

In May of 2019, a small working School Safety Assessment Team was created to study a list of public schools that posed traffic and parking issue during pick-up and drop-off times. This team consists of the Police Department, Traffic and Engineering Office, Planning Department and School Safety Office.

As of this date, three schools have been identified by the School Safety Assessment Team for assessment and recommendations for corrective action:

- 1.) Roosevelt School (lack of parent parking and bus congestion)
- 2.) West Tatnuck School (see attached report)
- 3.) Thorndyke Road School (Lack of parent parking and congestion issues).

Roosevelt School has a new pick-up and drop-off procedure to alleviate congestion for vehicles and parents.

West Tatnuck School is being recommended for land-taking next to the school in order to add parking spaces and improve pick-up and drop-off procedures.

Thorndyke Road School had signage added to Thorndyke Road that deters illegal parking and congestion created by the pick-up procedures during dismissal time.

Schools that will be further targeted for this school year by the School Safety Assessment Team will be: Chandler Elementary School, Forest Grove, Doherty, Canterbury Street, and the Technical High School.

SUBJECT: West Tatnuck School Safety Assessment

The Worcester Police Department (WPD) in cooperation with Department of Public Works & Parks (DPW&P), Worcester Public Schools Department (WPSD), and the office of Economic Development (ED) has conducted a detailed review of two City schools, Roosevelt School on the east side and West Tatnuck School on the west side of the City, in order to assess safety issues that may exist, and to devise remedies to improve those issues. A team consisting of representatives from all four departments was formed and convened at multiple meetings and field trips to these two schools for the purpose of gathering insight and to identify safety deficiencies. This report represents the panel's efforts and it is structured to include Existing conditions, Observation/Evaluation, Findings of safety issues and concerns, Recommendations, and finally potential source(s) of funding. The Recommendation section of this report consists of three components. They are: 1) Short-Range Improvements, 2) Mid-Range Improvements, and finally, 3) Long-Range improvements. All other future schools' evaluations will be structured the same way.

Existing Condition

Mower Street is a residential street that traverses in the easterly and westerly directions. It intersects Pleasant Street at three locations along its entire length forming two segments. The West Tatnuck School is located halfway on the westerly segment of this street. The street width varies from 25' to 30' curb to curb in the immediate vicinity of the school and is striped with double yellow centerlines. There are sidewalks sporadically along portions of the street. On the south side of the street, sidewalks start at Pleasant Street and end at a point across from the entrance to the school. On the north side of the street, only 400' of sidewalk located in front of the school is available.

This segment of Mower Street has a combination of horizontal and vertical curves that makes it challenging to extend the sidewalks along its entire segment. However sidewalks could be constructed along some sections of this street. Vertical grade along this street varies from 2% to 7%+.

The school has three parking areas, one on the east side of the school building that can accommodate 30 vehicles, and two on the south side of the school building painted to accommodate another 30 vehicles. However, due to the topography of the school property, the two front parking lots are separated by a grade of up to 8 feet.

Although Mower Street is narrow in the vicinity of the school, on-street parking is allowed along both sides of the street except, parking in front of the school is prohibited

at all times. The GIS plan in figure 1 shows all parking regulations in the general vicinity of the school.

Observation/Evaluation

The team met with the principal of West Tatnuck elementary school during arrival and dismissal times in order to observe the traffic situation and assess the safety of school children activity. It was clear that an overwhelming majority of the students are driven to the school and dropped off by their parents in the morning, and picked up in the afternoon at dismissal time. The parents were observed parking on both sides of the street while walking their children across the street to the back entry of the school. A few school busses arrive at and depart from the school as a very small segment of the school children population is bussed to school. This appears to cause the majority of traffic congestion on Mower Street. The observation showed that parked cars on both sides of the street coupled with narrow width of the street, as well as lack of continuous sidewalks, created a hazardous condition where it becomes difficult for two-way traffic operation particularly when larger vehicles such as emergency apparatus have to respond to emergency calls. Also observed was the occasional crossing of the street by school children from between parked cars in order to get to their parents' vehicle.

Findings

It was concluded that the culprit offenders are the parents when they park on both sides of the street when walking their children inside the school building, and in the afternoon during dismissal time when they arrive early and park for an extended period of time while waiting for dismissal time. On-street parking on both sides of the street (outside the No Parking zone) coupled with narrow street leaves less than 14' of travel way thus creating an unsafe condition for both children and motorists in the area.

The lack of continuous sidewalk on both sides of the street is another shortcoming that was identified by the group. This deficiency is probable cause of such a high percentage of students being driven to and from the school. Also, the lack of suitable sidewalks causes parents to park their cars and cross their children, where as if there were crosswalks, the parents could drop off or pick up from the sidewalks.

Finally, the lack of an off-street parking facility or drop off/pickup area is the major contributor of most of the unsafe conditions. As is the case with most schools throughout the City, West Tatnuck School lacks such a facility thus causing the above-mentioned safety concerns. The available 60+- parking spaces seem to be just enough to accommodate the staff, and access to them do not appear ideal for dropping off and picking up purposes.

Recommendations

It is realized that to remedy all of the shortcomings identified in this report could require significant resources both in time and capital. Therefore, the recommendations are grouped in three categories: short-range for those with immediate impact and minimal funding requirements; mid-range for those recommendations that provide more safety for children, and that could be implemented in a short time (1-2 years), as well as with

modest capital requirement; and long-range improvements in order to provide complete safety for all users, particularly the school children. Long-range improvements would take a longer time to implement, and could require a more substantial capital for design, construction, and possibly some land acquisition.

Short-Range

- It is recommended that The Principal should periodically send a letter to the parents explaining the importance of safety along Mower Street. The letter should describe that the parents need to provide a safe passage by all vehicles along Mower Street, and more importantly, allowing for safe crossings by school children.
- As shown on the figure 2, on-street parking restriction should be extended in some areas of the street in order to make available a safe two-way traffic during arrival and dismissal time.
- Parents should only walk or allow their children to walk on the existing sidewalk to the point where the crossing guard is stationed in order for the crossing guard to direct children to the school side of the street.
- Provide a police officer, possibly the resource officer, on occasional basis to enforce parking restrictions, and to promote safe dropping off and picking up practices during arrival and dismissal times.
- The School Department to trim vegetation and tree limbs along its property line on the north side of the street in order to make all traffic signs, including School Zone and No Parking signs, more conspicuous.
- The engineers from the Department of Public Works and Parks to evaluate all parking regulations and post signage accordingly.

The Short-Range improvements described above will maximize the area where parents can safely drop off their children and use an existing sidewalk to get to school. This will eliminate the need for the school to temporarily close down Mower St to allow children to walk to their parent's cars during dismissal time. The costs associated with the short-range improvements are estimated at approximately \$3,000.

Mid-Range

In addition to the improvements under Short-range category, the following additional improvements are recommended.

To provide a safer walking environment for school children and their parents, it is recommended that the existing sidewalk on the north side of the street be extended, at least, to the end of the school property line, as shown in figure 3. This sidewalk extension should allow the westbound parents to drop off their children on the right-hand side of the street and in advance of the school driveway. This area will function as a drop

off zone only, and vehicles will not be allowed to park for any length of time. Also, it is recommended that the No Parking restriction on the south side of the street be extended to West Moreland Drive in order to prevent parents from dropping off their children where there are no sidewalks. See Figure 4 for all Mid-Range Parking Improvements.

The sidewalk on the South side of the school will not be changed due to grade restrictions. A No Parking Anytime zone will be created on the South side of Mower St from West Moreland St to the easterly property line of the School. Eastbound parents will be able to park on the south side of the street, east of the school and walk with their children on the sidewalk to the crosswalk where the crossing guard can stop traffic and provide a safe location to cross. By restricting parking on the south side in this area we can ensure that two-way traffic can be maintained at all times.

The mid-range improvements which are intended to provide a much safer walking and crossing the street at a designated location, is expected to cost approximately \$20,000.

Long-Range

Upon assessment of the parking situation, and in order to minimize or even eliminate the opportunities for dropping off or picking up school children by parents while parked on the street, it is recommended that an off-street parking/staging area be constructed on the lower part of the School property. Such a facility will have to be coupled with additional parking restrictions that would force the parents to drive onto this facility and exit after dropping off or picking up their children. This facility could be designed and built to accommodate from 20 to 68 vehicles. Three conceptual designs have been prepared showing options that would reduce on-street drop off and pick up or completely eliminate them all together, as shown in figures 5, 6, and 7. Such a parking area will result in allowing children to only walk on the school side of the street, thus eliminating the need for crossing the street. This facility could either have a one-way circulation with sidewalk on the right-hand side while allowing boarding/alighting on the right-hand side, or a two-way circulation with sidewalks on both sides of to allow children walk toward the school from both sides of the parking lot. The attached diagrams show the above mentioned three preliminary layouts.

The implementation of this recommendation, including the design and construction of these alternatives is estimated to cost from \$161,000 for design 1, \$173,000 for design 2 and \$253,000 for design 3.

Funding Source(s)

As presented in the above recommendations, the short-range improvements have nominal costs associated with them and do not require a significant outlay. The Mid-Range improvements could potentially be funded through the school department while the Long-Range improvements would require additional sources of funding.