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Community Relations Minutes 11/13/2008

Approved December 16, 2008

Community Relations Subcommittee
November 13, 2008 – Meeting #9
-Minutes-

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

Kathleen Bodie, Interim Superintendent
Deb D'Amico, Principal, Hardy School

Roseann Casazza, President, Traffic Supervisors Union
Joey Glushko, Planning Department, Town of Arlington
Scott Smith, Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

Lauren Hefferon, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)
Eric Aranow, Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)
David Watson, Executive Director, Mass Bike
Judy Phillips, Childhood Obesity Specialist
Dan Chadwick, Hardy parent
Andrew Conway, Arlington resident and parent
Phillip Veatch, Thompson parent

Excused: Ron Spangler, Subcommittee Member

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

1. The minutes of the October 17, 2008 meeting were approved. **Motion by Sue Sheffler, second by Jeff Thielman. Approved 2-0.**

2. The subcommittee heard from several attendees on the issue of children biking to the elementary schools.

· Mr. Thielman began the meeting by stating that the principals met on October 24, 2008 and spent part of the meeting responding to issues raised regarding students biking to school at the October 17, 2008 Community Relations Subcommittee meeting. While the principals do not believe it is safe for children to bike to school in Arlington, they agreed that it is a parent's decision about how their child gets to and from school. The principals feel elementary students riding bicycles to school is particularly dangerous in light of a town by-law that prohibits bicycles (other than tricycles) on sidewalks. The principals felt that having bike racks on school property sends a mixed message: "We don't think it's safe to bike to school, but here's a place to park your bike". If students do bike to school, the principals feel strongly that bikes should not be allowed on school grounds during school hours because of overcrowding. Instead, the children would have to park their bikes outside of school property. Possible locations for parking bikes included bike racks at public parks adjacent to the schools or along a fence bordering the school's property.

· Lauren Hefferon said that she, Eric Aranow and other members of the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC) were working on a pilot program involving 1-2 elementary schools. She would like the school department and Superintendent to be open to the pilot program proposal. Ms. Hefferon said that the group appreciated the principals' position that it was up to parents

to determine how their children got to school and back each day. Ms. Hefferon said the group took exception with the decision not to have bike racks on school property, saying it sent a mixed message to parents and students. She stated that children are taught to care for their bikes, and parking a bike at a bike rack was safe and orderly. Having 10-12 bikes locked to fences and poles around the school grounds was unsightly and could be unsafe. She feels there are ways to make biking to school safe.

- David Watson, Executive Director of Mass Bike, a non-profit organization that promotes biking in the state, said that the statement from the principals that it was a parent's decision as to how a child got to and from school is a positive step. He said that bicycles are vehicles under Massachusetts state law, and added that not having a bike rack on school grounds sends a mixed message to children and parents.
- Eric Aranow presented the broad outline of a pilot plan. Mr. Aranow made the following points:
 - The Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Program should include bicycling because Arlington schools struggle with car traffic at drop-off and pick up times, Arlington has the most-used bike trail in the country, the program aligns with many of the town's sustainability objectives, and bike to school programs have been successful in other towns, notably in Salem, a densely populated town according to ABAC.
 - ABAC's goal is to reduce car traffic around the schools, teach children and parents bicycle safety and responsibility, encourage physical activity, promote "green" practices, promote alternative transportation, and increase awareness of cycling as a mode of transportation in the town.
 - ABAC is not proposing that small children would ride to school unaccompanied by adults, ride on unsafe streets, nor ride bikes on the playgrounds.
 - ABAC is not proposing a bike to school program that would place more responsibilities on administrators or increase budgetary demands on APS.
 - ABAC said it would like to propose one or two pilot programs that are carefully managed. The pilot programs would require active parent participation, a high number of low-traffic routes in the area, and schools where stakeholders are willing to work together to make this work.
 - The program would require that children in grades K-5 only be able to bike to school with an adult.
- Mr. Aranow said he and his group would like to develop a more detailed pilot proposal, including specific routes to school, in the next 3-4 weeks, with a presentation to the subcommittee in mid-December. He said his group would recruit members of the police department, Park & Recreation Department, a member of the Board of Selectmen, and other staff to come to the meeting to hear the presentation.
- Deb D'Amico, the Principal of the Hardy School, said that the principals are agreed that it is not their job to tell parents how their children should come to school, but they do have serious safety concerns about children riding their bicycles to school in Arlington. She said the principals were relying on work done in 2006 in which Mass Bike said that Arlington did not have safe bike routes to schools because of infrastructure challenges (sidewalk restrictions, crowded roadways in the morning when children are coming to school). She would be very interested in seeing which routes to Hardy are deemed safe by ABAC. Ms. D'Amico noted that many of the streets around the Hardy are cut-through streets.
- David Watson said that he was not the Executive Director of Mass Bike in 2006 but was quite certain that it was not Mass Bike's position at that time that it was unsafe for children to bike to elementary schools in Arlington. He said that the position of Mass Bike today is that Arlington does have the infrastructure to support a safe bike route to some elementary schools.
- Rose Cassaza said she met with the traffic supervisors earlier today and all of them are opposed to children riding bicycles to school because the roads are too dangerous.
- Scott Smith of the town's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) said the most recent data indicates that only 2% of all car crashes in Arlington involve bicycles. He added that it would not be wise to wait until the infrastructure is perfect before beginning a bike to school program.
- Joey Glushko from the Town Planning Department said the Board of Selectmen supports alternative means of transportation and encourages bike usage and education. She said the town is very interested in creating a more bicycle-conscious culture. She said there are solutions to the issue, including a 1-2 block "no-car" zone around a school willing to pilot a bike program.
- Sue Sheffler said she worked on the Safe Routes to Schools Program as a Bishop and Ottoson parent. She said there are two challenges that must be addressed in the pilot proposal – a) infrastructure challenges, and b) enforcement. She noted that there are not enough police in town to enforce traffic laws, and that the police officers change shifts at 8:00 a.m., when children are going to school.
- Interim Superintendent Bodie said she is open to the pilot proposal but cautioned that she wants to hear how the bike route will be made safe. She is interested in a very detailed, concrete proposal with specific bike routes, allowances for infrastructure challenges, and an indication of how the advocates propose that children will ride bicycles to school given the town's by-law prohibiting bicycles on sidewalks. She said the Community Relations Subcommittee was an appropriate place to hear the pilot proposal.
- The subcommittee set a meeting date of Tuesday, December 16th at 4:00 p.m. Lauren Hefferon and Eric Aranow said they would take responsibility for recruiting other public officials to attend the meeting.

3. Security Issue referral from the full School Committee

- Mr. Thielman said that the School Committee recently modified Policy ECAB (Access to Buildings). The policy reads: "All areas under the care and control of the school department shall be closed at 11:00 p.m. unless the hours are extended by the written

consent of the School Committee. Anyone found in these areas after hours shall be considered to be trespassing.”

- When the policy modification was adopted, the School Committee voted to ask the Community Relations subcommittee to “review and make recommendations in synch with its security update.”

- Ms. Bodie said that Arlington High School is spending funds from a grant to repair and replace 6-7 door areas in the high school. She acknowledged that the high school can be entered very easily in several locations. The high school principal is open to having grates in the school that cut the building off when an athletic contest is taking place in the gym, for example. Ms. Bodie said that Mark Miano, the Supervisor of Maintenance and Custodians, does not seem to favor this idea. She said she is working with Mr. Miano and Mr. Skidmore on ways to make Arlington High School more secure and would be able to provide a security update to the full School Committee at a later date. She asked the committee to give the administration time to work through various issues related to school security before presenting its report.

4. There was no new business.

5. There was no old business.

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m. **The next meeting is set for Tuesday, December 16th at 4:00 p.m.**

Non-School Committee member attendees at today’s meeting

Name	Affiliation	Email
Deb D’Amico	Principal, Hardy School	ddamico@arlington.k12.ma.us
Joey Glushko	Planning Department, Town of Arlington	jglushko@town.arlington.ma.us
Scott Smith	Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)	scottsmith@alum.mit.edu
Rose Casazza	Arlington Traffic Supervisors	rosecasazza@verizon.net
Lauren Hefferon	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	Lauren@ciclismoclassico.com
Eric Aranow	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	eric@reuse.com
David Watson	Executive Director, Mass Bike	david@massbike.org
Phillip Veatch	Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee (ABAC)	phil@veatchconnors.net
Judy Phillips	Childhood Obesity expert	jcophillips@gmail.com
Andrew Conway	Arlington parent	ahconway@mac.com