



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts
730 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington, MA 02476
Phone: 781-316-3000

webmaster@town.arlington.ma.us

Community Relations Minutes 10/17/2008

Approved Minutes

Community Relations Subcommittee
October 17, 2008 – Meeting #8
-Minutes-

In attendance: Jeff Thielman, Subcommittee Chair
Ron Spangler, Subcommittee Member
Sue Sheffler, Subcommittee Member

Sue Mazarella, Chief Financial Officer
Bob Penta, Principal, Peirce School
Cindy Bouvier, Director, Health, Wellness, and Counseling
Roseann Casazza, President, Traffic Supervisors Union

Lauren Hefferon, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)
Eric Aranow, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)
Ted Packard, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)
Jeff Roth, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)
Scott Smith, Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

1. The minutes of the October 3, 2008 meeting were approved. **Motion by Ron Spangler, second by Jeff Thielman. Approved 2-0. (Ms. Sheffler joined the meeting immediately after the vote to approve the minutes).**

2. The subcommittee heard from each person in attendance on the issue of children biking to the elementary schools.

· Mr. Thielman began the meeting by stating that the School Committee does not have a policy that prohibits or permits children to ride their bikes to school. In the absence of a policy, the Superintendent and the principals are free to make rules regarding biking to school. The point was made that a town by-law prohibits bicycles on sidewalks. Principals have discouraged students to ride bicycles to the elementary schools while the middle school and high school permits students to ride to school.

· Lauren Hefferon said that there are children and parents who do cycle to the elementary schools. In the absence of a policy, children park bikes in the wrong place and sometimes don't bike responsibly. She said she met with former Superintendent Nate Levenson in 2005, and they discussed a "bike to school" pilot program at one of the elementary schools. Ms. Hefferon said elementary schools in Lexington, Belmont and Cambridge allow children to ride to school. She said that Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) encourages students to bike and walk to school.

· Scott Smith of the town's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) said there is a need to do more cycling education in the community. He believes some elementary schools in town do have safe bike routes to them. In such cases, he feels the school district should permit students to ride bicycles to school. He noted that two percent of car crashes in Arlington involve bikes, there have been no car-bike fatalities in 15 years in town, and there has been a 25% increase in bike traffic in Arlington Center in the three years from 2005 to 2008. (Note:~ This is based on actual counts done by volunteers in 2005 and 2008.) He noted that the town by-law prohibiting bicycles on sidewalks is more restrictive than the state law, which prohibits bicycles on sidewalks in commercial areas but permits them in residential areas with the requirement that cyclists yield to walkers, parents pushing strollers, etc.

- Eric Aranow, a Peirce School parent and member of the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC), said that prohibiting biking to school sends a mixed message because we want children to be fit, and biking is an activity that keeps children healthy.
- Ted Packer, an ABAC member with three children who are in or have graduated from Arlington Public Schools, tried to have his son ride his bicycle to the Brackett School, but the experiment did not work. He feels by having children bike to school they can learn good safety skills.
- Jeff Roth, an ABAC member, said he would like reasonable guidelines that provide children with opportunities to bike to school, with prohibitions of bike usage during recess.
- Bob Penta, Principal of the Peirce School, said he is in favor of cycling education. As a principal, he feels a responsibility for children from the time they leave their homes until they return to home at the end of the day. At the Peirce School, he does not see a space where children could safely enter or exit the school grounds on a bicycle during the morning or afternoon because cars occupy the drop-off areas. He noted that 60% of the children at the Peirce walk to school, an activity that keeps a child fit. Mr. Penta noted that the school is located on Park Avenue, a cut-through street, and is off of Route 2A, a recently improved street with a high volume of traffic. He added that vehicles in Massachusetts have doubled since 1980 and that he trusts cyclists much more than motorists. He added that today many children carry 20 pound backpacks to school; he can't imagine them riding a bicycle with such weight on their backs. Mr. Penta said he has talked about bicycle policies with his school council, and they seem to agree that allowing children to bike to the Peirce is not a good idea. He said he cannot speak for the other principals in the district.
- Cindy Bouvier, the Director of Health, Wellness, and Counseling for the Arlington Public Schools, said that through the "Great Body Shop" program the district offers bike education to students. In grades K-2, students are taught bike safety and helmet usage. She said as a former Bishop parent, she said there were safe streets to the school and less safe streets, depending on where children live.
- Rose Casazza, President of the Traffic Supervisors Union, said there are very few safe routes to the elementary schools because the town by-law prohibits bicycles and children riding bikes would be sharing the road with motorists trying to get their children to school. She said that the traffic supervisors have reported many times that children do not listen to them. For example, children have been asked to dismount from their bikes when crossing the street but fail to do so. She added the traffic supervisors cannot adequately cross all children with current personnel and need two more staff. Allowing children to bike to school would place a burden on traffic supervisors who have enough work to do. She said that sees many adults exhibit bad behavior while riding bikes, noting that she has seen adults talking on cell phone while riding. Ms. Casazza urged the school committee to adopt a policy prohibiting students from riding bicycles to school.

3. Next Steps on the Bike to School Issue - The subcommittee reached consensus on the following next steps:

- Ms. Sheffler said that no program can move forward unless it addresses the concerns of the traffic supervisors and principals are addressed. She also said the police will need to get involved in the discussion.
- Mr. Spangler said it would be wise to pilot a bike program to one elementary school. The school principal and representatives of ABAC could map out a safe route to the school and address other issues related to students riding bikes to school.
- The subcommittee discussed a pilot program that may include:
 - Specific routes with input from traffic supervisors, the police, and parents.
 - Increased attention from the police in traffic enforcement at the school with the pilot program.
 - Education on cycling safety.
 - Possibly some limitations on grade levels of those students who may ride to school.
 - Potentially a requirement that a parent or other adult lead groups of students to school on bikes, similar to the "walking school bus" idea.
- Mr. Thielman asked Mr. Penta if he could report on this meeting to the Principals and to Superintendent Bodie. He said he would and would ask if any principal wanted to host the pilot program. The subcommittee will ask the administration for a report on the progress on this issue at its next meeting.

4. Space usage for Parmenter/Crosby study

- The subcommittee asked Ms. Mazzarella to ask Ms. Bodie to send Town Manager Brian Sullivan a letter in response to the motion passed by the full School Committee on June 24th directing the Superintendent to determine whether the projected space needs of the school district could require use of part or all of the Parmenter and Crosby schools. The subcommittee suggested that we review a draft of the letter before it is sent. Ms. Mazzarella agreed to follow-up on this request.

5. Ms. Mazzarella distributed the most recent financial reports she has from the after-school programs. The subcommittee agreed to review the reports and discuss at a future meeting.

6. There was no new business.

7. There was no old business.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m. **The next meeting is set for Monday, November 10th at 5:00 p.m.**

Non-School Committee member attendees at today's meeting

Name	Affiliation	Email	Phone
Bob Penta	Principal, Peirce School	rpenta@arlington.k12.ma.us	781.316.3736
Cindy Bouvier	Director of Health, Wellness & Counseling	cbouvier@arlington.k12.ma.us	781.316.3570
Scott Smith	Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)	scottsmith@alum.mit.edu	
Rose Casazza	Arlington Traffic Supervisors	rosecasazza@verizon.net	781.643.7122
Lauren Hefferon	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	Lauren@ciclismoclassico.com	
Eric Aranow	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	eric@reuse.com	(781) 646.3030
Ted Packard	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	Ted.b.packard@gmail.com	
Jeff Roth	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	jrothim@yahoo.com	781.316.1736