

**Pedestrian and Bike Safety Committee Meeting Minutes  
6/18/2009  
submitted for approval at July 16, 2009 meeting**

Board of Selectmen Meeting Room  
7:30pm

**Present:**

- Dave Atkins
- Bill Conley
- Suzanne Becker
- David Belcher
- Michael Kraft
- John Crehan
- Steve Harte
- Wendy Muellers

**Housekeeping**

A number of members were unable to attend tonight due to other meetings; Steve Olanoff and Nora Loughnane were at the Planning Board meeting. Paul Sicard and Eric Dubiner called to say they could not attend. Greg Agnew is still working out membership confirmation with the Board of Selectmen/Town Administrator.

Barbara Benway (from the Board of Selectman's Office) assembled helpful "New Appointee" packets containing information on town policies, open meeting law and a DVD for board members to watch. The packets included forms to be signed and returned to the Selectmen's Office.

David Belcher and Steve Harte need to connect with the PTO Presidents from Deerfield and Sheehan to confirm they will represent those schools; then the Town will add them to formal membership of the Committee and they can be sworn in.

Suzanne Becker reported that the Town is conducting a group swearing in ceremony for new committee appointees at the Senior Center on Tuesday, June 30 at 6:30 PM.

**Reports**

**Bill Conley** reported that he spoke with the Council on Aging at the Senior Center. They will put a notice about the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee in their next publication. The members he spoke to were excited that a Committee had been formed and appreciative that the Committee was seeking their opinions and input. They expressed similar concerns to what has been discussed at our meetings:

- they believe narrow, busy streets in town have made things less safe for bikes and pedestrians. Many of them do walk and bike and would like to see things improved.
- they asked what parts of town the Committee was looking at; answer: all parts of town
- they were particularly concerned about finding ways to get kids on bikes off the streets and onto paths wherever possible. Some mentioned how there are already some

paths such as behind the Starbucks on 109 to the High School/Middle School. They would like to see what is necessary to build support for more maintained paths off the roads to allow people on bikes to get around safely

**Suzanne Becker** reported that the Martha Jones Elementary School has formally joined the Safe Routes to Schools Program! Christine Morrow, who presented at our meeting two months ago, was onsite at Martha Jones to share many great ideas for encouraging walking, including ways to encourage and reward kids who cannot walk the entire way to school, but could still walk to a meeting point, bus stop, etc. They could record that part of their walking with a free pedometer as part of a competitive program in the school to track walking and reward classrooms for participation. Suzanne reported having shared the video we recorded of Christine's presentation and speaking with Principal Peggy Scott who was very interested in the program; Christine then came out to the school and got things started.

**John Crehan** reported a great turnout at the PMC Kids ride several weekends ago as hundreds of kids and parents rode bikes around the Martha Jones area in support of the Pan Mass Challenge.

**David Belcher** emailed a number of ideas to Dave in followup from the last meeting and reiterated his observations about the unique difficulties confronting the Deerfield School:

Dave,  
Here are some of my thoughts following last month's meeting.

Promotion:  
I agree that a walk Westwood event or some bike race in town might be a good way to promote what you are doing

Walk to Deerfield School:  
-paint a crosswalk where kids are supposed to cross over 109 to access the trail to the school  
-curb cut on both sides of that crosswalk-- currently there is none on westbound side  
-i do think the current trail represents the best place to cross for both neighborhoods involved  
-general observations: call me a paranoid parent but I really can't see most all students at the elementary school being of sufficient age/maturity to walk and cross over 109 without being accompanied by an adult. I am saying the crossing guard is really not enough. High Street is very, very busy at that time even if the traffic is so jammed it cannot go quickly. Its hyperbole but if we had a school off Route 1 we would not expect kids to travel it without an adult. The ability to go behind the town hall/police department is actually more dangerous (I still do it though) because of the blind spots and fair amount of traffic which travels through it.

Gay Street sidewalk:  
-i tend to think the main goal of a committee like the one you formed here should be to get some sort of cross town access. Focus on that one thing I say. Ancillary stuff is nice add-on and should be done where readily doable. I pick Gay Street because I think it might be more popular but I am not sure. A goal should be to facilitate walking to the Islington Station. I used to do that but it is quite dangerous to walk on Gay St in the morning.  
-maybe we could survey the abutters to see whether they are for or against it and why.

-on the cost side of things, I wonder about creative ways to install the packed gravel trails instead of concrete walks. I trust that is much less expensive and I suspect less intrusive for some reason to abutters. I acknowledge the ADA concerns but would want to confirm that a bit I'd think

**Bill Conley** observed that Deerfield Street itself has become a cut-through as motorists are looking for anyway to get around the 109 traffic backup; this means cutting through on Fox Hill and in many cases cutting through the parking lot behind Town Hall.

There was also a discussion theme of the impact of busy parents, going to work and everyone talking on their cell phones confronting the long traffic backups on 109. Even walking on the sidewalk near Town Hall feels dangerous for an unaccompanied Elementary School child.

**Dave Atkins** noted the Fox news video he posted to WestwoodBlog on Wednesday about the "walking school bus" idea that is a part of some Safe Routes to Schools programs--this would be especially noticeable on 109 and help address safety concerns at least on those days. Dave also reported emailing back and forth with a member of the Brookline Bicycle Advisory Committee--Tommy--who had a number of helpful suggestions for committees:

Dave:

The blog is great. Using video to help people understand the dynamic nature of ped/bike/auto interactions is key -- the world slows down for drivers... 35 mph feels really slow when driving but really fast when it's passing you buy on foot.

Some things I've learned:

- \* Be positive. Assume everybody is a driver. Not everybody would ever consider walking somewhere, but they all drive. Therefore, don't get ugly on motorists.
- \* Cars don't do anything. Drivers or motorists do. Likewise, bikes don't, cyclists do. Learn to use the appropriate noun when speaking -- remind people that it is in fact people making the decisions to steer their vehicles; the vehicles aren't making those decisions. Motorists can't see the crosswalk early enough. Cyclists don't have a safe passage at the intersection. Pedestrians are intimidated. That sort of thing.
- \* Do the easy things first. Make it SOP (standard operating procedure) for the town to review any construction or major repair with respect to pedestrian and bicycle access. If they're doing the work anyway, the additional requirements cost far less, and may be subsidized by the state or a regional planning group.
- \* Get pedestrian and/or bicycle money in the town's CIP (capital improvement plan). This ain't easy, but it guarantees progress.
- \* Develop a positive relationship with the DPW (Department of Public Works), both in transportation and in engineering. If these guys are on your side, you'll win constant battles before they even become battles. If not, you'll be fighting town gov't over and over again.
- \* Good luck with the police. If you figure out a way to get them well educated and on your side, do let me know.
- \* Any walk/bike to school program will pay massive dividends. So long as bicyclists are seen as couriers and latex weekend warriors, nobody will feel that their safety is worth actual money or time. However, if kids are involved, society steps up to protect them. Don't overdo it, but images of kids on the road is worth a fortune. Same goes for pretty girls.
- \* Where do you want the town's infrastructure to be when it's "done"? Figure that out. Then, call it a 25 year plan and figure out how to get there. Get the Transportation Board to support it. Get

the DPW to support it. Get the Selectmen to support it. Show it off wherever you can. This should grow up to be a 50 page document with maps and diagrams and explanations and so forth. Eventually, you get color prints and spiral bounded, and it suddenly is official, even if it isn't technically official.

\* Get MassBike to teach adults how to ride safely in your area. It ain't free, but it's important.

\* Get the police to teach kids how to ride safely in the school parking lot. It is free, and it's important.

\* Feeling adventurous? Look into zoning changes to require better pedestrian AND bike access and facilities. Sidewalks, bike racks, the works. This is tough -- it requires 2/3s vote at Town Meeting, but anything you get there will help the town evolve toward your 25 year plan "free" because the developer will be paying for it and the town benefits.

That's just a start. Lots to do!

- Tommy

**David Belcher** asked what the issues were with having sidewalks on Gay and Clapboardtree Streets. A great goal would be to one day have a sidewalk the entire length of Gay Street connecting Islington to High Street. In addition to massive cost, the follow issues are often cited as obstacles to such a dream:

- narrow parts of the roads do not have enough room for sidewalks
- stone walls would have to be moved or else have paths behind the walls as is done in some towns like Concord and Lincoln, but would have to address resident concerns about people walking across their property
- some houses are so close to road, not enough room to add sidewalk
- some trees are so close to road; would have to be cut down, etc.

At other meetings, Steve Olanoff has described the situation in Lincoln and Concord; Dave Atkins suggested it might be helpful to take some photos of those sidewalks-behind-walls to illustrate what is possible.

**Dave Atkins** related his story from weekend of attempting to walk around Islington. Crossing at St. Dennis crosswalk with wife and 3 kids, stroller...waited for motorists to eventually stop, but then a motorist tried to pass the stopped car on the left locking up wheels to avoid rear-ending the stopped car. Ironically, Joe Previtera (Conservation Commission) and his wife happened to drive by in time to witness the whole adventure.

Dave suggested we all write up our concerns in an email and send to him to compile in one big document as a start towards prioritizing problem/safety areas.

Steve Harte noted that Needham paints their crosswalks bright colors; wonder if we could cheaply do similar things. Dave recalled idea of a lighted crosswalk he had seen online--flashing lights installed in road triggered by pedestrian; supposedly can withstand a snow plow. Dave suggested Steve look into crosswalks improvements further and report back to the Committee.

John Crehan reported that he had researched rules that supposedly limit painting of bike lanes unless 4 feet or more of road, but could not find anything. Dave mentioned the idea of "sharrows"--a new technique of marking the pavement with chevrons and

bike logs to indicate that bikes are allowed, but without a dedicated lane. Point of such measures to increase awareness of bikes; not necessary to give up a whole lane, but just remind motorists of roads that are used by cyclists often.

John Crehan said we need a long term plan...need to identify a list of desired projects and goals to be “shovel-ready” when funding sources are available or opportunity appears.

Bill Conley talked about the need to be ready for truck traffic when Legacy Place opens and eventually, as Westwood Station is developed. Michael Kraft talked about/questioned how we could get truck restrictions in place as is done in Milton on Canton Street. Dave described the year-long dump truck convoy that went up and down Gay Street while the Fox Meadow development was underway. Bill said Conservation Commission chair and former fireman Joe Previterra has been pushing for truck restrictions for years and that we should talk to Safety Officer Paul Sicard (Paul emailed to say he was unable to attend tonight’s meeting). Officer Sicard has been very interested in the Committee and helpful in addressing some traffic issues such as cut-through traffic at the Coldwell Banker office at Gay and High Street...John Crehan reported how Islington Pizza is apparently a cut-through now for motorists who are stuck at the Washington Street/School Street light.

**Wendy Muellers** had a number of items to report...

- She related a story from last winter of how a resident walking her dog was hit by a police cruiser in the crosswalk on Pond Street at High Street. According to Wendy, the crosswalk is dark and long.
- The Town has chosen an architect for the new Library--Wendy suggested we talk to that person about including design ideas to facilitate Deerfield students having safe and easy access from High Street to the playing fields and school. Bill Conley noted that he is meeting with Tom Viti and the architect to talk about the moving of the Colburn school (Bill is on the Historical Commission) and could bring this up.
- The Westwood Environmental Action Committee is participating in a state “anti-idling” program. This program seeks to discourage busses and other vehicles from idling--generating pollution--and that perhaps there would be interest in combining efforts here to promote “clean air and safe streets.”
- Bus stops - at our last meeting, we examined maps of sidewalks and talked about the location of school bus stops. Deposits are due from parents by June 30 for the coming school year and now would be a good time to talk about bus stop locations. Several meetings ago, and at the formation of the committee, we talked about including the school bus coordinator...we should follow through on that. Consensus to talk with Officer Paul Sicard for advice on how best to be helpful in that process. One idea about bus stops--if there were better sidewalks and safer routes, fewer bus stops would be needed. Now, in some cases, there are multiple bus stops within sight of each other. Reducing the number of stops would also benefit motorists who would not be stuck behind the bus as long.

**Next steps for this Committee**

We need to develop some specific short term goals. What is our first deliverable to the town?

### **Action Items**

- Steve Harte to research options for making crosswalks more visible.
- John Crehan to research what issues are with respect to having bike lanes painted. Dave will send him some information he has to assist in finding out what steps we'd need to take if we wanted some kind of marking to be done on Gay/High/Washington Streets.
- Bill Conley to discuss crossing issues with Tom Viti (Library) and architect
- David Belcher to contact Deerfield PTO about serving on this Committee
- Wendy Muellers to follow up with Paul Sicard re bus coordinator issues
- Michael Kraft to find out what is involved in requesting truck restrictions on streets. Check with Joe Previtera too.
- All - write up your safety issues AND suggest some long and short term goals for the group
- Dave to write up these minutes and distribute membership list to group, compile suggestions and share with everyone before next meeting.

**Meeting adjourned 9:20pm**

**Next meeting is July 16, 2009, 7:30pm at 50 Carby Street**