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CC: MIKE KRUSE, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
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FROM: WILLIAM F. LYONS JR., P.E., P.T.O.E., A.I.C.P.
VICE PRESIDENT/PRINCIPAL

SUBJECT: WILLIAMS SCHOOL – RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 2005

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Williams School is a neighborhood elementary school in the Village of Auburndale. The school is bounded by Grove Street to the east and Hancock Street to the west. The school population is drawn from the northwestern corner of Newton, including residents on the west side of Route 128 (I-95) in Newton Lower Falls.

The school is chronically short of pick-up/drop-off areas for parents. As a result, there are many complaints from area residents about traffic circulation, pedestrian and vehicular safety, and the convenience of the pick-up/drop-off experience. In addition, the current situation places a significant strain on the resources of the school and the police department to maintain an orderly drop-off/pick-up process.

In addition to the problems experienced by the parents attempting to drop-off and pick-up school age children, there is a significant shortfall in available parking for school staff. Staff members typically are required to double park in the school lot or fend for themselves off-site.

It is also important to note that the neighborhood is concerned about impacts related to the Riverside MBTA station. Residents are concerned about cut-through traffic related to commuters parking at Riverside, particularly with regard to the speed of these vehicles. In addition, there is some concern about the possibility of Riverside-bound commuters parking in the neighborhood to avoid paying for parking at the MBTA station.

Two public meetings were held to solicit input on the problem and potential solutions. A meeting was held at the beginning of the study on May 31, 2005 at the Williams School. The purpose of this meeting was to allow the residents the opportunity to present their views and concerns. Potential solutions were not presented at this meeting.

A second meeting was held on September 12, 2005. At this meeting, recommendations were presented to address the problems identified in the earlier phase of the study. Most of the recommendations were greeted favorably. In particular, there was consensus that Hancock Street should be one-way at least part of the day. There seemed to be a majority in favor of a full time one-way circulation pattern for Hancock Street.

SYMPTOMS

During pick-up/drop-off time at the school, there is significant congestion in the current "blue zones" designated for these activities. Parents are prone to remaining in these areas longer than allowed. The tendency to remain too long results in overflow of the blue zones.

The excessively long parking in the blue zones and on surrounding streets results in many unsafe conditions. Vehicles queue up into traffic lanes and perform erratic maneuvers to attend to their busy schedules. These unsafe conditions affect both vehicular traffic and pedestrian traffic. Examples include speeding; backing across crosswalks where children are crossing; and erratic turning movements that violate motorist and pedestrian expectations.

The most detrimental impact caused by parking too long during pick-up and drop-off times is the resulting illegal parking. Rather than park a distance away from the school and walk, many parents who cannot park legally tend to park illegally. During peak times, parents can be seen parking in the wrong direction of traffic; in prohibited areas (on Lasell Street, next to fire hydrants, across cross-walks, etc.); and in the school parking lot.

There are significant problems on Hancock Street during pick-up/drop-off times. Because the road is very narrow, the parking that currently takes place on the school side of the street takes up a complete traffic lane.

This results in only one passable travel lane on Hancock Street to handle two-way traffic.

The one travel lane for two directions of travel on Hancock Street causes significant conflicts in the immediate vicinity of the school. Many near miss situations have been observed. Of particular concern is the potential for an accident involving a school bus since the school buses circulate through Hancock Street once they have picked up their children.

In addition, the narrow nature of Hancock Street causes some vehicles (particularly larger vehicles) to ride up onto the curbs and sidewalks. This results in a further safety issue for pedestrians on the sidewalks. It also results in a premature failure of the curbs and the sidewalks due to the increased loads of the larger vehicles.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

We have identified two potential solutions to the issues surrounding the Williams School. Both solutions have many common elements addressing core issues for the area. The distinction between the two plans is how Hancock Street is treated from a circulation point of view.

We have assumed that pick-up and drop-off space is essential to providing a safe and efficient pick-up/drop-off experience at the school. This is because many parents bring their children to the school from areas beyond a reasonable walking distance. While encouraging students to take the school bus or walk are viable (and worthy) means of addressing some of the school's problems, there are still some parents who must drive their children to school. In particular, the parents who live on the west side of Route 128 have reasonable concerns regarding the possibility of their young children walking to school.

We have also assumed that the current status quo on Hancock Street is unacceptable. It is our view that the dangerous conditions on this street during pick-up/drop-off times cannot be allowed to persist. Once child has already been seriously injured as a result of this situation; the conflicts on Hancock Street must be addressed before a more serious incident occurs.

The attached plans provide a graphical representation of the proposed improvements described below.

We also acknowledge that significant input from the Fire Department will be necessary to proceed with this project, particularly the one-way circulation on Hancock Street. The Fire Department must be able to address emergency responses to Hancock Street and to the rear of the Williams School. In addition, the Fire Department should be asked to investigate the adequacy of the entrance into the school off of Lasell Street, particularly with regard to vehicles parked on Lasell Street.

Common Elements of Both Alternatives

Pick-up/Drop-off Policies

- A map should be sent out to all parents indicating Pick-Up and Drop-Off routing. The map should show the one-way routing, with fourth & fifth graders generally using Hancock Street; youngest grades should use Grove Street. Parents should also be informed that during the PM period, the pick-up/drop-off area on Grove Street would only be open after school dismissal. A custodian could place a cone there every day, an hour or so before school dismissal and then remove it at PM dismissal. In addition, the pick-up and drop-off period should be extended from 8:35 AM until 8:45 AM to reduce the temptation for parents to loiter until it is OK to park for a longer duration so they can enter the school. See further comments below on this subject.

Phasing

- This memorandum provides a menu of potential treatments to address the needs of the William School and surrounding neighborhoods. Many of the recommendations can be independently implemented without impacting other recommendations. The neighborhood has expressed interest in a phased approach to this project, including implementing lower cost improvements first and implementing additional measures if they are required after an appropriate test period. Measures that are implemented should be monitored and may subsequently be modified based on actual impacts.

Grove Street

We recommend significant changes to the way parents interface with the school on Grove Street. Specifically, we recommend the following changes on the Grove Street side of the school.

- Swap the current blue zone with the school bus drop-off area on the school property. School buses would pick-up/dischage passengers while standing curbside on Grove Street where the current blue zone is located. Parents will pull into the turn-off and be permitted to drop-off or pick up their children without parking or leaving their vehicle. Signage will need to be installed to implement this change.

It should also be noted that this will require a change in the school's informal policy of requiring parents of the younger children to come into the school to get their children. This practice can no longer be permitted because it occupies too much curb time for parked vehicles. The teachers will need to bring the children to the front of the school and observe them entering the parent's vehicle while it stands in the pick-up/drop-off area. In addition, the school should be encouraged to segregate the school population to conform to its internal requirements by age.

- Prohibit left turns out of the proposed drop-off/pick-up area during drop-off/pick-up periods. Left turning vehicles will need to wait for an adequate gap in traffic to pull out. This will result in too many delays for vehicles in the pick-up/drop-off area. Only right turns should be permitted at these times, which will require smaller gaps and will keep traffic moving more efficiently. Parents destined for points to the east or north will circulate around the school via Hancock Street. Signage will be required to prohibit this movement.
- Prohibit U-turns in front of the school on Grove Street northbound and southbound. These movements compromise vehicular and pedestrian safety and need to be eliminated. Signage should be installed and intensive enforcement should be in place to reinforce this point.

Fern Street

- Restrict parking on the southerly side of the street. When vehicles are parked on both sides of the street, there is inadequate street width for two

cars to pass. Parking should be consolidated on the sidewalk side and prohibited on the other side of the street.

- Encourage long-term parking by parents and/or staff on Fern Street for visits exceeding the availability of the short-term parking areas.

Lasell Street

- Eliminate parking within statutory restrictions (5 feet) in the vicinity of the fire hydrant at the end of the street.
- Codify the prohibition on parents accessing the street during school hours. Currently, there is no ordinance prohibiting this traffic, although there is a sign posted. There is no legitimate need to have parents access Lasell Street. This prohibition should be formalized so it can be enforced.

Woodland Street

- Many residents commented that parking on Woodland Street between Grove Street and Hancock Street causes frequent stand-offs and unsafe conditions. The removal of parking on this section of roadway should be considered for a future phase of this project to improve safety in the area of the school, particularly given the circulating nature of the recommended traffic flow.

Hancock Street

- Install a school speed zone on Hancock Street. There is currently a school speed zone on Grove Street. A school speed zone is required on Hancock Street to improve safety. This will require installation of school zone warning beacons and related traffic control devices (signage, etc.). In addition, coordination should be undertaken with the Department of Public Works to ensure that a priority is placed on making sure Hancock Street is properly plowed during snow events to ensure the safety of the children.
- Remove parking that is too close to crosswalks. Parents already encroach on crosswalks. This creates an unsafe condition because the parked vehicle obstructs sight distance for motorists, causing a dangerous condition for children attempting to cross the street. The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices requires a 100-foot parking restriction on

the near side of a crosswalk and a 20-foot restriction on the far side of the crosswalk. While these distances can be adjusted based on engineering judgment, there is no doubt that the current situation is both substandard and very dangerous.

- Improve the pedestrian crossings at the intersection of Hancock Street and Fern Street. This crossing is not visible enough and needs to be enhanced. This is a primary crossing route for school age children. Improved pavement markings and signage will improve motorist awareness of the presence of children.
- Implement very short term parking (or standing parking) on Hancock Street northbound during school hours along the school frontage. This is a formalization of the current situation. This parking is essential to an orderly pick-up and drop-off process. However, the current situation is unacceptable because parents park for long periods of time (as much as 30-45 minutes). Parking in this area needs to be limited to no more than five minutes. Parents should not be allowed to leave their vehicles. This will ensure adequate curb space for all to conduct their pick-up/drop-off activities. The older children should utilize this area.

Many in attendance at the meetings expressed an interest in an indentation into the school property along Hancock Street to provide for parking outside of the traveled way. This would require a significant capital expense and should only be considered if other treatments are inadequate. In addition, the elimination of land used for park purposes may have statutory and regulatory hurdles. However, as a long term means of addressing parking issues, this treatment should be considered and explored. It should be noted that this treatment would partially address short term parking needs, but would not eliminate the need for a one-way Hancock Street since parking is recommended along the entire east side of Hancock Street.

- Implement longer-term parking on the portion of Hancock Street northbound not immediately adjacent to the school. This parking could be used as spillover parking for school staff. Parking may be limited to two hours and could also be used by parents who volunteer their time during school hours to support school activities. At the public meetings, these parents expressed interest in ensuring that longer-term parking would be available.

Teacher Parking

- Several initiatives could be pursued to increase staff parking. First, the parking lot could be redesigned to encroach somewhat on the recreational area. However, this may not be acceptable to the users of these facilities. Also, parking could be created on the west side of Lasell Street by taking down the fence and constructing a more typical street edge that would facilitate parking. Perhaps this parking could be dedicated to teacher use.

In addition, teachers could be encouraged to park on surrounding streets (including Hancock Street and Fern Street) to reduce the impact on the on-site parking. The teachers will find this inconvenient, but the supply of parking is readily available. Teachers who have bundles could drop-off their materials at a drop-off spot in the staff parking lot and then move their vehicle.

Finally, the school could enter into an agreement with the Warner Center on the corner of Grove and Hancock Streets. Perhaps an agreement could be reached regarding the sharing of facilities. This may benefit both parties.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 consists of making Hancock Street one-way at all times in the northbound direction. The one-way solution will allow for parking at all times on the school side of Hancock Street. The remaining single travel lane can be dedicated to one-way circulation, eliminating the current vehicle-vehicle conflicts in the vicinity of the school. This will also provide for a safer pedestrian environment for children since there will be less "stand-offs" and confusion resulting from too many conflicting activities.

This alternative will result in some inconvenience to residents. However, it will add a measure of predictability to school traffic circulation. It will require the installation of signs along the entire roadway to inform motorists of the resulting restrictions.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would make Hancock Street one-way only during school hours. While offering the benefits of the full-time one-way plan, it would

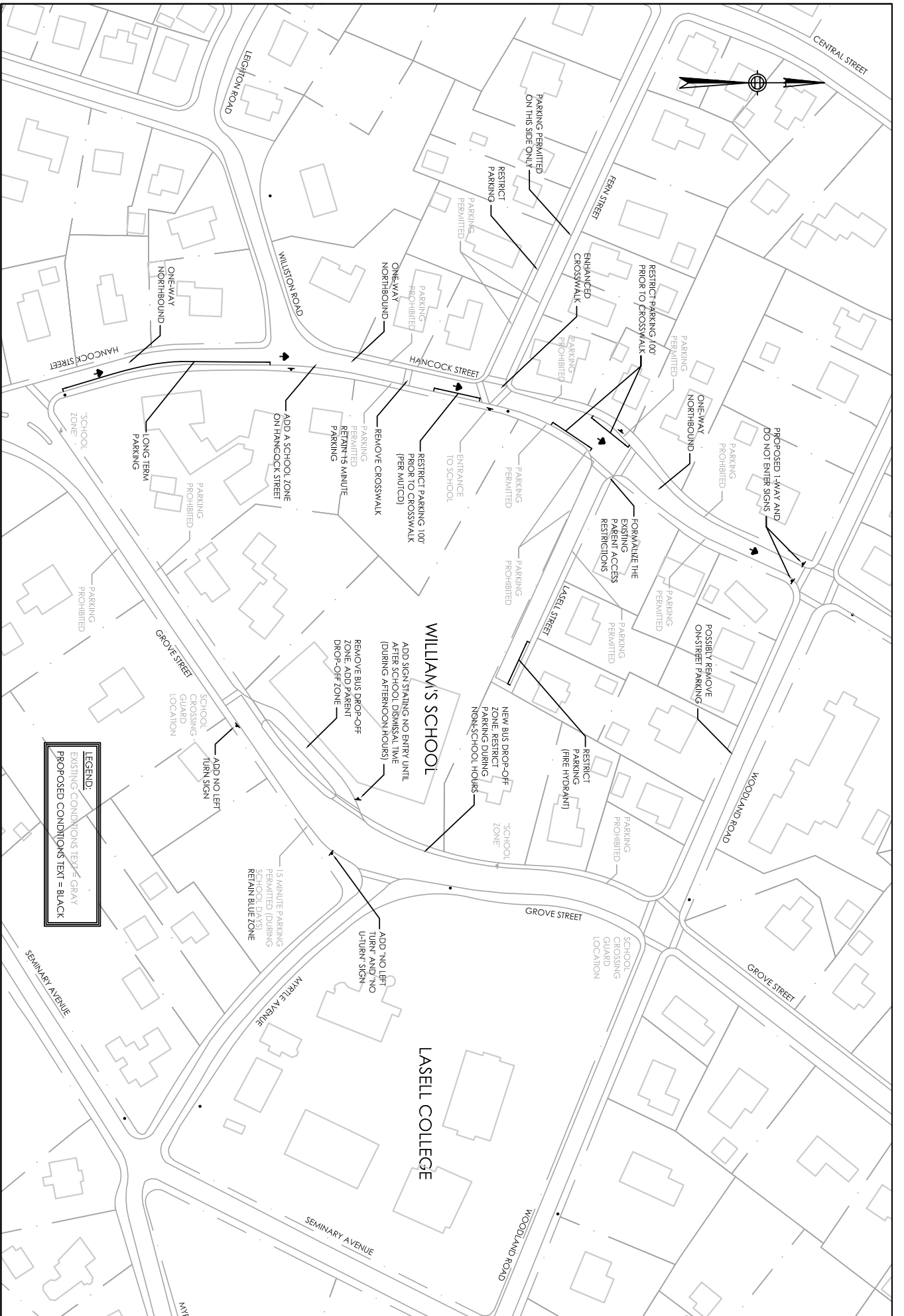
only inconvenience residents while most of them are at work. During non-school hours, the road would remain a two-way street.

The disadvantages of this alternative are that motorists and pedestrians could be confused about what restrictions apply at what times. Confusion would be most prevalent at transition times. This might cause discomfort for some motorists.

In addition, parking would need to be restricted on Hancock Street on the school side during non-school hours. This could have an impact on recreational and athletic events at the school during evenings and weekends. This could also result in some confusion for motorists.

SUMMARY

Alternative 1 is recommended. Full-time one-way circulation on Hancock Street will result in less confusion and a safer environment. It will introduce more predictability regarding conflicts during both school peak hours and non-peak hours. It would also eliminate vehicles from being driven and/or parked in the wrong direction, would more easily enable implementation of a handicapped parking space, and may reduce enforcement costs.



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 PROPOSED CONDITIONS TEXT = BLACK

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EXISTING CONDITIONS AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE 1 CONDITIONS

PROJECT:
 WILLIAMS SCHOOL
 NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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