars on the street for protection when they are in their front yard and their cars have been damaged by passing cars. Another neighbor, Ashley Porath also witnessed incidents of road rage and had her car damaged by drivers.

David Koses, felt that there were special circumstances at the site due to difficult street geometry, with a blind curve preceding the Park/Church intersection and noted the evenness of traffic from all directions. Both he and Candace Havens thought these conditions merited consideration of a stop sign to create a safer condition at the intersection.

Christine Samuelson questioned where some other means of traffic calming could be used to slow traffic on the street.

Sgt. Norcross commented that sometimes the speed of cars seems greater than the permitted 30 miles per hour because of the street configuration and requested additional speed data. He felt there were no easy solutions to the problems for these residents.

Ald. Baker noted that the addition of a stop sign could improve the situation and would not hurt it. Ald. Vance agreed.

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

#146-05(2) TRAFFIC CHAIR COUNCIL 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 sites 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: **HELD**

NOTE: Ald. Baker introduced the petition by describing the noted the numerous challenges for pedestrians in Newton Corner, particularly around the schools and in the area around the Mass Pike. The area in question is a walking corridor that runs parallel to Centre and Waverly Streets and includes four intersections with Park Street.

Chairman of the Bigelow School Safety Task Force, Terry Yoffie, showed a presentation and film of the walk to Bigelow and Underwood Schools from the southerly end of Park Street. The Task Force included representatives from the neighborhood, school, PTO and Board of Aldermen who gathered information about teacher and student travel patterns and who looked at all the things that affect the walk to schools via Park Street including sidewalks, crosswalks, vegetation, signage, street configurations, slopes, and snow removal. The film showed kids walking along the stretch with the rush hour traffic that highlighted the difficulties of the crossings along the way. The common goal of the committee is to provide a safer route to school, to encourage walking for good health and decrease auto use for such trips. The group requests Council direction for appropriate changes to improve safety along this corridor. Problems were noted at each intersection:

- Cotton Street has a curve in the road and cars pass through the intersection without slowing, thus endangering pedestrians. There is no crosswalk.
- Sargent Street jogs around Park Street and has two legs with curves. Cars pick up speed on either straightaway before the curves. Without a crosswalk or continuous sidewalks, pedestrians must cross on the curve where views of them from moving vehicles are not as good.
- Franklin Street is a relatively wide street, which encourages higher speeds. Because of slopes and curves, drivers don't see the pedestrian crossing until they get close to the intersection at Park Street.
- Church Street has problems similar to Franklin but is a narrower street. Kenrick Park in between Church and Park Streets, offers a sheltered walking space, but the pedestrians must dash across from either end to avoid fast moving vehicles.

For the short-term, the Bigelow Traffic Safety Committee requests consideration of all-way stops, clearly marked crosswalks, speed limit signs, trimming of shrubs over the sidewalks, reinstatement of neighborhood snow shoveling, and improvements to the city snow removal practices to keep sidewalks clear. For the long-term, they suggested traffic calming at the intersections closest to the schools including appropriate signage.

Several neighbors gave personal accounts of the difficulties at each of the intersections with cars moving too fast where there are slopes, curves and visibility problems. They stressed the need for safe crossings that they felt merited well-marking crosswalks, stops signs and/or good warning signs and posted speed limits. School Committee representative, Marc Laredo supported the work of the Bigelow Traffic Safety Committee and commended them for their efforts to improve conditions for students in the area. Other neighbors reinforced the need for order and traffic calming in the Park Street corridor.

Candace Havens added that since these streets are all connections between Centre and Waverly Street, changes on one street will affect the usage of the others.

Clint Schuckel noted the inconsistencies in sidewalks along this path. He also noted the addition of two crosswalks at Franklin and Church and signs will be added to bring these to the attention of drivers. He did not feel signs warning of children and dangerous intersections significantly affect driving behavior. He added that crosswalks must not be so common that people ignore them. They also should be safely placed; otherwise they can offer pedestrians a false sense of security. When there are no stop signs or signals, cross-hatching is a good way to make them more visible to drivers.

Ald. Baker was concerned about the discontinuity of the sidewalks and urged the Department of Public Works to consider ways to complete them where not installed by property owners. He also asked how election day traffic would be monitored and whether they would be required to abide by this restriction.

Todd Harrison indicated that the Secretary of Election Commission, Peter Karg asked restrictions be waived on election days, since Bigelow is a polling place for 2 wards. The Traffic Council and aldermen present agreed that such restrictions should not be enforced on election days. Sgt. Norcross indicated that police present on election day could be informed of this in advance so voters aren't ticketed during drop-off and pick-up.

Ald. Lennon suggested some alternative walkable surface to connect the sidewalks and complete the paths.

Sgt. Norcross said that posting of speed limit signs can have an adverse impact in neighborhoods where speed travels below the speed limit; 30 mph signs can encourage people to go faster than they thought was permitted.

Since this item was proposed for discussion, no formal action was taken. The Traffic Safety Committee will return with specific requests at the intersections of Church, Franklin and Sargent Streets.

- #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 7-9 am restriction on Arlington Street between Park Street and 135 Arlington Street. (Ward 1)
- ACTION:** **215-05(1) APPROVE (4-0-1, Norcross abstained)**
215-05(2) APPROVE AS AMENDED (5-0)
215-05(3) APPROVE AS AMENDED (4-0) Norcross not voting
- NOTE:** Bigelow Middle School principal, Todd Harrison said he became concerned when he witnessed parents dropping off children on the west side of the Park Street where they must walk in front of cars to get to school. He also observed

congestion in the same area and lack of adequate parking for staff. The changes proposed are intended to work together to address these problems. Elimination of the morning restriction on Arlington Street beside the school will allow for additional teacher parking without impacting the adjacent residences, since no changes are proposed in front of homes. A tow zone on the west side of Park will send a stronger message to parents who consider parking there to wait for their kids. Finally, increasing the area for drop off and pick up on Park Street will make it possible for cars to pass through more quickly. He noted the student survey showed that the majority of kids are driven to school, but that more students would walk if walking routes and conditions were improved. The teacher survey showed that over 90 percent of teachers drive alone to school and there are more cars than spaces for teachers. He felt adding spaces on the street would help free up some spaces on Park Street which would, in turn, help cars pass through the street more efficiently.

Clint Schuckel described the block surrounding Bigelow Middle School. The existing restrictions include “No Parking on the north side of Arlington Street and restrictions from 7-9 am and 3:30 to 6:30 pm on the south side. On Park Street there is “No Parking” zone on the west side; the east side is unrestricted.

Candace Havens added that 15-minute parking signs at the lower end of Park Street allow parking and creates a bottleneck when occupied at drop-off and pick-up. She was unable to find a record of these restrictions on the books. She said the group considered removal of the 7-9 am restriction in front of residences on Arlington Street, but neighbors there requested they be preserved to assure them some available parking for their visitors, since no parking is allowed on the north side in front of their homes.

Ald. Samuelson preferred a one-minute blue zone instead of a ten-minute loading zone since she felt it would facilitate movement of cars. To ease congestion around the schools, she suggested parents drop off their children a block from school and for parents to arrive at school only when they know their children will be waiting outside for them. She agreed that snow removal from sidewalks should be reinstated and agreed that snow piles need to be better managed.

Bigelow parent Pat Tietbohl, 34 Ruthven, noted that middle school students don’t all come out of the building on time at once, as they do in elementary school and timing is a different sort of challenge. Colleen Conboy, 129 Arlington, said speeding on Arlington Street is a problem and she is tired of inconsiderate drivers and traffic on this street.

David Koses said that over the years the City has restricted parking on many streets due to commuter parking, which has forced a consolidation of commuter parking on fewer streets. Last month, Traffic Council recommended a restriction on Belmont Street due to commuters parking on that street to use MBTA Route 57. He said that commuters are not the enemy, and that Route 57 is one of the

most frequent transit services in Newton. He feared, however, that if parking continues to be more restricted, eventually fewer people will have access to the bus, which will reduce demand, which may reduce service frequency. He said that there are no houses on either side of this section of Arlington Street, and while school parking may be more urgently needed in this area, the school does not own the street, and the needs of commuters should also be considered.

Ald. Samuelson and Candace Havens pointed out that Tremont Street is wider and could more easily accommodate long-term parkers, although currently 2-hour parking, and a more appropriate place to promote long-term parking in the immediate area.

Ald. Lennon assured the Council that there is ample patronage of public transit from the surrounding area and did not fear this would happen.

The Traffic Council approved a 60-day trial of the following:

- (1) No parking/tow zone all days on the west side of Park Street between Arlington and Vernon Streets (4-0-1, Norcross abstained)
- (2) Live parking on Park Street from the parking lot driveways to the corner of Vernon Street from 8 am-9 am and from 1:30 to 3:30 on school days (5-0)
- (3) Remove 7-9 am restriction and change of afternoon restriction to “No Parking 4:30 – 6:30 pm” (5-0)

DISCUSSION ITEMS (considered in a break in the middle of the meeting)

1. Traffic Calming. The Traffic Council reviewed proposed criteria and points system for Traffic Calming, which originally addressed raised crosswalks only. The Traffic Council members and Aldermen Baker and Vance reviewed the proposed process for approving traffic calming measures which includes evaluation first by Traffic Council, recommendation for approval to the Board and subsequent review by Public Safety and Transportation, Public Facilities, and Finance Committees for their respective reviews and approval. As proposed, the Board would then take final action on the item. After discussing the merits of the process, criteria, and points system, the Traffic Council tabled the item for further discussion to be resumed at a later date.
2. Revisions to Traffic Council. Clint Schuckel passed out a summary of ideas for streamlining the Traffic Council’s operations. After describing the changes, the Traffic Council discussed them briefly. Ald. Baker suggested the problems with the current format and the ways in which the new proposal addresses them should be clearly outlined. He also said the details should be well thought out before presenting them to others, since they may represent a significant change from the current process. The proposal will be presented to Public Safety and Transportation Committee for consideration this fall.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace Havens, Chair