

Pedestrian Infrastructure Advisory Committee to the Darien, Connecticut, Board of Selectmen

Draft Minutes

Date: October 6, 2015

Place: Darien Town Hall, Room 119-B

Present: Terry Duffy, Susanne Handler, Joanna Garrett, Beth Harmon, Ted Hawkins, Pat Morrissey, Holly Schulz-Amatruda, and Bert von Stuelpnagel.

Absent: Jennifer Morgan,

Guest Speakers: Betsy Haggerty-Ross, Chair Board of Education (BOE), Michael Harman, Christa McNamara, Katie Stein, and Callie Sullivan, members BOE and Michael Lynch, Facilities Director, Darien School District (District).

This was a regular meeting of the Pedestrian Infrastructure Advisory Committee (PIAC).

Chair Beth Harmon called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm. The minutes from the meeting of September 29th were approved as drafted.

Vice Chair Pat Morrissey outlined to the BOE members the mission of the PIAC and explained why we were interested in pedestrian and bike safety issues for Darien Schools. BOE members were invited to provide comments or observations on this topic. Betsy stated that the BOE does not have the day-to-day operational responsibility for the schools, the District does, and stated that the Board of Education serves as policy makers. Additionally, the BOE and School District do not own the school buildings, land, or infrastructure. The town retains ownership of these assets while the BOE and District are responsible for the "care, custody and control" of the buildings and property.

Mike Lynch recently did an informal survey of bicycle riding to schools and reported that all schools had between 8 to 12 riders except Ox Ridge where biking to school is too dangerous. For safety, pedestrian traffic is largely separated from bus and auto traffic at each school. The BOE was asked if they would like to see more kids walking to school. Callie replied that each school has a limited number of kids that can walk due to distance and the limited number of sidewalks and crosswalks. Christa reported that she has never been approached by a parent requesting a reduction in buses. Many more parents are asking for additional buses not sidewalks or crosswalks. Holly opined that she thinks many kids would love to be able to ride their bikes or walk to school than are unable to do so currently. Betsy reminded the committee that putting in new sidewalks and crosswalks lies within the purview of the town's responsibilities, not the BOE and District's.

As to crossing guards, the BOE doesn't hire, supervise or pay for crossing guards. The guards are in the Selectmen's Budget and the police department exercises management over them. Questioned about Board's perception about any need for additional signage to alert road traffic about the presence of a school, they said the BOE certainly would not object to additional signage and crosswalks at schools. Several PIAC members have previously noted that there is little to no school warning signage, especially around Holmes, Royale, Ox Ridge, and Tokeneke which are located on fast moving state highways.

Holly brought up the BOE's policy on busing and the "annual parent scramble" that comes with the publication of bus routes and schedules. BOE members acknowledged that this year's implementation was fraught with more difficulty than usual because a new computer system caused problems. However, this is another instance of an operational activity with which the BOE does not get directly involved. Michael Feeney, CFO of Darien School District, runs the show here. To change the current bus transportation policy, the Superintendent would have to create a study with recommendations for changes then send this forward to the BOE for approval. Christa asked if the PIAC has a problem with Darien's current school transportation policy. Pat responded that the committee does not have a problem with the policy but we are examining all avenues relating to pedestrian and bike safety throughout the town and are hoping to get input from all sectors of our community.

Callie suggested that the committee look to New Canaan and other Fairfield County communities to see what they are spending on sidewalks, signage and crossings. She also mentioned that our State Rep, Bob Duff, should be contacted to see what state resources could be brought to bear.

Holmes School Report Terry Duffy presented his clear and concise Holmes School hotspot findings with map notations and selected 8 X10 pictures. West Avenue and Hoyt have good sidewalks but the triangular intersection of these two streets is a nightmare to navigate. A major thoroughfare, Christy Hill has no sidewalks or space for bikes so it is unusable to the families living along it to walk or bike to school. Many neighborhoods abutting West and Christy Hill have no crosswalks to safely assist walkers crossing to take the sidewalk to schools or town. Terry recommended that committee members drive to Glenbrook to see what progress has been made to improve village walkability.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03

Respectfully submitted by Ted Hawkins, Clerk