



SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday May 14, 2007 at 7:30 a.m.
City Hall Conference Room A

The Safe Routes to School Committee met on Wednesday, May 24, 2007 at 7:30 a.m. at City Hall Conference Room A.

I. Call to Order: Christina Westfall brought the meeting to order at approximately 7:35 a.m.

II. Roll Call: Present were City Council Representatives Ken Smith, Chairman of the Traffic & Safety Committee, City Councilors Christine Dwyer and Ned Reynolds, Debbie Finnigan, Traffic Engineer, Detective Chris Cummings, Police Commissioner Gerry Howe, Police Department representative, Robert Lister, Superintendent of Schools and Clay Hayward, School Board representative, Christina Westfall and Jonathan Bailey, Traffic & Safety Representatives.

III. Acceptance of the Minutes:

It Was Voted on a Motion made by Councilor Smith to accept the minutes of the May 3, 2007 meeting. Seconded by Jonathan Bailey. Motion passed.

IV. Election of Officers: Chair & Vice-Chair – The Chair turned the meeting over to Debbie Finnigan. Debbie Finnigan asked for nominations.

Nomination of Christina Westfall for Chair made by Jonathan Bailey. Seconded by Councilor Reynolds. Motion passed.

Nomination of Jonathan Bailey for Vice-Chair made by Councilor Smith. Seconded by Gerry Howe. Motion passed.

Debbie Finnigan turned the meeting back to Christina Westfall.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Mission Statement – objectives (short and long term) – Christina Westfall stated this includes all methods, biking, walking or skateboarding of getting to school.

Gerry Howe asked about the anti-skateboard Ordinance in the downtown area?

Detective Cummings responded there is no roller skating or skateboarding in the downtown area and will bring a copy of the Ordinance at the next meeting.

Councilor Dwyer referred to parents using cars and not necessary an anti-car but a Safe Routes.

Clay Hayward stated we need to think not only of children but also adults using the bike paths. He observes adults always riding their bikes on the wrong side of the street while the children obey the laws. We are here for children K-8 but feels adults need education of rules of the road.

Detective Cummings stated by educating the kids when they see their parents violating rules, they are extremely quick and anxious to correct them.

Councilor Dwyer asked whether this Committee is about routes to school or something bigger than that, which is generally community bicycling, pedestrian activity. Is this about bicycling and pedestrian safety including safe routes to school or make this specifically safe routes to school and have another committee take on traffic & safety of pedestrian and bicycling and feels we need to decide on this. Stated that Mr. Corrigan referred to very specific focus on safe routes to school not bicycle/pedestrian safety and how surprised he was there were not more school representatives present.

Debbie Finnigan followed up stating this was put together so that ultimately make is safe for children getting to school, if this is something different it needs not to be called safe routes to school. In order for us to get the federal funding that's what this needs to be as Mr. Corrigan explained at our last meeting was essentially this is what it's supposed to be, if it's something different, it needs to be called something different and not sure how we would go after improvements for the school for K-8 kids. This may not be the committee we need to have, maybe a different committee. Primarily the function of this committee is to make sure children get to school safely, parents walk the dogs while walking with their kids, or older who are retired have them watch the kids walk to school, ride to school whatever the case may be.

Councilor Reynolds feels from the perspective of the grant money and determination of what we submit is eligible and whether we get grants will be judged on whether it applies to safe routes to school and need to keep this in mind, it is for safe routes to school. Feels this committee should be the hub and vehicle for broader effort, these issues are inseparable. Parents are an integral part of this program as they have to allow their kids to walk/bike and would be a mistake to wall ourselves in because of the name of the committee. Feels we are on target for our grant application and what we propose for the money.

Christina Westfall stated we have long term and short term goals and feels the short term goals should focus on the purpose of this committee as it stands and long term goals should be the community.

Jonathan Bailey referred to connecting with individual schools, parent associations within the schools and asked if we need to focus on this next step? How do we try to build the schools and parent associations and neighborhood groups into this.

Councilor Raynolds asked if it would be productive to invite the Chair of the Neighborhood Committee along with heads of PTA's from each school to our next meeting?

The Chair referred to Item C. on the Agenda Formation of the School Sub-Committees and felt it would be appropriate to discuss this then. And to now continue with discussion of goals for our purpose here.

Councilor Smith stated the first short term goal should be a bicycle safety program, perhaps building on the one that the resource officers have. Another on-going one could be to look at the safety of the actual paths for walking/bicycling, etc. and how kids are getting to school.

MOTION made by Councilor Smith that the short term goals should be a bicycle safety program perhaps building on the one the resource officers have and to look at the safety of the actual paths for walking/bicycling. Seconded by Councilor Raynolds. Motion passed.

Superintendent of Schools, Robert Lister suggested having a representative from this Committee to meet the principals of the elementary, middle and parochial schools and stated they have numbers on how many children ride bikes to school and how many walk. We have bi-weekly meetings with principals. You'd be surprised at how many kids do not walk to school and how many do not ride bikes to school. One of the reasons so many SUV's pull up to the schools is because parents are worried about their kids walking to school, whether it's traffic and safety or who is out their riding around looking for kids. We meet on a regular basis. Another thing we could discuss and work with Chris Cummings and the other SRO's who in the past work with bicycle safety, helmet safety, provide helmets to kids. The number of kids walking or biking to school is disappointing. Out of 524 kids in the middle school, 26 walk and 12 ride bikes.

Councilor Smith feels this should be another goal, not sure whether short or long term, pick a percentage, 20% that would reduce by 20% the number of students that arrive to school by vehicle.

Councilor Dwyer stated we need a clear mission statement.

MOTION made by Councilor Dwyer to promote a bicycle safety program, safety for children and adults focusing on increasing the number of children walking or biking to school. Seconded by Councilor Smith. Motion passed.

B. Guidelines of Committee – terms – **MOTION** made by Councilor Dwyer for a three-year term. Seconded by Councilor Smith. Motion passed.

C. Formation of School Sub-Committees – One for each school (K-8)

Councilor Dwyer thought it a good idea to have a meeting with the principals prior to formation of committees.

Debbie Finnigan stated in prior discussion we want to take a cue from them but if we don't know what that is, we should talk about it, the thought was having a committee from each school, as something at Dondero may be different from something at Little Harbor.

Clay Hayward felt it is important that you incorporate the principals on a meeting and then go from there. It is also important that we don't have all these subcommittees involved as he doesn't want to make other groups feel we are micromanaging. If one committee for all the schools and communicate with all principals and with their people feels this would be the best way to handle it.

Gerry Howe stated it is a whole different culture between elementary and middle and the high school. Involvement is much higher in the elementary schools and feels we have to incorporate those cultures in our efforts. What works in the middle school doesn't work in the high school, there will be some carryover to the high school even though K-8 now.

Councilor Reynolds stated it was mentioned at the last meeting there is a lot of experience to draw on and he contacted the Maine Coordinator of the Safe Routes to School program. Received a message back that Tobin Scipione would contact him. Ms. Scipione made a proposal to come to our June 11th meeting and give us an orientation and help us figure out what our training needs might be at a cost of \$187. Councilor Reynolds presented her proposal to the Committee.

Councilor Dwyer suggested the initial step is to meet with the principals and learn what their immediate interests are before bringing anybody in. We should ask the principals what we would like them to be prepared to talk about at the meeting and we should also have some things to talk about with the principals

Councilor Smith asked Bob Lister if the Principal from St. Pat's was included?

Bob Lister responded the principal is not invited to their meetings and yes, there is a lot of communication with them.

Bob Lister felt it would be better rather than a representative of this group come to our meetings, maybe the principals as well as from St. Pat's be invited to your meeting. Have them come prepared on how many kids walk or ride bikes and for them to have a sense of what this Committee's purpose is and where it's headed and receive information from them. 7:30-8:30 a.m. is a good time for them and will invite them.

Councilor Reynolds suggested distributing the information to the principals in advance.

The Chair stated that John Corrigan will be present at the next meeting.

Ned Reynolds stated that John Corrigan is the New Hampshire coordinator but also fairly new and suggested taking advantage of someone who has a number of years experience with this program, to help us implement workshops, no disrespect to John Corrigan.

The Chair suggested giving John Corrigan a chance and an opportunity to do the job and see how it works out and at no cost.

Jonathan Bailey referred to the tremendous amount of resources that we have already referring to the Kiwanis giving helmets away, had a reduced version of the bike rodeo because the school nurses are no longer involved, not as well utilized as it might otherwise be due to the cycle of how many volunteers, how much time and energy going into it.

The Chair stated that she has informally spoken with some of them and are very interested in this program and how could they assist us. Stated she felt the packet is important to get out ahead of time so they can review it.

Debbie Finnigan will distribute to the principals

Bob Lister asked that they be sent to him and he will distribute.

Ned Raynolds stated there are resources on the Web and asked Debbie to annotate it.

Debbie Finnigan stated there is other information she will send along.

Councilor Smith asked if it was possible to be copies of what the SRO's use for their training portion?

Detective Cummings stated he draws off from a lot of different resources, rules of the road, helmets, how to prevent injuries, going out with a friend or buddy to be safe, make sure to check with mom or dad before taking off, all lumped together, pulling from all kinds of resources.

Detective Cumming stated education is great, kids at that age are sponges for information. Each school has a safety patrol (kids help people crossing street into school) and suggested incorporating these kids giving them some sort of responsibility in this is another step. Each school has a student council where members get together doing posters for ice cream social or whatever else, posting in the school. Detective Cummings thought maybe a ride a bike to school day for a week, not just a day. Physical Education teachers do jump rope for heart and get the whole school into it, going after physical fitness portion, bring them in and have them push it in their classes would also get them worked up. In talking to different principals in different schools, there is an outlook on competition amongst students. Tally how many miles they ride or walk to school over a month or however we want to create that and come up with a reward, they will create that habit of walking or riding, getting kids involved also gets parents involved, an SRO, principals involved, nurses are involved, and the kids aren't involved, kids love to be involved, want to be part of this and want some sort of responsibility. We would be remiss if we don't take those kids who are walking and biking to school and not get their input. What do they want, what do they want out of this, how would you benefit, how do you think we could get your friends and family to join in on this. We need to give the kids responsibility and get them involved in developing the program.

Debbie Finnigan followed up stating she was at a seminar in D.C. one of the pieces was Safe Routes to School and the coordinator from a very small town that has one school and a store and they got their program to work by having every kid coming from 20 miles away were all bused in and these kids needed community service to graduate. They have a K-8 school and three times a week they dropped the kids a mile away from school and

the 8th graders, as part of their community service, was to make sure that the K-7 kids all walk safely to school together. Not only did the 8th graders get their community service, but got them involved in their program. It was just 3 times a week but was a big success.

Detective Cumming referred to Steve Shulton at Little Harbor takes classes out every once in a while and the whole entire school goes out and get their exercise by walking this one mile loop. He is huge in physical fitness and gets these kids involved and suggested bringing him in, as somebody that goes above and beyond.

The Chair stated that Dondero School has a walking program, there are resources out there and the kids are the ones that are going to make it happen agreeing with Detective Cummings.

Councilor Dwyer suggested asking the Principals to come to us with the folks at their school and bring their ideas. The problem of congestion at the front of the Middle School a quick win solution is not to drop of kids there but drop them at some drop off points and have them walk.

Councilor Smith commented that is a great point and also asked Steve Parkinson and Debbie Finnigan if there is anything we already have on the books within the CIP or anything planned that we could also apply for these grants? The same question for Dr. Lister is there something they are looking for in their budget that could be peeled off that?

Steve Parkinson responded from a Public Works aspect we would have to look at what we currently proposed in order to get any kind of grant funding we would have to have a plan from this Committee as far as what this project would do for your Safe Routes to School. We will look into this and report back at the next meeting.

Dr. Lister will look at this, put some thought into it and have conversation with the Principals and address it at the next meeting.

Councilor Smith stated the reason for his question is that the RFP's will come out the end of this month and we already had some pre-work done for the 1st RFP, we could funnel it into it.

Debbie Finnigan stated that part of it is education and getting the kids involved, so how do we come up with an RFP that includes getting the kids involved, whether it be bike or walk to school week or have some sort of incentive at the end, the class that wins gets an ice cream sundae or something. It may be an easier RFP to put forth but maybe something we could organize quicker with all the resources we already have in place.

Gerry Howe referred to previous minutes that between 10-30% is for non-infrastructure Referred to what Chris was talking about and he thinks it's critical is institutionalizing this whole program and you do that by getting everyone involved, the Principals, parents and the kids, the kids have got to own it. If the kids don't own it and the schools don't

own it than infrastructure is moot, you can build all the infrastructure you want, but if it's not used, the culture isn't there to participate it leads to nowhere.

Councilor Reynolds stated maybe a question to ask John Corrigan it's a guideline of the program for the federal money that 10-30% can be reserved for non-infrastructure and 70% for infrastructure and ask him if that split is something that he is responsible for at the state level? Not sure that our first grant request would have to reflect that split and perhaps we could think about a grant request that is all about startup and designing a program, educating children about safe walking practices, training crossing guards. Perhaps we could put together a proposal that is all about that in terms of his level, his million dollars has to reflect that breakdown. We are in the initial stage.

The Chair stated that is an excellent plan.

Councilor Dwyer stated however, she feels these are all good points, but we do need to be brainstorming with the Principals about infrastructure and wonders if infrastructure that involved kids would like to think about and how can we think about the role of kids in public design or do something to strengthen the infrastructure? Thinking crosswalks or places where kids or enhancing crosswalks where kids get involved in designing, something that makes the kids have part of the infrastructure in the City. Something along Myrtle Ave. to New Franklin.

The Chair referred to Detective Cummings mentioning safety patrol, currently within the school building itself, the safety patrol goes into the classrooms and walking the kids to buses. Growing up, safety patrol did crosswalks with flats and big poles and neighbors living adjacent to crosswalks let us store poles on their porches so it was an entire community effort.

Dr. Lister referred to having a good idea about an after school program, we write grants and the kids don't come, we ask them why they don't come and they say well the adults say decide we have ping pong, pool, whatever and the kids don't want that. Dr. Lister suggested having some kids come to one of these meetings. They know what the obstacles and issues are around town as they ride their bikes or walk around town and we should ask them.

Jonathan Bailey suggested asking them what they don't like about it as well and feels we need to do this with the parents.

The Chair referred to the survey going to the parents, one should go to the kids as well asking them how they get to school, what would they rather do, that type of thing.

The Chair wanted to clarify Item C meeting with the Principals, asked if we are going to invite them to the June 11th meeting?

Dr. Lister will invite the Principals to attend the June 11th meeting at 7:30 a.m.
Councilor Smith asked if we had finalized the short and long term goals?

The Chair responded we finalized the Mission Statement in and of itself, believes we had the bicycle safety program as a short term goal and focusing on increasing the number of children walking or biking to school as a short term goal. The long term goal was to reduce the percentage of kids going in cars.

The Chair stated insomuch as we have the Mission Statement proper but do not have short and long term goals should we carry the short and long term goals over to the next meeting after meeting with the Principals and let the Mission Statement stand?

Councilors Dwyer and Smith agreed we need to show that we are prepared and organized.

Debbie Finnigan stated that part of it is to build some sidewalk, maybe not a mile sidewalk, but there may be a path that you know people are walking in because of the dirt in the grass, you could apply to finish that few feet that you need to get it safe.

Detective Cummings mentioned one think you need to think about with sidewalks, we are trying to get kids to either ride their bike or walk, if a kid is walking on the sidewalk and another kid comes along with his little brother with training wheels, mom's pushing a stroller, that sidewalk is going to get awfully crowded and someone is going to get hurt. If the Police see a person riding on the sidewalk especially downtown, "off the sidewalk". In the long run we need to look for in trying to develop is some sort of bike path on the side of a road that is stripped, the busy roads (Sagamore and South for example) if we could have every 200 yards or whatever a small sign with a flashing yellow light on it that says "Bike Path - School in Session" during school hours to warn motorists there will be kids riding on the side of the road so they will be aware. We have a huge influx of people, about 30,000 people that live in Portsmouth and that number can jump to over 100,000 in the daytime that have no idea about the SRTS issue and we are pushing kids to ride their bike and walk. We have to notify these motorists and let them know there is a higher influx of kids riding their bikes, we encourage them but want them to do it in a safe way.

Councilor Dwyer suggested another question to ask the Principals is the thoroughfares the kids do use that they are most concerned about. There is a population of kids as Detective Cummings stated that use Sagamore/South to get to school and is a commuter route.

Detective Cummings stated are a dozen roads he could name that are going to be issues, in that area, Miller, Sagamore, South even Junkins Ave. because you have the Middle School and Little Harbor all together. Even if we could do a half mile circumference around the school to have signage, we do not need it on Richards, Lincoln or others as they are off the beaten path, Miller and Sagamore in particular and South, kids will be riding their bikes in nice weather, people going to Rye, No.Hampton going up that route to the beach, those are the area you need to be concerned about and we need to look at for signage, etc. The smaller side streets even by New Franklin, Dennett and Woodbury

Ave. On Woodbury Ave., I would not want my child riding a bike there, way too many cars everywhere, but this may be an area we want to look at to really design, and maybe able to tap into the State as well.

Councilor Raynolds stated they have heard from parents on Woodbury.

Detective Cummings stated from a Police Officer's standpoint, feels that directly our attention to that particular area because of the high traffic volume is so much more important for infrastructure than dealing with the sidewalk or whatever else. We have crossing guards around especially in the Little Harbor area, that is so congested and so dangerous for cars, pedestrians, bicyclists and that's the reason why this Committee is here and is the biggest area that needs to be dealt with.

Councilor Raynolds suspects that there may be the state's website and/or national website that we might find links to successful grants and suggested that Debbie Finnigan could do that.

The Chair asked the plan is to have the grant ready or finalized by June 11th or ahead of time?

Councilor Smith responded just to have ideas, the RFP is not until the end of this month and stated that Councilor Raynold's idea is great.

Gerry Howe asked Chris Cummings if we increased bike riding by 10 or 20% would there be enough bike racks?

Chris responded "probably not".

Gerry Howe stated that's infrastructure, that's quick, visible.

Councilor Dwyer stated a fun thing for kids to get involved in.

The Chair thanked the members for coming and bringing great ideas to the table and feels this will be successful for the entire community not just this task before us.

Gerry Howe introduced himself apologizing for missing the first meeting and is here representing the Police Commission, Jack Kelly asked that he represent the Police Commission and is pleased and happy to be here.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully submitted

Elaine Boucas
Recording Secretary