

Public Services Committee
Public Comment Meeting on Proposed Traffic Changes at CCES
June 26, 2008
Town Hall

Brief Comments on activity over the past 3 months

Bill Pritchard, PSC Chair, and Councilman Lang provided a brief description of the events of the previous 3 months:

- The principal requested advice from the County on CCES traffic problems and safety issues.
- Montgomery County's DPWT provided a traffic analysis and drafted recommendations.
- These recommendations were reviewed by Todd Hoffman, Al Lang, Rob Enelow, and Joe Cutro, and together with Jody Smith all walked the perimeter of CCES over the dismissal hour.
- Joe Cutro was requested to review the DPWT recommendations and to comment on them, which Joe Cutro did and presented to the PSC for discussion. This resulted in a set of recommendations from the PSC.
- During the perimeter walk traffic flow possibilities were discussed and one in particular was developed, which was posted on the Web Site for review by the Town's residents
- The PSC's recommendations were presented to the Council on June 11, 2008
- Separately, the PSC has recommended that a 15 mph speed zone be established around CCES.

Comments on proposed signage changes:

With the exception noted below, residents did not have concerns about the signage changes and welcomed the 15 mph school zone speed limit. However, many noted that unless there is consistent enforcement of parking and Do Not Enter signs the new signs will not improve the situation.

Many Rosemary St. residents expressed concern that eliminating parking on the north side of Rosemary St. in front of the school will only encourage people to drive faster, and thereby decrease pedestrian safety. Residents also note that parking is limited and report having their driveways blocked by parked cars, expressing concern about their ability to park with the proposed restrictions. Some have shared driveways that are not fully available for off-street parking. Councilman Lang stated he believed that the Town's traffic engineer made this recommendation because the County DPWT Engineer suggested no stopping at any time and our engineer felt this too stringent. Councilman Lang also stated that it could also be that in this case 1-sided parking would be safer than 2-sided parking, and he would follow-up with the Town's traffic engineer to pursue the issue.

They commented that a sign is missing that would prohibit parking only near the school's driveway. Residents note that traffic has never been eliminated on the entire street in front of CCES in the past. One suggestion was to allow CCES staff to park in front of the school in order to slow traffic down (with no parking as one approaches the traffic circle to allow clear sight lines for pedestrians).

Comments on rerouting traffic flow:

In general, residents expressed concern that in rerouting traffic in this way, the Town Council would be helping only the parents of school children while hurting Rosemary Street residents. In particular, some residents said it would make it too difficult for them to get to their homes. (Others said they do not mind a longer way to get home, as long as they knew they could get there easily.) They hope that the Council will look to balance the needs of both groups.

While Rosemary St. residents accept that they must accept the positives and negatives that come with living so close to CCES, they feel that the Town Council's decisions over the years have meant that much of the traffic exiting the Town is dumped on Rosemary Street. Residents would like to see a comprehensive plan to address the issue of traffic in the Town, and enactment of the recommendations of the Traffic Study that the Council accepted a few years back. (For example, another big problem is the number of cars that make u-turns on Rosemary Street when they learn that they cannot go through the circle. Can signs be installed at Connecticut Ave. to let them know this is the case?) Again, Rosemary Street residents also are concerned about enforcement of existing laws.

Many residents expressed their concern that housing the Gifted and Talented program at CCES is not in the best interests of the Town, by eliminating other valuable programs there, reducing diversity, requiring portable classrooms, and possibly requiring moving the 6th grade to Westland Middle School. The residents stated that the principal says that the program is expected to grow over the next two years.

One suggestion to address the problem of so much traffic exiting the Town at Rosemary Street was to ask the State to consider installing a light at Thornapple Street and Connecticut Ave., perhaps just during school hours to allow the buses to exit left on Connecticut Ave. via Thornapple St. Perhaps the stoplight for the existing crosswalk between Woodbine and Virgilia Streets could be moved to Thornapple instead?

Buses are the largest part of the school traffic problem, particularly with regard to the congestion they cause trying to go both west- and eastbound on Rosemary St. To address this problem, many thought the Town should return to the written agreement it entered with CCES about seven years ago, wherein CCES and the Board of Education committed to having buses arriving from Connecticut Avenue enter the circle via a turn on Bradley and a right onto Hillcrest. Buses could exit on Rosemary, which limits bus traffic on

Rosemary St between the Circle and Meadow to the eastbound direction. Councilman Lang stated he would ask Todd Hoffman for copies of the plan and letter.

At a minimum, residents would like to see buses going one-way on Rosemary Street, ideally eastbound because that is how the most car traffic is going, and would like the Traffic Engineer to be consulted to seek creative ideas, to consider ways that could be done, if the Hillcrest option is not feasible.

According to residents, this solution worked for about 2 months, but school bus drivers were uncooperative and the Town did not enforce it, which is why it is not followed today. One resident noted that it may be hard for buses to make the turn onto Bradley from Connecticut, which may be why bus drivers prefer to turn onto Rosemary (where the street is wider). The group discussed whether the turn onto Bradley could be made easier by moving the stop line back on Bradley Lane. It may also be necessary to eliminate some of the parking on the Eastside of Hillcrest to make the turn onto Hillcrest easier for buses.

In addition to talking with CCES/the Board of Education it may be necessary to install a "No Right Turn for School Buses" sign on Rosemary St. at Connecticut Ave. to allow better enforcement of this provision, should it be enacted.

If the Town Council does not want to require that the buses enter on Hillcrest, could the Town open up options for bus drivers to enter the Town at the point that is easiest for them, perhaps at one of the streets to the north of Rosemary?

Another option might be to have buses enter on Rosemary and exit via Stanford St. to Wisconsin Avenue.

Also, because pickup time is the most congested, could the buses use Connecticut Ave. (where parking is allowed) as a staging area to wait until it's time to pick up the children, especially if the principal is letting walkers and bikers leave first (as discussed below)? Private school buses and camp buses also cause congestion on the Street.

Councilman Lang promised to have the bus route options diagrammed and posted to the web for review.

In addition to the school bus traffic, there is a real problem with parents who drive their children to school, particularly at pickup time, and on rainy days. Residents noted that if CCES is serious about being a good neighbor, the school needs to discourage parents from driving their children to school, through walking/biking to school (including on rainy days), car pools, utilizing existing bus service, etc. One possibility discussed is to dismiss walkers and bikers first, then bus riders, and then pickups, to encourage walking. CCES must also undertake a major effort to educate parents on the traffic rules around the school.

Some residents noted that CCES staff have tried to enforce existing traffic rules in the past, but some of the staff members were treated badly by parents and did not want to take on that role. If staff are to do this job, they should probably wear a badge/shirt/etc. showing that they have the authority to enforce these changes. Many residents commented, however, that they would prefer to see police officers enforcing (by giving tickets, not warnings) the laws around the school. Also, they believe it would be money well spent if the Town were to hire police to direct bus and parent traffic in the morning and evening, at least at the beginning of the year until traffic patterns are established. One resident suggested that the Town create its own police force to enforce these and other traffic laws. Another suggested a traffic camera in front of the school.

Residents expressed the desire to meet with the Traffic Engineer themselves because they know the street and its traffic patterns best. The PSC may arrange that for its next meeting on July 8th.