

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

January 2, 2001

## **Russell Street Neighborhood**

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Date Referred: November 7, 2001

Date Deliberated: December 19, 2001

Committee Members present: Richard Bento, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Ralph Elwell, Larry Englisher, Lt. Jim McHugh, Michael Rademacher, Scott Smith, Ed Starr, David Walkinshaw

Contents:

- TAC Russell Street Neighborhood Recommendations
- TAC Additional Russell Street Neighborhood Considerations
- TAC Russell Street Neighborhood Discussion

Associated Materials:

- Neighborhood Traffic Safety Requests, Arlington Center Neighbors
- Water Street/Russell Street Area Traffic Circulation Study, BSC Group
- Traffic Improvement Study Arlington Town Center, BSC Group
- Arlington Police Traffic Monitoring: Russell Street
- Traffic Impact Assessment for Proposed Condominium Development
- Arlington Police Services Report
- Arlington Department of Public Works Report

# TAC Russell Street Neighborhood Recommendations

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The following recommendations were made by unanimous vote of the Committee:

1. Install a crosswalk and stop line on Court Street Extension at Water Street (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
2. Install signs and/or pavement markings warning motorists on Court Street Extension that pedestrians must share roadway
3. Enhance warning signs and markings at the Donald Marquis Minuteman Bikeway and Water Street intersection (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors and the BSC Group)
4. Remove brush beside Mill Street Connector at Water Street to improve visibility
5. Evaluate Mill Street Connector for stop sign at Water Street after condominium development completion
6. Direct Police Services to increase speed limit enforcement on Russell Street (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
7. Direct DPW to develop a plan for alternating side of street parking on Russell Street (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
8. Plant street trees in empty tree cutouts on Russell Street (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
9. Post 25 MPH speed limit on Russell Street (pending Home Rule Petition) (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
10. Reevaluate Russell Street within one year of improvements
11. Remove parking space on the north side of Mass Ave to improve visibility at the Robbins Library and Water Street Crosswalk (in front of Domino's pizza) (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
12. Direct DPW to investigate further measures for the Mass Ave Crosswalk at Robbins Library and Water Street, including bump outs, overhead signs and removal of a parking space on the south side of Mass Ave (in front of Library)
13. Temporarily delineate roadways and sidewalks at Russell Terrace/Winslow Street intersection with plastic bollards (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors)
14. Delineate roadways at Russell Terrace/Winslow Street intersection with curbing and construct concrete sidewalks at the time of water main replacement (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors and the BSC Group)
15. Repair/construct sidewalks and curbing on Russell Terrace at the time of water main replacement (in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors and the BSC Group)

## **Additional Russell Street Neighborhood Considerations**

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The following considerations were raised by the Committee during discussions:

1. The Donald Marquis Minuteman Bikeway is a unique town-wide transportation corridor, and should be addressed as a whole. The Committee requests that all permanent improvements to the Bikeway be part of a comprehensive plan.
2. As part of any review of the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue with Pleasant St and Mystic St, the Committee requests the investigation of lengthening the left-turn signal from Mass Ave to Mystic St during off-peak hours as a deterrent to cut-through traffic in the Russell Street Neighborhood.

## TAC Russell Street Neighborhood Discussion

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The following discussion is the result of site visits, neighborhood meetings and a meeting of the Transportation Advisory Committee. The broadest study boundaries for this neighborhood were Mass Ave to the south, Mystic St to the east, Summer St to the north, and Mill St to the west. Problems identified within this study area were approached in the context of the entire neighborhood. The Committee would like to commend the Arlington Center Neighbors for their contributions to this study.

### **Court St Ext/Water St intersection: poor visibility**

Court St Ext's extremely narrow roadway and the existence of high stone walls at the Water St intersection cause an unusually dangerous conflict between motorists on Court St Ext and pedestrians on Water Street. For these reasons the Committee agrees with the Arlington Center Neighbors, and recommends that a crosswalk and stop line be installed on Court St Ext at Water St.

### **Court Street Extension: no sidewalks**

There is no simple way to construct sidewalks on Court St Ext. It is extremely narrow, and tightly bordered by residences and stone walls. However, the pedestrian traffic generated by the Post Office, public parking lot and the neighborhood itself is currently at odds with heavy vehicular traffic.

The town bylaws only require pedestrians to use sidewalks on those streets where sidewalks exist; they do not require pedestrians to avoid streets that don't have sidewalks. This alley is already effectively a woonerf (or shared motorist/pedestrian way), and should be marked as such, so that drivers know that they are expected to share the space with pedestrians.

The Arlington Center Neighbors have requested that a pedestrian lane, which had been previously painted on the roadway, be replaced. This would render the vehicular lane extremely narrow and, perhaps, create a false sense of security on the part of pedestrians. For these reasons, the Committee recommends that this roadway be marked with warning signs and/or pavement markings to designate its shared status.

### **Water St Connector/Water St intersection: poor visibility**

Because of the proximity to the Bikeway, this is effectively a 5-way intersection between Water Street, the Bikeway and the Water St Connector. There is also a stone wall at the corner that limits visibility from the Water St Connector of pedestrians traveling on the east side Water St sidewalk towards Mass Ave.

The Water St Connector is a Private Way. The Arlington Center Neighbors have requested a stop sign, stop line and crosswalk be installed on the Water St Connector at Water St. The Committee concedes that the conditions at this intersection are less than ideal, but does not believe that the situation currently warrants these changes.

The BSC Group has recommended that the Water St Connector, from Water Street to Russell Terrace, be made one-way in the eastbound direction. The Committee believes that making the Water Street Connector one-way will shift traffic to the residential streets Russell Ter and Russell St. Given the current curbing and sidewalk conditions on Russell Ter and the high traffic volume and speed on Russell St, this option seems undesirable.

### **Mill St Connector/Water St intersection: poor visibility**

This location is to accommodate a new condominium development, which will affect the volume and speed of traffic at this intersection. The Committee is reluctant to recommend changes to intersections unless they are stable and measurable. We are, therefore, recommending that this intersection be assessed for the installation of a stop sign after the completion of the condominium development.

Visibility at this intersection would be greatly improved by the removal of the brush beside the Connector at Water St. The Committee recommends that this be done post haste.

### **Russell Street: traffic speed and volume**

Examination of the data from Russell St shows excessive speed on the part of motorists, with the average speed of eastbound vehicles being 31 MPH, and the 85th percentile exceeding 39 MPH. Alternating side of the street parking, as suggested by the Arlington Center Neighbors, makes sense here. This will most likely reduce the number of parking spaces, so we need to make sure that the abutters support the measure. (Other municipalities use this technique; for example, Third Avenue in Cambridge combines alternate side parking with curb bump outs.)

Speed humps, also suggested by the Arlington Center Neighbors, are problematic on Russell St due to the roadway's grade. The maximum acceptable grade for speed hump installation is 8%; Russell St (between Russell Ter and Prescott St, where their installation would be most effective) is 7%. Since Arlington has not yet tested these traffic calming devices, the Committee would not recommend their installation here at the current time.

The BSC Group's recommendations for Russell St were to construct a mid-block neck-down (just west of Prescott St) and prohibit entry to Russell St from Mystic St between 4 PM and 6 PM on weekdays. Although a neck-down would probably slow traffic, it would be expensive to construct and may be less effective than alternating side of street parking. The Committee agrees with the Arlington Center Neighbors that street closures are not always a positive solution for the community, and believes that they should be used as a last resort.

Along with increased Police enforcement, the Committee also recommends the planting of street trees in the empty tree cutouts on Russell St and the posting of a 25 MPH speed limit (pending successful Home Rule Petition).

### **Library Way/Water St crosswalk at Mass Ave: pedestrian safety**

The high level of activity, complexity of the traffic patterns, and proximity to the Mass Ave/Pleasant St/Mystic St intersection all contribute to the pedestrian perils at this crosswalk. The BSC Group's recommendation to investigate the feasibility of installing pedestrian traffic signals here is an expensive solution that may exacerbate traffic queues at both Water St and Library Way. Another option, extension of the island divider to create a pedestrian refuge, would essentially block all left turns at this intersection.

The Committee, in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors, has concluded that visibility, and safety, at this crosswalk could be immediately improved by the elimination of the parking space on the north side of Mass Ave (in front of Domino's). The DPW has accepted the task to study and recommend methods of improvement for this crosswalk, including bump outs, overhead signs and the removal of a parking space on the south side of Mass Ave (in front of Library).

### **Winslow St/Russell Ter/Water St Connector intersection: poor delineation**

This is an awkward intersection of public and private roadways (Water St Connector is a Private Way) complicated by geometry and grade. Clear delineation of the roadway and the installation of sidewalks would increase both the safety and integrity of the neighborhood.

The Committee, in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors and the BSC Group, recommends that curbing and concrete sidewalks be constructed at this intersection. Since this construction is most efficiently done when the the water mains are replaced, the Committee recommends that the roadways and sidewalks be delineated temporarily with plastic bollards (such as those used at Mass Ave and Paul Revere Rd).

### **Russell Ter: inadequate/poor repair of sidewalks and curbing**

Russell Terrace's sidewalks and curbing are in need of repair. The DPW is scheduled to replace the water mains in this neighborhood within the next few years. The Committee, in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors, recommends that these repairs and improvements be completed when the DPW does its work.

### **Donald Marquis Minuteman Bikeway / Water St intersection: conflict & confusion**

As stated earlier, the Bikeway's crossing of Water St is at the center of a 5-way intersection. There is a high volume of non-motorized traffic using this section of the Bikeway, causing many conflicts with the equally high volume of traffic on Water St. This is especially true on Saturdays, when peak periods of both the Bikeway and Water St coincide.

The Committee is in agreement with the Arlington Center Neighbors in its recommendation to improve the signage and street markings at this intersection. However, we request that no decisions on permanent modifications, such as the BSC Group's recommendation to define the Bikeway crossing at Water St with a different pavement treatment and the Arlington Center Neighbors' recommendation that a speed table be installed, be made at this time. The Bikeway is a unique transportation corridor, and decisions regarding it should be made uniformly throughout Arlington. The Committee would like the opportunity to study the Bikeway and make recommendations regarding it at a future date.

### **Russell Street Neighborhood: cut-through traffic**

Although there are clearly traffic generators in this neighborhood, most notably the Post Office, cut through traffic is also a distinct problem. The neighbors recognize the complications generated by street closings and have not chosen this solution, despite the BSC Group's recommendations.

The Committee sees the possibility of reducing the volume of cut-through traffic by lengthening the right-turn signal from Mystic St to Mass Ave along with the left turn signal from Mass Ave to Mystic St during off-peak periods. As part of the Redevelopment Board's study of this intersection, the Committee requests that this retiming be considered.