

Newburyport School Committee

Policy Subcommittee Meeting

Date: 21Sep2007

Time: 12pm

Location: Superintendent's Conference Room

Attendees Gordon Bechtel
Mark Wright
Andrea Jones
Kevin Lyons (absent)
Mayor Moak
Approximately 8 parents

Please bring: •

Topics

Num	Topic	Responsible
1.	Transportation Safety	all
2.	FY2009 Policy Goals	all
3.	Plan for Benchmarking	all

Notes

Transportation Safety Discussion

Gordon Bechtel welcomed everyone to the meeting and began by saying that the Policy Sub Committee was hosting this discussion of transportation safety on behalf of the School Committee and at the request of the Mayor. The goal of this discussion is two-fold. First, the city and the School Committee recognize the importance of having an open discussion on this topic. To this end, Gordon Bechtel said that the meeting will use an open conversation format. The second goal is to brainstorm ideas for improving transportation safety, write these down, and deliver them to the School Committee and the City for further action. Mr. Bechtel set expectations by stating that it is unlikely for this meeting to produce any “promises” for action.

Several parents stated the need for a broader meeting on the topic. Meeting at noon in the Superintendent's Conference Room does not provide an opportunity for a large segment of the community to participate. They asked the Mayor to look into hosting a larger community forum on the transportation safety, at a time when more working adults can attend. They also suggested that the larger meeting be better advertised, perhaps through the school systems telephone messaging system.

Mark Wright said, and Gordon Bechtel agreed, that the school district's responsibility for a student begins when that student sets foot onto a school bus, or onto school property. The District's purpose is education, not transportation. However, the School Committee recognizes the importance of safe transportation, and wants to be a part of the City's overall solution for safe student transportation to and from school.

The group brainstormed many ideas, as follows:

- *Build and/or repair sidewalks in critical locations for pedestrian safety.* Many parents recognized their and their kids' desire to walk or bike to school. It's good exercise, and many of the children prefer it to riding the bus. Unfortunately, there are several walking routes that are unsafe. The group specifically mentioned the following:
 - Ferry Road, between I-95 and Moseley Ave.
 - Moseley Ave (?) from Famous Pizza to Ferry Rd.
 - Hale St. from Squire's Glen to Low Street
 - Virginia Lane

The group recognized that all citizens of Newburyport would benefit from improved pedestrian and bicycle safety, not just students.

Mayor Moak gave an overview of his plans for this coming year's capital improvement budget. He plans to dedicate a large chunk to sidewalks, including the construction of a new sidewalk on Ferry Rd. He recognizes this location as a key area for improving pedestrian safety. Another large piece of the capital budget will be used for general sidewalk construction and maintenance.

- *Look into the Safe Routes organization for help in funding sidewalk construction/repair.* This organization has federal funding to help with the construction, promotion and use of sidewalks. <http://www.commute.com>.

- *Seek assistance from local businesses to help fund sidewalk repair/construction.* The group noted that construction of new commercial buildings should require proper sidewalks. This is often termed “mitigation funds.” Perhaps the NAID organization could help, especially in the Hale St. area, because of its proximity to the industrial park.
- *Operate a radio advertising system on-board school buses.* Triton School District currently operates such a system. The operator of the radio system, pays the District for the opportunity to use the District's buses. This money supplement's the District's budget for transportation. In Triton's case, the supplement is large enough to avoid having parent's pay fees. Mark Wright emphasized that the advertising system does not cover the whole transportation budget; it merely supplements it.

<sc> The group agreed that radio advertising in busses was worth bringing to the School Committee as part of it's annual discussion on transportation fees.

- *Promote and educate safe walking.* The group noted that promotion and education of students and parents on safe walking would help improve the safety of walking students. Gordon Bechtel relayed a note sent by Cathy Hill, a physical education teacher in the District, about the group [WalkBoston](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of walking in and around Boston. The group has programs for safety training, including the “Walking School Bus” program, and it has educational curriculum about walking for teachers to use in the classroom and/or gym.
- *Set up a safe walking program with parent volunteers.* Several parents expressed interest in this idea. It couples nicely with the WalkBoston programming, and is a way for parents to get involved. It was noted that the School Committee would probably not be the best group to set this up. Parents and PTOs are likely to be a better host organization. Allison Balentine volunteered to help out.
- *Add traffic calming mechanisms to busy roadways.* The group agreed that much of the safety problem rests with the driver. Poor, inattentive driving is dangerous, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists. Examples include the tragic death of Trista Zinck, and the recent rear-end accident in front of the Nock Middle School during student pick-up. In addition, many members of the group described personal experiences of bad driving by drivers using cell phones.

Traffic calming mechanisms can help in this area. They induce drivers to pay closer attention, and they slow traffic. Gordon Bechtel mentioned that WalkBoston has information on traffic calming. Mayor Moak agreed that this is a possibility, but noted that several common techniques (such as speed bumps) are legally restricted in their use.

The group noted that traffic calming mechanisms would be very beneficial in front of the Nock. The recent accident demonstrates the dangerousness of the situation. Cobblestone slow down strips on Low St. as cars enter the Nock area might help. Anything to focus the driver's attention on the fact that they're approaching a school would help.

The group also noted that the police presence at the Nock during drop-off and pick-up definitely helped with driver behavior. Every day, it seems, they pull two or three drivers over. It's definitely a help, but police can't be there all the time.

- *Place reflectors or cones along bike paths and road shoulder, where there's*

room. Reflectors could screw into special threaded sockets inserted into the pavement during the summer, and be removed during the winter for plowing. Reflectors would be far enough apart to allow easy parking for cars. The cones/reflectors would provide a visual barrier for drivers, clearly delineating the areas for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- *Utilize the Evergreen Golf Course as a walking/biking corridor for students.* This would help get students off of Ferry Rd. Initiate discussions with Evergreen's management.
- *Carpooling.* Gordon Bechtel wondered if anyone was using carpooling from their respective neighborhoods. The group noted issues with carpooling, including logistical issues when kids were sick. The group suggested a carpooling "bulletin board" for prospective carpoolers advertise. <gbechtel> Investigate the possibility of the District hosting a carpooling "bulletin board" on its web site. Gordon Bechtel cautioned that the District would not be in a position to coordinate carpooling logistics, however. It would be up to the carpooling parents to arrange the logistics for their own carpool.
- *Inclusion of sidewalk construction and repairs in a debt exclusion.* Expanding on the earlier theme that better sidewalks improve everyone's ability to walk, not just students, the group noted that this could improve the chances of passing a debt exclusion which includes sidewalk funding. Mark Wright noted that everyone needs to begin talking about this topic with voters of all ilks, not just parents. That will help a lot to pass a debt exclusion, should one be offered.

Set Policy Subcommittee Goals for FY09

After the transportation discussion, the Andrea, Mark and Gordon met briefly to discuss the Policy sub committee's goals for the year. Gordon noted the following "mandatory" goals, which are set out in the School Committee's policies:

- Produce the Superintendent's FY09 Evaluation
- Complete a yearly review of the School Committee's policies
- Produce and complete a District and School Committee Self-Evaluation

The three agreed that the following would also be goals for the year:

- Complete and begin using the Benchmark
- Assist the Superintendent with the completion of a new five-year Strategic Plan
- Continue the periodic review of administrative policies, as necessary

Set Plan to Establish Benchmark

Andrea, Mark and Gordon quickly set up a short-term plan to move the Benchmark ahead in its preparation:

- Plan to discuss which five communities Newburyport will benchmark itself against. Upon further reflection, the five communities the group selected in FY07 may no longer be appropriate. We'll discuss more appropriate communities in our next meeting. <all> Come prepared to discuss which five communities we should benchmark against.
- <ajones> Bring in materials on Health surveys to the next meeting. The group will review and recommend quantitative and qualitative measures for the Health

component of the Benchmark.

- <klyons> Bring in materials on Academic performance to the next meeting. The group will review and recommend quantitative and qualitative measures for measuring academic performance in the NPSD.