

Safe Routes to School Task Force

Meeting minutes

Nov 15, 2019

Attendees: Jenn Martin (Zervas/Chair Newton SRTS), Margaret Albright (School Committee), Dana Hanson (Mayor's Office), Andreae Downs (City Council), David Koses (City of Newton Transportation Coordinator), Shawna Sullivan (DPW), Shane Mark (DPW), Liam Hurley (NPS), Regina Moody (NPS), Dawn Fleming (Newton Police), James Farrow (Angier), Melanie Hildebrandt (Bowen), Ali Dunn (Cabot), Barry Elliot (Countryside/Brown), Mike Halle (Franklin), Anne Cedrone (Horace Mann), Barbara Nestle (Mason Rice), Kirsten Smith (Mem Spaulding), Alissa Abrams (Peirce), Caitlin Cusick (Ward), Sarah Hirzel (Peirce/Bigelow), Alissa Abrams (Peirce), Joana Canedo (Bigelow/Chair Green Newton School Connections), Alicia Bowman (NNHS/president Bike Newton), Nathan Phillips (NSHS).

1. Welcome and Introductions

Newton safe Routes to School has a new website: www.newtonsaferoutes.org. Please check it out and make suggestions. Up until now, all the meetings have had packed agendas. Please send ideas for the next ones - speakers, topics, general discussions.

2. Updates

James Farrow on list of school site improvement projects.

This is a work in progress and feedback is welcome. The goal is to have a database of projects provided by people in this group. So far, the majority of projects is from Franklin. Please send your project ideas.

Jenn will circulate the current list by email and will keep this item on the agenda for next meetings going forward. Eventually we should have a list of completed projects as well.

James will propose a template email that could be sent to PTOS about project suggestions.

The emphasis should be on identifying the problems well, on what people see as unsafe - not the possible solutions, but what the issues are. Traffic engineers will propose the solutions..

Liam asks to prioritize the list, as everything cannot be done at one time, and there are budget restrictions.

Liam Hurley - updates

- 35 bike racks were installed in 16 schools.
- There's going to be a ribbon cutting ceremony of the Newton North covered bike shelter on 11/22 at 3pm.
- Horace Mann specific safety issues (narrow driveway entrance) are to be addressed by NPS, along with other building improvements.

3. Bus registration

Liam Hurley and Regina Moody

- NPS is looking to change the bus registration system this year. The proposal is to move the registration online and streamline the process, thereby eliminating mailing packets, applications, checks and passes. Move out of paper, have a more orderly system that would help to manage capacity and routes.
- The system would be tied to the Aspen parent portal where parents can see if their child is registered and print the bus pass, etc. There will be prompts for parents to move through the registration process so only families who have to pay the fees pay them (elementary students do not have to pay, for instance). Families would select the bus route and bus stop for their child during the registration process.
- Payment would be done through MySchoolBucks, which is already used for food services. Still figuring out how to deal with credit card fees and how to cover those costs of almost 4% per transaction. Having NPS cover those costs might be worth the administrative efficiency. MySchoolBucks accepts Visa, which UniPay Gold (used for other NPS fees) does not.
- Regina adds that her office processes many refunds; there is a way to easily process refunds through MySchoolBucks.
- The goal is to open registration earlier, starting in May. There would be an early bird special from May 1st - June 30th, for \$350 (like it is today). After that the fee would rise to \$400. This would not apply to new families who move in. Moratorium on bus registration from mid-August to mid-September, then reopen registration dependent on space. There are generally 1000 new registration in that period.
- Reminder that:
 - K-5 bus is free.
 - 6th grade is free if you live over 2 miles; \$350 if under 2 miles.
 - 7-12th is \$350 regardless of distance
 - Family cap of \$700
- There should be ample notice sent to families about registering earlier and moving online. NPS understands not everyone has a computer, so plans to have laptops available in the Transportation Office and host open office hours for assistance.
- First NPS needs to communicate proposal to the School Committee for approval and then come up with the strategy to communicate with families.
- NPS is still discussing consequences for students who do not have bus passes. They do not want to need to remove kids from buses who do not have passes, as the threat of this creates stress among students.

Jenn asks the group to email questions and recommendations so she can collect our responses for Liam.

4. Snow Removal Overview and Q&A

Shane Mark, Director of Streets and Sidewalks, City of Newton Department of Public Works. It's his 5th winter season in Newton, he came from Columbus, Ohio.

It is important to understand the approach on deciding what to plow, as of course it is not random. There's lots of thought process and effort put on the decisions.

City ordinances related to winter and snow are in a newly created brochure. Main ones:

1. **Business districts** (4 units or more of housing and business): Required to clear sidewalks within 12 hours. Enforced by the police. Fine \$100 first offence. \$200, second and \$300, third.
2. **Residential or non-business.** Until last year there were no fines for offences and lots of residents did not do it. There was only a notice on the door asking to shovel. Notices were sent on a complaint driven basis (through 311) The new ordinance has associated fines now and DPW will start enforcing: 1st offence - written warning, 2nd offence, 50\$ fine. It is still complaint driven via 311.
3. Two of the main complaints are: 1) why some people have to shovel if the city is going to clear some sidewalks; 2) when the city plows, they send the snow right back in the recently cleared sidewalk.

How the priorities for clearing sidewalks are set:

1. Safe Routes to School - kids should be able to go to school in the easiest safest way possible. Routes are planned so the kids go where the sidewalk clearing committee believes it's the best way for them to go (where there's a crossing guard, or no obstacles, etc.)
2. Key school bus stops - list of key bus stops is not based on volume, but on other factors, such as visibility and area for students to wait. Regina Moody identifies these.
3. High pedestrian areas - village centers, churches, etc.
4. Key transit routes - MBTA bus stops, commuter rail and Green Line
5. Bridges - both state and MBTA-owned
6. City-owned property - If the City is going to hold residents accountable for shoveling then the City should do the same for their property.

How to decide the routes? A sidewalk clearing committee is set up in August/September and looks at the maps weekly, starting with schools. Committee includes: key DPW staff, SRTS representative (Jenn was there this year), police (Officer Fleming or Sgt Lee), NPS transportation (Regina Moody), ADA coordinator Jini Fairley, representatives from the City Executive office. All are advocating to what they feel is right. The base maps have all current NPS students identified with different color dots for the school level.

Questions:

- **How to ask for enforcement?** Call 311 or access it online. Note that the mobile version of 311 does not have a button for snow - these categories will be added before the first storm.
- **How to deal with buffer zones?** These are part of the review.
- **Who enforces what?** Police enforce the overnight parking ordinance, snow dumping, and snow removal from the business districts; DPW enforces residential sidewalks.
- **Can there be more enforcement in specific areas?** DPW responds to 311 calls - complaint driven. Enforcement after the storm is done by the same people who have cleared at night.
- Where should residents (and their contractors) leave the snow when shoveling? Back in their property - not on the sidewalks and right of way, nor on the street. Enforced by police.
- **Can one plow to the parking spots instead of sidewalks, as sometimes the snow mound is too big?** No, mainly because of drainage, the catch basins should be open when snow melts, so need to do curb-to-curb. (Also there are complaints when it's not done curb-to-curb).
- **What happens when residents shovel and more snow falls?** Unfortunately it's part of winter - residents need to shovel sometimes several times, the same way as the city might plow several times a day.

About the City service:

- City plows 81.49 miles of sidewalks; 148 locations merit hand clearing (MBTA, Commuter Rail, Green Line, School Bus stops, Crossing Guard locations, bridges).
- City hires many contractors, that are trained to go slow.
- Speed impacts plowing: if the plower goes slow, there's no blast of snow of the plow and to the curb.
- City plows many other locations in addition to sidewalks. Funds for snow are already very high and they cannot do everything.
- Levels of service would need to change and it would be much more expensive to add more sections.
- The winter brochure will be available online, it will be sent out in the mayor's newsletter, councilors' lists and will probably be sent along with utility/tax bills by mail. STRS will share digital version among members. NPS will encourage principals to send it home to parents with students.

Challenges

- Trash collection day: people should be encouraged to clear a spot for the carts when they remove snow from their sidewalks and driveway. The carts should not be on the street, nor on the area where people walk, nor on top of snow mounds.
- Vehicles blocking driveway aprons
- Narrow sidewalks and other obstacles (hydrant, utility poles, etc.)

Send comments on the **snow maps** by Nov 22. Jenn will be the keeper of the list of suggestions regarding school snow maps and she will send all the comments to Shane. He will send a team to evaluate suggestions, but might not be able to address all of the demands, as there are lots of factors involved.

Jenn notes that we all would like to work with DPW and Mayor's Office in the best way to get this to schools. SRTS will address problem areas within schools and explain to parents through email communication, at PTO coffees, etc.

Upcoming

Upcoming Meetings: Dec 13, Jan 10, Feb 7, Mar 13, Apr 3, May 8, and June 5.

All meetings are on Fridays at 9:30 a.m. at the Waban Library