

Traffic Safety Advisory Committee
August 25, 2008
Minutes

Present: Chief Douglas - Chairman
Bob Courage
Gil Archambault
Dave Wheeler

Absent: Bill Ruoff
Bill Parker
Mike Putnam, Board of Selectman Representative

Kathryn Parenti, Recording Secretary

1. Roll Call vote required by the BOS.

NEW BUSINESS:

3. Discussion: *Request from the Board of Selectmen regarding the reduction of the speed limit on Wellesley Drive.*

F. Douglas began by stating that due to several members being absent, there was no quorum, the discussion would be unofficial and they would not be able to vote on the issues. He began by stating on Westchester Drive, south of the railroad tracks, there is a 25 mph sign on the right side of the road. He stated this was discovered after John O'Brien brought the Wellesley Drive issue to the attention of the BOS. He had gone through the ordinances to see when the BOS reduced the speed in this area. He then had conversations with Bill Ruoff and Guy Scaife and determined they should replace the 25 mph sign with a 30 mph sign since there was no ordinance. He noted the police have been on Wellesley Drive quite frequently for various reasons. He did notice that in the late afternoons there are a large number of children out playing near the edge of driveways and that number is even greater than on Ridgefield Drive and Valhalla Drive. He said John O'Brien of 81 Wellesley Drive had sent a letter to Gary Daniels, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen. He noted there was also an email from Amy & Donald Densmore of 35 Cypress Road and from Jean Godlewski of 54 Wellesley Drive regarding the reduction in the speed limit on Wellesley Drive. This correspondence indicates support for the change in speed limit.

J. O'Brien stated his main concern was for the number of children who live in the neighborhood. He noted on Westchester Drive there are a couple of houses with a large number of children. In his area, there are 9 children living in 4 houses and many of them have steeply graded driveways that children will run down and into traffic. He stated his wife cares for a deaf child with Down Syndrome and that is a big concern for him. He noted junior drivers torment him when they drive by because he asks them to slow down and they are the group that violates the speed limit the most. He noted F. Douglas came out with patrol officers and that seemed to slow drivers down. He stated many parents sit at the edge of their driveways supervising children to make sure they are not hit by cars travelling by at high speed.

B. Courage wondered if lowering the speed would solve the problem.

J. O'Brien responded the statistics show that the majority of offenders are junior drivers who are texting or using cell phones.

B. Courage stated he understood J. O'Brien's concern but wondered if they would adhere to the posted speed limit. He did agree this was a safety issue; if they reduced the speed, would that increase his comfort with the road? He stated the harassment issue was something the police department would need to look into.

J. O'Brien replied the harassment has come to a stop but he did feel there was a couple of miles per hour over the limit that are allowed, bringing the speed up to 33 or 35 miles per hour. He felt an inexperienced driver would not adhere to that speed limit. He felt the reduction of speed to 25 mph would cause drivers traveling at 35 mph to be in violation.

D. Wheeler asked if any other signage would be helpful, such as "Children at Play" or "Deaf Child".

J. O'Brien responded the only signage in the neighborhood is on Westchester Drive and two signs on Wellesley Drive, that he asked to be posted. He noted there was a 25 mph sign on Crosby Street, near the nursing home and a sign for a handicapped child. He felt D. Wheeler's suggestion would be good but he mainly wanted to lower the speed limit. He thought the fact that there are bus stops on Wellesley and Westchester should be a factor in this as well.

F. Douglas agreed there is a problem and he has spent a lot of time trying to resolve issues. He felt enforcement would play a part but noted everyone cheats. He stated on Nashua Street the speed limit was 30 mph but people have a tendency to speed. He noted in the court system, based on the existing conditions, the drivers will be found not guilty if their infraction is less than 15 mph over the speed limit. They would be hard pressed to get a conviction if someone is traveling on the bypass on a Sunday morning, when there is no traffic, at 70 mph in a 55 mph zone. However, if someone is on the bypass, traveling at 65 mph in snow conditions, they will get a conviction. The issue is how to get the general populous to understand what is reasonable speed. He stated when the speed limit on Nashua Street was reduced to 25 mph, the overall speed of vehicles decreased and it was reported by the owner of the Variety Store that he did not hear the screeching of brakes or the near misses like before. He stated there was no absolute speed law in New Hampshire except on the interstate highway system and they must stay within the component of the state statutes. He stated they have increased enforcement and have installed the electronic speed limit sign. He does understand that Wellesley and Westchester Drives are heavily traveled but Crosby and West Streets are 25 mph but he doesn't remember if Ridgefield Drive is or not.

B. Courage stated he did not have any issues with the reduction of the speed limit.

G. Archambault stated he had done a survey in that area at 8am, 1pm, 5pm and 6pm on weekends and weekdays and noticed there were many kids walking and playing in the street.; it should be the parents job to keep the children out of the street. He felt the handicapped child should be supervised at all times and the steep driveways should be used with caution. He also spoke with two (2) couples and four (4) individual who were walking in the neighborhood and they all felt the reduction in the speed limit was not necessary.

J. O'Brien noted his wife puts the car at the end of the driveway to provide a barrier to prevent the children from playing in the road but he noted you can lose track of a child in an instance. He also noted the school bus picks up children in the road and not in the driveway; his wife meets the bus and is there when the handicapped child steps off the bus. He stated the handicapped child understands not to go into the road but she may not hear if there is a dangerous situation, especially if the weather is wet and she is not wearing her hearing aids, which cannot be wet. He noted many people in the neighborhood are in agreement with lowering the speed limit.

F. Douglas asked if the speed limit is posted at 30 mph and cars travel at 40 mph, an officer has to be there to enforce the speed limit. If the limit is lowered by 5 mph, that would lessen the excess speed, to a certain extent.

D. Wheeler stated he supported the idea of lowering the speed limit but not for the reasons stated. He didn't buy the school bus issue but he does feel the handicapped child needs protection. He thought they would be dealing with this again for other streets and his argument may change.

F. Douglas agreed with the handicapped child needing protection. He stated, in the Manual of Traffic Control Devices, the handicapped signage is no longer made and that situation is no longer recognized. He said B. Ruoff was going to check on this. He noted the Manual is not consistent. He said there was an issue at the intersection of Osgood Road and Union Street where a gentleman who was stopped was adamant he didn't have to use a turn signal there. He looked at the Manual and there was nothing about signal requirements. He did have two (2) signs made requiring turn signals were required. He felt there should be a sign notifying the public there is a handicapped/deaf child in the area.

G. Archambault noted in this survey on Wellesley, the people he spoke with had no problems leaving the speed limit at 30 mph.

J. O'Brien stated he had left his house one morning and was driving down Wellesley Drive at 25 mph. A car came up behind him and was so impatient with the speed that he took a detour through the neighborhood at a higher rate of speed to get around him. He stated the speeding has not been a problem until the last couple of years with all the new junior operators in the area.

D. Wheeler asked, if there is a "Deaf Child" sign and someone speeds by at 10 mph over the posted speed limit, would they get a conviction.

F. Douglas replied they would if the child was outside at the time because of the then and there existing conditions.

D. Wheeler noted the state prison manufactures signs, if they were to go that route. He asked J. O'Brien if anyone would be offended by such a sign.

J. O'Brien stated it would not be. He told of another incident where he was pulled over to the side of the road to talk with Mrs. Godlewski and a car passed around them, over the speed limit and did not even use the brakes. He noted the junior operators are not dealing with the "what if" factor...what happens if a ball goes out into the road. He felt if the speed limit was lower, it may reduce the speed of many drivers.

D. Wheeler said the sign would not slow them down but there would be better enforcement.

F. Douglas noted the committee would not be able to make a decision today due to the lack of a quorum but once everyone reviews the minutes and after further discussion, they will be able to forward a recommendation to the BOS. They will inform J. O'Brien of the result. He also suggested J. O'Brien start a petition to present to the BOS as it may help in this situation. It was done with the enforcement of loud mufflers issue.

J. O'Brien stated he did not realize what a big issue this was, especially with some of the streets sloping down toward Westchester Drive. He noted the offenders are not only junior drivers but more experienced ones as well.

D. Wheeler thanked J. O'Brien for taking the time to attend the meeting and stated he was embarrassed at the lack of quorum and apologized for that.

F. Douglas reiterated once the opinion of the committee is official, a letter will go the BOS with their recommendations.

B. Courage noted the BOS does not always go by the Committee's recommendations.

2. Discussion: Request from the Board of Selectmen regarding the installation of stop signs at the corners of Border & Souhegan Streets and Chestnut and Souhegan Streets.

F. Douglas stated there was no ordinance saying there were ever stop signs at those locations. G. Archambault stated he had driven through the neighborhood and noted there were stop signs where Pleasant Street and Hilltop Drive intersected Souhegan Street but there were no stop signs at Chestnut and Border Streets. He recommended unification of these streets with either all stop signs or all yield signs. He did note that Chestnut Street has more traffic than the rest.

F. Douglas clarified that G. Archambault was recommending there be all stop signs placed on streets intersecting Souhegan Street. He asked if the Committee agreed.

D. Wheeler stated he did not agree. He had replaced a mobile home at the intersection of Border and Souhegan Street and he felt there was not much traffic there; he never saw a "close call". He felt a better location for a stop sign would be on Souhegan Street, on the westbound side, at Border Street. He noted the traffic volume has not changed much in that neighborhood over the years.

B. Courage stated he did not agree with D. Wheeler's philosophy on stop signs but it is a major issue. He stated, as a selectman and working for the town, he wanted to do everything from a safety standpoint and a stop sign would be first in line. He noted he used to have relatives who lived near the intersection of Border and Souhegan Streets and they would hear cars screeching down Border and Souhegan Streets. Both streets named in the request are "T" intersections and both streets enter a "collector" road, which is Souhegan Street. He noted there was a stop sign at the "T" intersection of Whitten and Mason Roads and it was removed. It was recommended and supported and yet it was removed.

F. Douglas stated the minutes reflect the majority of the committee feels if the stop signs are to be installed, both should be installed.

D. Wheeler again stated that a stop sign should be installed on Souhegan Street to slow traffic.

F. Douglas noted, in the Manual of Traffic Control Devices, a stop sign should be erected on the street with the most volume of traffic but should also be installed at "T" intersections; according to the manual, the two 90 degree intersections should have stop signs. He did wonder why there should be one on Hilltop Drive since that street did not have that much traffic.

D. Wheeler felt the Committee should be consistent.

F. Douglas noted the minutes would reflect all the feelings about this issue and he noted he would let everyone know when the next meeting would be as soon as possible.

4. Other Business

B. Courage stated he had mentioned to B. Ruoff about having the street lines painted in town. He noted there are some stop bars but no center lines. He asked B. Ruoff why Carl Somero had not gotten the lines painted; B. Ruoff replied they were way behind schedule. He noted, when he was DPW director, the lines were always painted by Memorial Day. He also noted there was a pedestrian crossing marker in the road at Shepard Park but the crosswalk had not been painted. He felt this was a safety issue and was important since school was starting this week. He also noted Milford was the only town in the vicinity without painted lines.

F. Douglas remarked there was a yellow line violation near Great Brook and he spoke with someone at DPW who said they were not planning to paint lines this year at all. He noted each department has to deal with less money each year but he did feel that this was a priority.

3. Discussion: Election of Officers

There was no discussion regarding the election of officers due to lack of quorum.

4. Approval of minutes from June 23, 2008.

The minutes were not approved due to lack of quorum.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:15