

Waban Area Council

www.wabanareacouncil.com

wabanareacouncil@newtonma.gov

April 11, 2019

Hon. Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Newton City Hall
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459

Dear Mayor Fuller:

We are writing to request that the City make additional safety and traffic improvements along Beethoven Ave. and Allen Ave. in connection with the expansion of the Zervas school population.

As you know, in 2017 both Beethoven and Allen were identified as top candidates for traffic calming given the speeding that occurs on those roads and their proximity to the Zervas school. We understand that curb extensions and crosswalks are planned for Allen Ave. at Pine Ridge and Plainfield. We are pleased that these heavily-used pedestrian crossings will see safety improvements, but we ask that other safety issues on those roads also receive more immediate attention. With the expansion of the Zervas population over the next few years and the lack of parking around the site, it is critical that the streets be made safer for pedestrians, cyclists and cars.

Over the past few years the Waban Area Council has held several community meetings regarding traffic safety around Zervas, including a March 2018 meeting attended by Director of Transportation Jason Sobel, Newton Traffic Engineer Steve Simoglou, and Newton Police Traffic Officer Dawn Fleming. While we have heard complaints about blocked driveways, double parking, and overall inconvenience of the heavy traffic surrounding the school since its re-opening, the most common sentiment expressed by residents was one of fear. They witness car accidents and close calls with pedestrians on a frequent basis, and they are fearful for the children they see walking to school every day.

Zervas PTO President Jenn Martin has provided us with a summary highlighting safety issues and possible improvements in the area, which we are attaching here for your review. We urge the Traffic Department and the School Department to work together to address these safety issues.

We are aware that the city faces a tight budget, and that there are many spots in Newton that are in need of traffic calming. But the new Zervas school will result in the largest expansion of any school population in the city. More cars, buses, pedestrians and cyclists will be on these

streets than ever before. We hope the safety issues raised here will be adequately addressed in order to bring about successful completion of the Zervas school project.

Sincerely,

Waban Area Council

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Winters". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "K".

By: Kathy Winters, President

Attachment: Letter from Zervas PTO President Jenn Martin

cc: Director of Transportation Jason Sobel
City Councilor Deb Crossley
City Councilor John Rice
City Councilor Andreae Downs

Attachment

86 Allen Ave
Newton, MA 02468

April 1, 2019

Dear Waban Area Council,

Thank you for your continued support in making our streets safer. I was pleased to learn of the curb extensions planned along Allen Ave at Plainfield and Pine Ridge as a strong first step to slowing traffic on Allen Ave.

As the Zervas Safe Routes to School representative for the last six years and the current Zervas PTO Co-President, I applaud the City of Newton for the safety considerations that went into the new school, including keeping Beethoven Ave at its present width, the no-turn-on-red restrictions for the Beethoven and Beacon stoplight, and the bus loop and parking lot entrance and exit on Beacon rather than Beethoven. Children of all ages who live nearby are able to walk independently to and from school. However, I do continue to have safety concerns around the school on Beethoven and Allen. This is a concern not only for families and children who walk the full distance from home, but also for the many families who park on nearby streets and walk to the school on these same routes, becoming de facto pedestrians.

1. The Allen Ave intersection with Beacon St. (including across Beacon where the name changes to Ferncroft Rd.) continues to be a dangerous area for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. I personally have observed two car accidents there, and walk to school only a few times a month now that my children are independent walkers so assume there must be more. The crosswalks along Beacon at the ends of Ferncroft and Allen are heavily utilized at the start and end of the school day, including by shorter-stature independent walkers. Additionally, vehicular traffic is very heavy then with both school and commuter traffic and because vehicles stop headed east at the stoplight. Beethoven traffic is routed north at pick-up and drop-off, so parents who use the Blue Zone at Zervas frequently head west on Beacon then turn left onto Allen. At the same time, many cars are headed straight from Ferncroft onto Allen or turn right from Ferncroft onto Beacon. In all cases, visibility of pedestrians isn't great, cars have to move very quickly to find gaps in traffic, and I've seen children almost hit several times. John Rice had explored narrowing the end of Allen Ave to shorten the lengthy crossing, but that would require moving utilities which is prohibitively expensive. Rebecca Cohan, who lives at the SE corner of the intersection, has a creative solution of shifting Allen Ave to be one way headed south twice a day during the school rush. I am also open to other potential solutions.

2. The intersection of Puritan Road and Beethoven Ave still needs significant work to be safer for pedestrians and motorists. Two years ago, there was a bus accident at that corner, and the PTO has gotten much feedback at Zervas from parents on foot who have almost been hit by turning vehicles, and feedback from local drivers about the poor visibility for drivers since the intersection is at the crest of a hill on Beethoven. Some ideas:

- On the west side of Beethoven, the no parking during school days zone ends before the intersection. Extending that zone south up the hill and through the intersection would

improve visibility and ensure that vehicles could not park in the intersection itself, which currently happens.

- Puritan “T’s” into Beethoven and there is no painted stop line or crosswalk and the stop sign is mounted at an angle on a utility pole. Painting a crosswalk, moving the stop sign back several feet, and mounting it on a sign post would improve safety for the large number of children walking along Beethoven. *See Figure 1.*
- Extending no parking areas away from the intersection on all three sides would improve visibility. There is usually a vehicle parked (legally) facing north on Beethoven at the SE corner of the intersection that forces drivers blindly onto the west side of the road into potentially oncoming traffic just before cresting the hill. Last year I worked with the Zervas principal to ensure that Zervas staff did not park in that spot; making it illegal to do so is a better solution. *See Figure 2.*

3. There needs to be a comprehensive parking plan for the Zervas area rather than the current street by street approach. The plan needs to take into account everyday Zervas teacher and staff parking, visitor parking by parents and staff who have daytime meetings at Zervas, parent parking for pick-up and drop-off times, and resident needs. Kindergarten and first grade students who do not use the bus are required to be met by an adult at the door at pick up (no Blue Zone pickup allowed). As such, as the Zervas student body intentionally grows, the number of parents who must find parking is increasing each year. Next year for the first time Zervas will have four kindergarten and four first grade classrooms. The number of parents who need to find parking at 3:00 p.m. will also increase next year with the new full-day kindergarten plan. We have heard that the School Committee is working on a parking plan and hope the neighborhood will be supportive of this comprehensive approach.

4. There also should be a comprehensive school transportation policy that prioritizes active transportation and busing for students and staff. In my six years at Zervas, the school has grown from 320 students to the current 427 students, has a projected enrollment of 456 for next year, and has a plan to reach 490 in a few years. Zervas currently has 110 total (75 full-time and 35 part-time) staff, a figure which will continue to grow as our student population increases. There are 60 parking spaces in the parking lot, which means some staff will continue to use street parking. Creative solutions are needed for a large “neighborhood” school – incentivizing teachers to take the T, park further from the school, or bike; increasing eligibility for the bus and incentivizing families who are eligible for the bus to use it; making conditions safer for children who can walk to school so that they do walk to school; and adding a fine to the residential snow removal ordinance so more children can walk year round.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jenn Martin
Zervas PTO Co-President and Safe Routes to School representative
86 Allen Ave
Jamartin77@gmail.com