

Safe Routes to School Travel Plan Task Force – Meeting Notes: 22 October 2013 (Page 1)

In attendance: Tracy Bull (Chair), Principal Emilie Carter (MES) , Rick Greenier, Officer Rob Kelleher (MES), Principal Marsha McGill (JMUES), Sarah Ruffell, Matt Waitkins (NRPC)

Excused members: Bill Cummings, Leslie Rothman

Mrs. Bull welcomed committee members, calling the meeting to order at 3:32pm.

Mrs. Bull requested a motion to accept the meeting minutes from September 24th, 2013, made by Mr. Waitkins and seconded by Officer Kelleher. She made a request for any corrections or clarifications to the minutes. Seeing none, approval of the minutes was put to a vote. The motion carried 5-0-2, with Mr. Greenier and Officer Kelleher abstaining.

Mr. Waitkins explained that since the committee's last meeting, he had integrated in all corrections, clarifications, and recommendations received into the document. Today would be the committee's final opportunity for review in order to complete the travel plan. He further noted that, while there is a well-outlined action plan designed for implementation of the committee's findings, the document itself is advisory in nature.

Mrs. Bull stated that she had prepared a list of points shared with Mr. Waitkins primarily addressing relatively minor typographical and formatting adjustments. She indicated that she had a number of content points she would like to allow committee members to discuss.

Regarding the recommendation for a pedestrian connection and crosswalk along Hillside Terrace, Mr. Greenier had previously noted the potentially high cost involved in creating sidewalk all the way along that street, which has steep hills. Mrs. Bull stated that students have walked to school that way over the years both coming up to Baboosic Lake Road and continuing over to the crosswalk leading to School Street, as well as along the road through Last Rest Cemetery up to the same crosswalk. Students reside along Hillside Terrace, in the condominium complex located behind the Merrimack Police Department, and may further access that street from where it connects to Wire Road. A crosswalk may be desirable across Hillside Terrace at Baboosic Lake Road as well as near the roadway through the cemetery. Mrs. Carter noted that the street is heavily trafficked in the morning by both busses and vehicles during the high school commute. Mr. Greenier asked what other kind of pedestrian connection could exist besides a sidewalk, and Mr. Waitkins and Mrs. Bull explained that a paved area, level with the road, but marked with white lines affording pedestrian passage could exist at a much more cost-effective level than formalized sidewalks. Committee members agreed the

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recommendation for a pedestrian connection on Hillside Terrace should remain in the report with a notation that further study should be made at the time that particular interest is addressed in order to achieve the best solution.

Mrs. Bull explained there is reference at various points within the report to “Mayfair Lane”, noting that while it appears to exist at the juncture of McElwain and Woodbury Streets, proceeding south towards O’Gara, essentially in front of the School District’s (SAU) Administrative Office and Merrimack High School. However, there is no signage to that effect and she has never heard reference to that section of road by that name before. Officer Kelleher was also unfamiliar, as was Ms. Ruffell, who works in the SAU Office. It was noted that both the SAU Office and the high school have McElwain Street addresses, #36 and #38 respectively. Mrs. Bull shared copies of an enlarged map located online in order to better demonstrate the area. Committee members agreed that none present were familiar with that section of road ever being referred to as Mayfair Lane. Mr. Waitkins stated the Town would have official records and that he would investigate accordingly. Mrs. Bull expressed concern that while Mayfair Lane might be the official designation, possibly dating back when the area was residential before certain homes were reconfigured as offices, it would not be widely recognized as such, potentially making the report confusing in the future. She recommended investigating the situation for accuracy, changing reference within the report from Mayfair Lane to McElwain Street and offering a clarifying footnote if necessary.

Mr. Greenier and Mrs. McGill were excused at 3:55pm.

Mrs. Bull referred to the proposed sidewalks map on Page 38, noting that certain recommended pedestrian connections were not readily visible, such as Bishop and Woodbury Streets. She also asked if it would be worthwhile to offer a third color indicating recommended pedestrian connections versus actual sidewalk recommendations. Mr. Waitkins noted that, due to the limited size of the map on a report page, some street names may be obscuring the connections highlighted. He further noted that a correction needed to be made to an indication along Baboosic Lake Road. He will adjust the map with necessary corrections.

Mrs. Bull stated that recommendations for pedestrian connections, crosswalks and signage along the unimproved portion of O’Gara Drive and on School Street would coordinate well with anticipated paving projects currently slated on the School District’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). She recommended current dates for those improvements within the CIP be confirmed and footnoted accordingly within the travel plan. Committee members agreed. She further indicated she provided information to Mr. Waitkins in order to cross-reference infrastructure

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improvement recommendations within the travel plan to similar findings from the Merrimack Town Center Pedestrian and Trails Master Plan (iTrac Project, 2009). Those include pedestrian connections for the unimproved portion of O’Gara Drive, Woodbury Street, and DW Highway from Wire Road to Church Street. The NRPC helped create the iTrac Project report, which is the purview of the Town Center Committee to actualize.

Regarding the Action Plan recommendation that the SRTS Steering Committee be continued in order to assist with implementation of the various travel plan recommendations, Mrs. Bull inquired whether the committee would remain a subcommittee of the Town Center Committee (TCC) or become a function of the School District, most germane to the Mastricola Complex. It was agreed that, in order to fully implement the Safe Routes program within the schools, the committee should continue as a function of the School District, with representation from the TCC, and should be noted accordingly within the report.

Mrs. Bull explained that, during the course of the iTrac Project, discussion was held relating to future enhancements along what would become a continuous walking loop around O’Gara Drive, McElwain Street, and Baboosic Lake Road, once a pedestrian connection was realized on the unimproved section of O’Gara Drive. Many people, both school-affiliated and community residents, already walk or jog the loop for fitness and recreation, which is nearly one mile around. Distance markers could be erected, for instance, as could an outdoor fitness area along a portion of the unimproved section of O’Gara Drive, perhaps through volunteer efforts. Committee members agreed it would be valuable to include mention of these suggestions within the travel plan, particularly as educational pieces for walking and biking initiatives that might develop over time. Mrs. Bull and Mr. Waitkins will finalize wording within the text.

Mrs. Carter stated she could share an improved image of the Mastricola Elementary School sign for the cover of the report, which she would email to Mr. Waitkins.

Mrs. Bull explained that following today’s recommended revisions, the travel plan document will be complete and the next step will be to make public presentations of the committee’s work. Presentations are presently scheduled to occur before the Town Center Committee (TCC) and the Merrimack School Board on Monday, November 18th, 2013, beginning at Noon and 7:30pm respectively. Mr. Waitkins will compose a PowerPoint presentation of about 10 minutes in duration featuring highlights of the committee’s work and recommendation outcomes.

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Mr. Waitkins and Mrs. Bull will serve as primary presenters, but recommended that two other committee members help co-present, including a school administrator at each presentation to assist with questions that may come forward. Mrs. Carter indicated she could help present before the TCC, but is unavailable to do so before the Board that evening. She will contact Mrs. McGill to see if she is available. Mrs. Bull stated she would contact Mr. Greenier, as his leadership in observing annual walking and biking initiatives would be valuable at the presenters' table.

Once the presentation is prepared, Mr. Waitkins and Mrs. Bull will arrange for all presenters to meet in order to prepare accordingly. It is expected the presentation before the TCC would take place early in the agenda, following approval of minutes. Agenda position for the School Board will not be known until closer to that meeting date, but Mrs. Bull will advise committee members accordingly via email. She noted that all committee members are welcome and encouraged to attend either or both presentations if their schedules allow.

Mrs. Bull requested any comments or questions from committee members.

Mrs. Carter stated she believed the travel plan document was quite thorough and would serve well.

Mrs. Bull shared that Mr. Greenier and Mrs. McGill, along with support from the Merrimack Police Department including Officer Kelleher, successfully undertook the 10th annual JMUES observation of International Walk to School Day on October 9th, with just over 50 students participating. Photos and a brief article were picked up online by Merrimack Patch.

Mrs. Bull also shared that the SRTS travel plan project had been earmarked as an agenda topic for the joint meeting between the Town Council and School Board originally scheduled for Wednesday, October 30th, 2013. That meeting has since been postponed indefinitely by the Town Council. She stated that during the School Board's meeting on Monday, October 14th, Board members requested that Chairman Ortega issue a letter to the Town Council requesting they reconsider postponing the joint meeting and instead hold it in the near future. Mrs. Bull indicated she would keep committee members advised of any further developments via email, assuming the SRTS travel plan does come forward on that joint agenda sometime soon.

Mrs. Bull entertained a motion to adjourn, made by Mr. Waitkins and seconded by Ms. Ruffell. The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 4:17pm.