

MINUTES
Westwood Pedestrian/Bike Safety Committee
August 20, 2009
7:30pm
50 Carby Street Municipal Offices

Present: Dave Atkins, Virginia Lester, George Lester, Phyllis Craine, Molly Polansky, Susanne Becker, Eric Dubiner, Ralph Buonopane, Michael Kraft, Bill Conley, Steven Harte, Wendy Muellers

The meeting opened with an update on a presentation made by members of the Ped/Bike Safety Committee at the most recent Library Planning Meeting. Wendy Muellers reported that Library Director Tom Viti had invited her and other members of the Pedestrian and Bike Safety Committee to come to a meeting of the Library Planning board to share their concerns in these early stages of planning and architectural review. Ralph Buonopane and Bill Conley also serve on the Historical Commission--involved heavily in planning due to the issues related to the relocation of the Colburn School building.

The purpose of the presentation--individual comments by members of the Ped/Bike Committee--was to see if the committee could make a contribution to bike and pedestrian safety as it relates to the new library being planned by the town. One member who attended the meeting stated that he felt the Library Trustees listened politely but were not especially interested in any real changes. It was pointed out that the proposed new library parking lot poses a problem because people walking from High Street or the Library building to the Deerfield School would have to walk through the parking lot. At the Library meeting Officer Paul Sicard (another Ped/Bike member unable to attend tonight's meeting) suggested that a sidewalk be placed along the edge of the new library parking lot. The Library Committee did not appear to be interested in adding a sidewalk, however it was suggested by a bike/ped member that since the town has already engaged a separate architect to study all of the town's buildings perhaps this architect could look at the library plans to see if a sidewalk is desirable and necessary based on their opinion.

After more discussion it was also suggested that the bike/ped committee make a formal **recommendation to the Selectmen regarding the need for safe pedestrian passage from the new library at High Street to the Deerfield School.** The rationale for this approach is that the Library Committee would be more receptive to recommendations from the Selectmen and that the role of the Ped/Bike Committee should be first to identify concerns and see what options could be suggested without planning specific implementation details best left to the people designing the facility. This idea was favorably received by the Bike/Ped committee and a motion was put forth [at the September meeting, no one could remember who moved and seconded

but the motion was affirmed without objection] to vote on this proposal. The motion was seconded, a vote ensued and the 1st motion passed without objection.

Fresh discussion ensued and a second suggestion was proposed to include in the **recommendation to Selectmen a request to add accessible bicycle parking to the library in addition to the safe pedestrian access**. The current bike racks are located at the entrance--at the top of some steps--and if there is an opportunity to locate bike racks at street level in the new design, this would be preferable. This idea was favorably received by the Bike/Ped committee and a motion was put forth [at the September meeting, no one could remember who moved and seconded but the motion was affirmed without objection] to vote on this proposal. The motion and seconded, a vote ensued and the 2nd motion passed without objection.

Discussion continued on another topic related to town-wide policy: the issue of painting white "fog lines" lines on the shoulder of the roads. One member observed that in the area of Pond Street, when lines were re-striped, they made the travel lanes wider and took away a shoulder area because the white line was made as near to the curb as possible instead of being measured from the centerline. There was consensus that whether or not there is a current policy, the Ped/Bike Committee should **recommend to the selectmen that the town make it a policy when striping the white "fog lines" on the edge of the road, to consistently measure the road width from the center line in order to provide as much space as possible on the sides of roads when it is available**. The potential extra space might not be enough for a full bike lane, but a wider shoulder in some areas could provide space for bikes, walkers, runners, etc. It is also a principle of traffic engineering that narrower road widths--"lane diets"--can encourage slower traffic as people in cars feel the road is narrower and may drive more slowly.

This idea was favorably received by the Bike/Ped committee and a motion was made by Bill Conley to vote on this proposal. The motion and seconded by Wendy Muellers, a vote ensued and the 3rd motion passed without objection.

Dave Atkins then reported on conversations he had with the town engineer (John Bertoreli, also a member of this committee unable to attend this evening) regarding cross walks in the Pine Lane/School Street area. Pine Lane is presently being resurfaced and re-striped and there are opportunities to make pedestrian friendly changes. Dave and John visited the area around the School Street playground and talked about possible changes. John offered that it might be possible to add a small section of sidewalk to the right of the driveway entrance to the playground--allowing the crosswalk to be shifted up School Street a few feet. This would shorten the crosswalk by making it less diagonal and would allow walkers to "land" on the new sidewalk instead of walking into the driveway as it was previously striped. John agreed to discuss this with the Town DPW. Officer Paul Sicard had also made suggestions

about doing some kind of striping to indicate how main traffic flow should go right at this intersection--apparently some residents of School Street report drivers unfamiliar with the area end up in the loop area of School Street because they do not realize Schaffer to Pine Lane is the way through...

Further down the street, Dave and John examined the Pine/Fairview intersection but concluded this area is more problematic because 1) curb cuts would be required to create a new crosswalk and 2) there are line-of-sight issues with any possible crossing. A resident's yard on the curve is a small hill that blocks the view from those cars attempting to turn from Fairview and also obstructs the view of drivers approaching from the School Street direction. Even if a crosswalk were created, it might be dangerous because cars approaching would not be able to see the crosswalk. Another issue with this intersection is the design of the roadway--as cars approach from School Street, it appears the road continues straight, but in fact, it curves to the right sharply. Drivers unfamiliar with the area are likely to stray into oncoming traffic, believing they are supposed to go straight. John agreed to see if any more prominent striping could be done to better indicate the through-traffic-path.

A report was also made by Michael Kraft who had investigated the feasibility of removing truck traffic from Clapboardtree Street. Research revealed that before such a change can be implemented the current truck traffic must meet state mandated activity criteria, and when that threshold is met, the traffic must be diverted to an alternate route. Clapboardtree does not meet either standard easily and so this idea was tabled.

Lastly Dave reminded the group that it needs to formalize its goals and suggested three areas of focus for the near future:

- Crosswalk enhancements - making a list of places where crosswalks are needed or not safe/effective
- Problem intersections - making a list of locations that present safety challenges
- Sidewalks - making a list of locations where sidewalks are desired or need to be repaired/maintained better

To this end Dave proposed that the Bike/Ped Committee prepare a report to be present at the next Selectman's Meeting that will include the three motions approved at this meeting of August 20, 2009. In addition to the three motions, the Bike/Ped committee will also include and update on Safe Routes to School and bike lanes. A deadline of September 3 was set for initial drafts to be submitted via email to Dave Atkins with a final report to be approved by the committee at the next Bike/Ped committee meetings schedule for September 17, 2009.

This suggestion was approved by the committee and the meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

The sections of the document to be drafted, for discussion at the next meeting are:

- Suzanne Becker – Safe Routes to Schools Update
- Eric Dubiner – Bicycle paths and other bike improvements/accomodations
- Wendy Muellers – Crosswalks
- Steve Harte – problem intersections

Following the meeting, Dave did some research into open meeting law and concluded that an email discussion of these topics might present Open Meeting Law problems--the idea of passing a document around from person to person by email might violate the Attorney General's guidance on open meeting law because it hides the process by which consensus was achieved and short-circuits potential public input. The Attorney General's guide specifically mentions how it is a violation of meeting law for a quorum of members of a public board to engage in an email discussion, although distribution of materials is allowed. Dave has proposed an alternative:

- 1) a public website has been created using a new "crowdsourcing" technology that will allow anyone to submit their ideas and see an ongoing vote/discussion of those ideas at <http://westwood.ideascale.com>
- 2) the section authors above should draft their submissions and send to Dave at least one week in advance of the next meeting (**new deadline: Wednesday, September 9 at 5pm**)
- 3) Dave will send out the draft document, along with a meeting agenda, along with the formal meeting notice by Friday, September 11. This will give everyone time to read the material and be ready to discuss it at the Thursday, September 17 meeting.
- 4) Dave will publicize this process--on the town website, via email, and through the Hometown Weekly and Daily News Transcript.