

Report of the Transportation Advisory Committee to the Arlington Board of Selectmen

17 April 2002

Magnolia Street Neighborhood

12 September 2001: Date Referred to TAC

19 December 2001: First Deliberated by TAC
Committee Members present: Richard Bento, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Ralph Elwell, Larry Englisher, Lt. Jim McHugh, Michael Rademacher, Scott Smith, Ed Starr (Committee Chair), David Walkinshaw

2 January 2002: Requested Completion Date

28 January 2002: First Board of Selectmen Hearing
Referred back to Committee for further study

15 March 2002: Working Group Meeting with Residents
Present: Elisabeth Carr-Jones (Working Group Leader), Lt. Jim McHugh, Shawn Nevalainen (Magnolia Street), Ron Santosuosso (DPW), Scott Smith

21 March 2002: Working Group Meeting with Residents
Present: Elisabeth Carr-Jones, George Laite (Lafayette Street), Rona Logue (Magnolia Street), Scott Smith

2 April 2002: Second Deliberation by TAC
Committee Members present: Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Larry Englisher, Lt. Jim McHugh, Scott Smith, Ed Starr, David Walkinshaw

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Recommendations for Magnolia Street Neighborhood

The following recommendations were voted unanimously by the Arlington Transportation Advisory Committee on 2 April 2002:

1. Directed Police patrol for speeding vehicles, as voted by the Board of Selectmen on 28 January 2002
2. Continued enforcement of the overnight parking ban, as voted by the Board of Selectmen on 28 January 2002
3. Work towards a set of options to address parking on an area-wide basis. This would include at least East Arlington, and may include the entire Town.
4. Paint the crosswalk on Herbert Road at the Magnolia Street Playground in the international crosswalk (or ladder) design
5. Plant street trees in open areas on Varnum Street and Herbert Road

Supporting Information for Magnolia Street Neighborhood

The following discussion is the result of site visits, data collection, neighborhood meetings and meetings of the Transportation Advisory Committee. The broadest study boundaries for this neighborhood were Massachusetts Avenue to the north, Lafayette Street to the east, the Marquis Minuteman Bikeway to the south, and Varnum Street to the west. Problems identified within this study area were approached in the context of the entire neighborhood, or beyond.

Background

Complaints of motor vehicles speeding, overnight parking enforcement, commuter parking and limited emergency vehicle access have been made by residents of this neighborhood. Relative to most Arlington neighborhoods, the traffic is light and the on-street parking is dense. Police Services reports predominantly parking violations in this neighborhood. With the exception of Mass Ave, the neighborhood is entirely residential, consisting almost entirely of two and one-half story structures. Although Massachusetts Avenue businesses contribute to the competitive parking environment in this neighborhood, residents are generally sympathetic to this need. The Town-owned roadways, curbing and sidewalks in this neighborhood were found to be in very good condition.

Speeding Vehicles

Although traffic volume is not high on the streets in this neighborhood, traffic speed occasionally is. Periodic Police presence would aid in reducing the incidence of speeding vehicles. Also, despite the consistent narrowness of the streets in this neighborhood, Herbert, Varnum and Magnolia Streets have been pointed out by residents as having particularly high traffic speeds. With the exception of Magnolia, which is one-way leading away from Mass Ave, these streets are relatively devoid of street trees. Planting street trees is a long-term and relatively passive solution to high traffic speed, but one that should also assist in reinforcing the area's neighborhood atmosphere.

The Magnolia Street Playground is a significant pedestrian generator in this neighborhood. There is currently a crosswalk on Herbert Road at the Playground (on the west corner of Magnolia), but it has not yet been painted in the international crosswalk (or ladder) design. Bringing this crosswalk up to the more visible international standard would also aid in reducing traffic speed.

Overnight Parking

Over the course of decades, increases in car ownership and population have combined to produce significant overnight parking pressures in this neighborhood. Off-street parking is constricted by large building to lot ratios and correspondingly narrow driveways, necessitating that tenants juggle cars to accommodate the overnight parking ban.

Despite these pressures, there is dissension about the overnight parking ban among residents in this neighborhood. Some would like to see an easing of restrictions, others would not. The Committee recognizes that overnight parking has consistently been addressed on a Town-wide basis, that Town Meeting has voted repeatedly to retain the ban, and that the most recent Vision 2020 survey shows solid support for the ban. However, in order to address this issue equitably, an East Arlington-wide study of overnight and other parking restrictions should be undertaken. Only after such a study has resulted in the recommendation for revisions, should the Town consider experimenting with permit, seasonal and/or alternating side of street parking options.

Enforcement of the overnight parking ban has been sporadic, relating to the number of complaints. This has led to a situation where landlords and real-estate agents may not be properly notifying prospective residents of the ban. Arlington Town Meeting could choose, according to Town Counsel, to institute a By-Law revision requiring notification of the overnight parking ban. The Committee has no objection to such a By-Law revision, but believes that its proposal is outside the scope of our authority.

Commuter Parking

The proximity of the Alewife T station and the numbers 77 & 79 bus lines make this area of Arlington attractive for commuter parking. This situation is exacerbated by the traffic congestion on Rt. 16 and inadequate parking facility at Alewife station. Residents feel that their neighborhood is becoming a parking lot for those seeking to avoid the traffic and difficulties of parking at Alewife.

Average daytime parking density varies in the neighborhood from about 35% to about 65% of capacity. Preliminary license plate surveys indicate that most of the commuter parking is from relatively local sources, points farther west in Arlington and Lexington.

Two-hour parking is posted on Varnum, Thorndike and Fairmont Streets (south of Herbert Road only) and has reduced the incidence of commuter parking. There has, however, been an increase in daytime parking on Herbert Road, Magnolia Street and Varnum Street north of Herbert.

Instituting and enforcing two-hour parking restrictions in the entire neighborhood would speedily eliminate the commuter parking. Yet, not all residents wish to be without the convenience of parking on the street; as things are, residents in posted areas can find convenient parking nearby during the day. In addition, some of the daytime parking is due to employees of local businesses, who would suffer from a blanket 2-hour ban.

The symptomatic approach of posting streets with 2-hour restrictions when required has kept the daytime parking situation here tolerable. However, any significant increase in demand for parking would require a more comprehensive approach to the problem. As recommended earlier in the report, an East Arlington-wide study should be undertaken to equitably assess parking problems and potential solutions.

Emergency Vehicle Access

Although not addressed in the initial scope of this report, emergency vehicle access has been recognized as a concern for the health and well-being of this neighborhood. Narrow roadways with parking on both sides create a less than ideal environment for emergency vehicles. All streets in this neighborhood have adequate "No Parking Here To Corner" signs to allow emergency vehicle access to and/or from their intersections with Mass Ave. However, no such signs are posted at other intersections in the neighborhood. The Committee intends to work with the Arlington Fire Department to establish any emergency vehicle access problems and develop recommendations for solving them in the broader East Arlington area.