



PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE

Merrimack School District
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Minutes
June 12, 2006

Present: S. Heinrich, F. Rothhaus, R. Hendricks, S. Barnes, L. Rothhaus (arrived late) and School Board liaison J. Thornton

Also Present: Kyle Annutto, Police Captain Mark Doyle, School Resource Officer M. Murray, Carol and Wayne Morrison.

S. Heinrich called the meeting to order at 7:37 PM.

Committee Vacancy

S. Heinrich told the Committee that Kyle Annutto had responded to the announcement about filling the vacant seat. K. Annutto had been invited to the meeting and was present to meet with the members. K. Annutto provided a resume for Committee review and responded to Committee questions.

S. Heinrich made a motion to nominate K. Annutto to fill the vacancy. Second: F. Rothhaus. MOTION PASSED 4 – 0 – 0. K. Annutto was sworn in the School District Clerk and joined the Committee for the rest of the meeting.

Meeting Schedule

The tentative meeting schedule for the next year was presented to the members. It was noted that the meeting dates and locations for July and August are tentative and subject to change.

Traffic & Parking at MHS

S. Heinrich gave a brief overview of the traffic and parking situation to K. Annutto for the upcoming school year:

- Students can purchase a parking permit for \$25
- Seniors get first preference, juniors enter a lottery for permits for any remaining spaces
- The budget for the upcoming year eliminated the parking lot attendants, but left \$1 in that line.
- Lots of students without permits park near the tennis courts. There are some issues about this.
- Rumors among students are that no one is going to buy permits and everyone will park anywhere because there will be no enforcement.

Captain Doyle and Officer Murray provided a brief overview from the Police Department's perspective.

- There are more cars parking at the high school than there are parking spaces.
- When parking lots are full, students parking in other areas often present problems.

The officers asked what the Committee was trying to address and how the Department could help.

S. Heinrich stated the Committee wanted input on ways to improve traffic flow and ways to improve the parking situation. Some of the potential solutions he mentioned were better signage, better enforcement of parking rules and building additional parking lots.

M. Murray stated that some ideas include making the traffic one way at the high school, installing legal handicap parking signs, not allowing cars to move at dismissal until the buses exit, and having the buses going behind the high school exit by the Superintendent's Office instead of enter from that direction.

R. Hendricks asked if the school could make O'Gara Drive one way or if it had to be a Town decision and he further asked what authority the Police had on School District property. He suggested that parking should be limited to Seniors and possibly some other designated students. He also stated that parking permit fees and enforcement policies should be approved at the School Board level.

M. Doyle told the Committee that the portion of McElwain Street that is one way for an hour in the afternoon was done by a vote of the Selectmen. He stated that traffic restrictions have to be approved by the Selectmen (soon Council) in order for the police to enforce them – even on private roads – which O'Gara Drive is. (L. Rothhaus arrived at this time.) S. Heinrich called for a break in the discussion.

Service Recognition

L. Rothhaus presented Wayne and Carol Morrison with a plaque to recognize their combined 15 years of service to the Committee. W. Morrison thanked the Committee for this award.

Traffic & Parking at MHS (continued)

M. Doyle told the Committee that, though O'Gara Drive is private property, the Police have some enforcement capabilities for specific traffic violations: unreasonable speed, parking in a legally marked handicap parking space, reckless driving/driving to endanger, fire lane violations, etc. He noted that the handicap parking spaces in the visitor's lot near the high school main entrance are not legally marked.

M. Murray stated he would like to see a one-way traffic pattern through "the bowl" at the front of the school in the morning and no car traffic in the bowl at dismissal. He further stated that towing must be used for parking violations.

S. Heinrich stated the Committee has been looking into traffic and parking issues at all the schools over the past several years. He said that the Committee wanted to make a recommendation to the School Board on improving traffic flow and parking at the high school. In addition, the Committee wants to come up with a viable enforcement plan.

L. Rothhaus stated the problems at the high school would now be worse due to the cutting of the parking lot attendant positions. She agreed that towing needed to be instituted and that towing fees should not be reimbursed. She stated that she felt that students driving to school saved the district in bussing costs and that she thought that additional parking lots or spaces should be created.

S. Heinrich noted that some spaces are lost to snow storage in the winter due to the way the lots are divided and that creates additional parking problems.

R. Hendricks suggested that he thought hangtags were a good idea. He further suggested that the tags and the parking lots be color-coded.

S. Heinrich stated the main concern at this time would be to prove the need for reinstating the parking lot attendants.

M. Doyle stated the Police Department supports the reinstatement of the parking lot attendants. He noted since the decrease in calls to the Department for theft, vandalism and other crimes committed in the parking lot since the institution of the parking lot attendants. He further stated that dismissal occurs right around shift change and calls to the high school often result in overtime – which is currently a budgetary issue for the Department.

S. Heinrich asked M. Doyle about towing. M. Doyle stated that, when the Police have a car towed, they accept the liability for damage that occurs to the vehicle as the result of the tow so they inspect the vehicle and document damage and contents before the tow. F. Rothhaus noted that, if the School has a car towed, the District would need to accept the liability. He suggested that applications for parking permits include a statement that absolving the District of liability if a car is towed. Members suggested this was a good idea but that often the cars that were illegally parked did not have permits, and thus, their drivers would not signed a liability waiver and that someone under 18 may not have the authority to waive liability. Members suggested that signs be installed to note: “Not responsible for any damage or loss if a vehicle is towed.”

S. Barnes asked the police officers to provide data regarding calls before and after the institution of parking attendants.

M. Doyle suggested that any parking policy would need to be enforced consistently in order to be effective.

R. Hendricks noted that while permit fees could be raised to cover the cost of the parking attendants, he also noted that the District gains income from the fines imposed. He suggested that fines should be kept, but that towing is instituted if fines aren't paid in a timely fashion.

S. Barnes suggested additional consequences if a car is towed, the driver would also lose the parking permit or not be allowed to participate in Senior activities.

Members decided to invite the high school administration to their next meeting on June 20th and developed a list of questions for which the administration would be asked to provide answers:

- How many permits were issued last year?
- How much money has been collected in permit fees?
- How many tickets have been issued?
- How much money has been collected in fines?
- How much was supposed to be collected?
- How many cars have been towed?
- How many permits have been revoked?

K. Annutto suggested that local towing companies are not willing to tow cars due to a potential loss of future business.

J. Thornton suggested that, if the Committee was going to recommend the parking lot attendants be re-instated, they should be sure to show a balance between the parking lot attendants and the revenue parking permits and fines generates.

M. Murray asked about changing the traffic pattern and improving traffic flow at dismissal. He suggested that something had to be done to reduce the number of places where cars can exit onto O’Gara Drive. Members noted that getting the parking lot attendants reinstated was time critical to any other recommendations that the Committee might make. However, several ideas were suggested:

- Remove some or most of the barriers in the middle of the parking lots and reduce the number of openings through which cars can exit
- Add guard rails at the Baboosic Lake Road entrance to O’Gara Drive to prevent cars from parking there
- Add guard rails along the road near the tennis courts to allow parking in those areas, but create an entrance to them
- Temporary gates which are closed until the buses pass,
- Having administrators present in the lots to help direct traffic
- Build additional parking lots.

S. Barnes suggested that the Committee prepare two reports: a parking attendant recommendation now and a parking lot/traffic pattern recommendation, with possible costs and timelines by the end of the year. She further suggested that the Committee ask the Police Department its plan for input on the traffic pattern recommendation.

K. Annutto stated he wanted to be sure that any policy addressed illegal parking as well as school parking policy violations.

L. Rothhaus reminded the Committee that she wanted the recommendation to mention some of the other ancillary parking needs:

1. Practice fields for soccer are at Reeds Ferry School resulting in students who want to

bring a car to school in order to practice.

2. Some after school activities end after the late bus resulting in students who want to bring a car to school in order to get home.

In addition, she asked J. Thornton to provide the Committee with copies of the current parking policies. She further asked S. Heinrich to get maps of the school campus.

S. Heinrich thanked M. Murray and M. Doyle for their attendance at the meeting.

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

However, R. Hendricks told the Committee that the Memorial Garden at the middle school had been completed. He suggested that members should be sure to visit it.

L. Rothhaus made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: R. Hendricks. MOTION PASSED 6 – 0 – 0.

S. Heinrich adjourned the meeting at 9:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich