

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

The Transportation Advisory Committee's goal is to improve the quality of life in Arlington by improving the safety for all modes of transportation while balancing safety with mobility, equity, the environment, and public health. In this effort, the TAC, Arlington Police Department's Traffic Division, the Public Works Department, and the Planning Department work closely together.

The TAC was established by the Board of Selectmen in the spring of 2001 to advise the Selectmen on transportation matters for the Town. Citizen members of the Committee at the start of 2007 were: Joseph Cahill, Scott Smith, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Howard Muise, Jeff Maxtutis, Charles Pappas, Michael Rademacher, and Edward Starr. Charles Pappas and Joseph Cahill resigned during the year. Jean Clark, and Susan Doctrow joined the committee during 2007. Town Staff members at the end of 2007 are Lt. Paul Conroy (Police), Michael Rademacher (Public Works), and Laura Wiener (Planning). Jack Hurd is the liaison to the Board of Selectmen.

The TAC was honored in November 2007 by the Town of Arlington with the 200th Anniversary Year Good Citizen Award.

Major activities of the TAC in 2007 included the following:

Massachusetts Avenue Corridor: During the past year, a consultant was selected to work with the Town on redesign of Massachusetts Avenue between the Cambridge city line and Pond Lane. Redesign will include both roadway and streetscape improvements when complete. While both Mass Highway and the Federal Highway Administration have committed design funding, the actual release of funds and the start of design activities awaits passage of the state transportation bond bill.

Westminster Avenue: Following a fatal accident on Westminster in the spring, the TAC, working with other town officials and neighbors, proposed immediate short-term improvements for Westminster and Lowell Street. These recommendations were voted by the Board of Selectmen and enacted by DPW in a matter of weeks. Consideration of further improvements for the neighborhood was initiated shortly afterwards, and those that are in Arlington will be recommended this winter for installation in the spring. A few improvements are also under consideration for recommendation to the town of Lexington, where Westminster and Lowell intersect beyond the Arlington border.

Schools in Arlington: Following successful pilot projects with the Hardy and Dallin Schools, the TAC is pursuing similar activities for the remaining elementary schools, including the establishment of school zones where appropriate. The model used in the pilot the school principal leads the effort, with contributions from parents, Safe Routes to Schools, Stand for Children, APD, and DPW. Work was initiated at Stratton School in July and paint and sign improvements were made before the start of school. Work began on Thompson School in October. The issue of safe transport to school was raised at a joint meeting of the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen in late November. The TAC proposed a working concept to address all schools in Arlington, both public and private, that addresses both operational improvements and capital improvements such as sidewalks. Because of the need for capital improvements and the large number of schools in Arlington, this will be a multi-year program. Both the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen voted to endorse this plan in January 2008. This will be a major activity of the TAC in 2008.

Three private schools residing in town buildings have been studied this year because of significant traffic issues in their vicinity: Arlington Children Center, International School of Boston, and Dearborn Academy. Recommendations have been voted by the Board of Selectmen to improve the traffic circulation, and will be implemented after ground thaws in 2008.

Parking: In early 2007, the TAC developed, and the Selectmen adopted, procedures for dealing with resident and public safety requests for one-side parking and time limits in residential neighborhoods.

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Downing Square: This six-way intersection of Park Ave, Lowell St, Park Ave Extension, Bow St and Westminster Ave is a very difficult intersection. Several alternatives have been identified by the TAC working with DPW and are now undergoing analysis and measurement by a consulting firm. This work was delayed for the appointment of a new Director of DPW and Town Engineer, which occurred in 2007. We expect the alternative analyses to be completed in the winter, and design to begin in the spring.

Symmes Development: In 2007 the TAC reviewed the drawings submitted by the developer and identified several areas where the requirements of the special permit clauses for transportation had not been addressed. Working with the Planning Department, these issues have been identified and are now being addressed by the Town Manager.

Green Line Extension: Working with the Planning Department, Senator Marzilli and the Board of Selectmen, the TAC is advocating for the Somerville/West Medford Green Line Extension to come as far as Route 16 where it can be useful to residents of Arlington. Station alternatives will be under study during 2008. (www.greenlineextension.org)

Neighborhood Projects: The TAC responded to requests from Arlington residents for transportation improvements ranging from simple situations to major safety issues. Examples include: Webster Street parking, crosswalks on Warren Street, Ravine, Academy, and Irving among many others.

Outreach: The TAC participated in transportation meetings and events conducted by the Boston Area MPO, MBTA, Arlington Schools and School Committee, Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation and the Summer Street Neighborhood Association. The Mass Ave Corridor project and schools were featured at the TAC's 2007 Town Day booth. The TAC maintains a website (tac.Arlington.ma.us) containing all formal reports submitted to the Board of Selectmen, committee agenda and minutes, and other transportation resources for Town residents.

The TAC continues to be very concerned by the limited Police resources for traffic enforcement. The staff for the Traffic Division was drastically reduced for fiscal year 2004 because of budget issues, and has not been replaced four years later. Traffic enforcement is a very important part of maintaining the quality of life in Arlington. We need drivers to approach Arlington with the thought, "I'll be careful because I could be ticketed here." It takes sustained enforcement to attain this position, and the benefits are increased public safety and quality of life. We were on this path before 2004, but we are very far from it as we start 2008.