

## Moving Together: Getting Around A-Town



## Pilot Pedestrian Flag Program a Success

*by Jeff Maxtutis*

One of the highest transportation priorities for the town is maintaining and improving safety at each of its schools. Through Arlington's active participation in the federal Safe Routes to School Program, administered by MassDOT, the town's Transportation Committee (TAC) is continuously seeking measures to improve walkability and safety around schools.

In response to the town's elimination of Traffic Supervisor positions and reduction of hours, the TAC began researching lower cost measures to improve pedestrian visibility and enhance driver awareness. One of the techniques identified was to use pedestrian flags at crosswalks near schools.

Pedestrian crossing flags are generally florescent orange flags on wooden sticks that are placed in canisters mounted to existing poles at crosswalks. Approximately 10 flags are used at each location. Pedestrians simply pick up a flag when reaching a crosswalk, hold the flag out, and cross the street as they normally would. The flags are not a traffic control device (such as a Stop sign), but increase visibility and driver awareness.

Since they are not approved traffic control devices, we remind pedestrians that while drivers are required to yield to pedestrians in marked crosswalks, the use of flags in and of themselves does not eliminate a pedestrian's responsibility to first make certain that approaching vehicles are preparing to stop. Normal, prudent safety considerations still apply.

Pedestrian crossing flags have been used in several communities across the country, including locally in Lexington, with mixed results. Issues identified included: clarity of use, all flags on one side of the street, theft of flags, cost of replacing flags and lack of consistent monitoring. Acknowledging these concerns, the TAC proposed initiating a pilot pedestrian flag program at a limited number of locations near schools to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Funding for the pilot program was provided through a grant to the Arlington Police Department from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

Beginning in September 2011, the TAC installed pedestrian flags and canisters at three locations: Park Avenue Extension at Morris Street (Peirce School); Gray Street at Pine Ridge Road (Brackett and Ottoson); and Rhinecliff Street at Dow Avenue (Dallin School). TAC working group members and Safe Routes to School Coordinators conducted initial observations and pedestrian counts, and provided training at each location.

The Safe Route Coordinators at each school are responsible for monitoring the flag supply and assessing effectiveness and identifying issues with the flag program. To date, the response from parents and Safe Route coordinators has been overwhelmingly positive. Some parents have indicated that the flags are used not only on school days but every day of the week. Safe Routes coordinators have requested that the program be extended to other schools and locations. Only a small number of flags have disappeared.

The TAC recognizes that Traffic Supervisors provide the highest level of safety at critical crosswalks and cannot be replaced by flags. However, until staff levels can be restored, pedestrian flags can help increase pedestrian visibility and driver awareness at critical school crosswalks. The TAC will continue to monitor operations at the pilot locations and receive feedback from users. Based on the initial results, the TAC hopes to expand the program to additional locations in the summer/fall of 2012.

*Jeff Maxtutis is Co-Chair of the Arlington Transportation Advisory Committee.*



Pilot Pedestrian Flag Program training at Peirce School in fall 2011