

**JOINT TASK FORCE FOR
RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL
TRAFFIC SAFETY CONCERNS:
PROGRESS REPORT FOR
PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON
MONDAY MARCH 25, 2013**

Cooperatively developed and written by representatives of the Bernards Township Board of Education and the Bernards Township Municipal Committee.

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I. Introduction

In November of 2012 the Bernards Township Board of Education and The Bernards Township Municipal Committee agreed to form a joint task force described below.

TASK FORCE GOAL:

To provide a recommendation to the respective governing bodies for a safe traffic flow for the morning arrival to Ridge High School that includes traffic patterns for pedestrians, school buses, and private vehicles.

TASK FORCE GROUND RULES:

The task force is serving as an advisory committee to the respective governing bodies; formal actions can only be made by the full governing body.

All possible solutions will be evaluated with equal consideration to develop pros and cons for each.

The Board and the Township are committed to work together to resolve the traffic safety issues at Ridge High School for the benefit of the community.

The task force will speak with one voice in communications to respective governing bodies and the public.

Public input will be received and considered by the joint task force.

The task force will gather and solicit information from those who have it – IE school administration, consultants, municipal engineering staff etc.

DELIVERABLE TO EACH GOVERNING BODY:

A final report which provides an analysis of the pros and cons of each solution followed by the joint task force's recommended course of action.

TARGETED TIMEFRAME:

Meet *at least* 2 times per month with a status report completed for the governing bodies by the end of January 2013.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS:

Susan McGowan – Board of Education, President

Bill Koch – Board of Education, Chair of Finance Committee

Carolyn Gaziano – Township Committee, Deputy Mayor

John Carpenter – Township Committee, Committeeman

Thomas Timko, PE, CME – Bernards Township, Engineer

Nick Markarian – Superintendent of Schools

II. History

Traffic safety concerns on the campus of Ridge High School have existed for the past several years. Traffic congestion immediately around the campus, primarily during peak arrival times when the school is opening in the morning has also been a problem. Pedestrian safety and traffic in and around neighboring roads and properties such as the Township Municipal Complex and the Homestead Village neighborhood have also been concerns. At the core of the problem is the growth of the school over the years and the resulting increase in traffic volume arriving to the campus through a single access point.

The problem was investigated by a traffic engineering consultant, Gary Dean Associates in 2006. The resulting report was titled, *Access Evaluation and Recommendations for Ridge High School*, (see Appendix A).

During the 2011-2012 school year, the safety issues in front of the school in the oval driveway became untenable. To address the concern, the morning drop off point for Ridge High School buses was relocated to the adjacent campus of Cedar Hill Elementary School. The measure was instituted in the winter of 2012 and continues at present. The current practice has improved the safety situation on campus and even helped students get to school in a more timely fashion; however it has its drawbacks.

Traffic volume in the early morning hours has increased through the neighborhood that the buses must travel in order to reach the Cedar Hill School. The additional traffic has raised concerns in this neighborhood (the Homestead Village neighborhood) associated with safety and quality of life. Furthermore, the students riding the bus to school have a less than ideal drop-off location because they must walk outside some distance from Cedar Hill School to Ridge High School.

In an effort to evaluate the ongoing problem and to seek alternative solutions to the practice of dropping off Ridge High School students at Cedar Hill School, Gary Dean was again commissioned. The 2006 report was dated and a new study with timely information needed to be done. Dolan and Dean Consulting Engineers, LLC investigated and produced a report titled, *Access and Circulation Study for Ridge High School*, this report was completed in June of 2012 (see Appendix B). The conclusion of the report identified potential remedies that involved the use of Township property. As a result, the Ridge High School traffic task force between the Board of Education and the Township Municipal Committee was formed in November of 2012.

The task force (described in the Introduction section of this report) has since been meeting in an effort to achieve its goal. The joint task force held a public meeting on Monday December 10, 2012 to receive input from the public on the issues. The process of achieving the goal of making a recommendation to the respective governing bodies has taken longer than hoped, however the committee is encouraged by the work that has been done. We look forward to receiving input from the public at our next public meeting on Monday, March 25, 2013. We hope that the information provided in this progress report informs that input.

III. Discussion

The reader must understand that what follows in the remainder of the progress report is purely conceptual and that all costs are strictly budgetary estimates. Many factors must be considered before any concept can become a reality. Engineering design, local and county approvals, unknown site or utility conditions, and unknown cost considerations among other issues are all factors that ultimately impact whether any particular concept may come to fruition. Please keep this in mind while reading.

The work of the joint task force was largely defined by an effort to identify the answers to two questions:

1) What criteria can be used to evaluate the merit of any particular strategy?

- and -

2) What are the possible strategies that could be blended together into a concept plan to improve the overall situation at hand?

In order to answer question one above, the joint task force determined that the criteria needed to be centered on the following criteria questions:

- Are campus safety issues mitigated?
- How practical is the concept in terms of construction, user-friendliness, and logistical/operational needs?
- What is the cost?
- How are residents impacted?
- What is the impact relative to off campus traffic and intersections?
- What is the aesthetic impact?
- What is the impact on municipal operations?

In order to answer question two above, the committee developed a list of strategies that could be used to help remedy the problem. As concepts/options were developed the criteria questions were applied to gauge the overall feasibility of the idea. Many general concepts had countless variations due to the number of possible permutations of various strategies in the concept design. Strategies that were ruled out are not included on any of the concept maps. Here are the strategies that were ruled out with an explanation as to why they were ruled out.

- Widen the existing exiting lane on Health Department property to include a second exit lane for left turns onto Finley to head south.

Due to the proximity to the signal and the introduction of a turning movement into an area where traffic queues for the signal, the County will not approve a left turn exit from this driveway.

- South Maple Avenue strategies:
 - Modify the pedestrian path that exists starting at the corner of Collyer and South Maple into a driveway and bring traffic up the slope to the running track. Construct a ring road around the

running track for access to Lots A or D. Incorporate a new pedestrian path with the new driveway.

- Modify the pedestrian path that originates at the community center into a driveway and bring traffic up the slope to the running track. Construct a ring road around the running track for access to Lots A or D. Incorporate a new pedestrian path with the new driveway.
- Connect the Engineering Building parking lot to a portion of the pedestrian path, improving the pedestrian path into a driveway and bring traffic up the slope to the running track. Construct a ring road around the running track for access to Lots A or D. Incorporate a new pedestrian path with the new driveway.
- Construct a new driveway from the Dog Park parking lot to the existing pedestrian path by the varsity baseball field. Modify the pedestrian path into a driveway and bring traffic up the slope to the running track. Construct a ring road around the running track for access to Lots A or D.

All of these Maple Avenue strategies were evaluated and dismissed due primarily to prohibitively high cost considerations.

- Peachtree Road strategies:
 - Redesign Peach Tree Road with traffic calming, and continue busing. Widen the driveway along the east side of Cedar Hill School to Lot A. Buses drop off by the gym and exit through the signal.
 - Redesign Peach Tree Road with traffic calming, and allow cars. Widen the driveway along the east side of Cedar Hill School to Lot A. Parents drop off by the gym and exit through the signal.
 - Redesign Peach Tree Road with traffic calming, and allow cars to drop off students in the cul-de-sac and/or connect the cul-de-sac to a ring road to lot A by making the walking path into a driveway.

All of these Peachtree Road strategies were evaluated and dismissed due primarily to the invasiveness to the Homestead Village neighborhood and logistical considerations of looping traffic through lot A.

- “Bernardston” Park, the concept of condemning an entire property to cut completely new access into the Lot A area from Finley Avenue.

The strategy was dismissed due to cost issues and the impact to private residents.

At this point we will transition this progress report to present strategies and ideas that *were* considered and developed into the various options presented in this report.

IV. Strategies and Concept Plans

On the following page you will find a two column list of strategies that the task force examined. In the left column are all of strategies that were considered. You will note that the first 15 strategies are in blue type – these 15 strategies are associated with some type of construction typically involving the paving of a driveway or road. Strategies 16 to 31 are all strategies involving operational considerations and/or minor improvements. You may note that not every single strategy is listed in a concept/option plan. The task force felt that it was possible that some strategies not specifically noted in a concept plan may still ultimately come into play in a final implementation. In the Appendix section of this report you will see a drawing for each concept plan and a file with a corresponding list of pros and cons for each concept plan.

Please note as you read the pros and cons for each concept plan you may see some abbreviations associated with the drawings. Here is a key to the abbreviations:

A or Lot A – represents parking Lot A at Ridge High School which is the parking lot immediately around the newest gymnasium (close to Cedar Hill School)

B or Lot B – represents parking Lot B which is the small parking lot inside the oval loop at the front of Ridge High School

C or Lot C – represents parking Lot C which is the smaller of the two northern most parking lots near the performing arts center of Ridge High School.

D or Lot D – represents parking Lot D which is the largest parking lot at Ridge High school – between the performing arts center and Astor Field

HD or Health Dept. – represents the existing asphalt driveway on the Health Department property which connects Finley Avenue to the oval drive at the front of Ridge High School.

Bypass or Bypass to Lot C – represents an extension of the Health Department driveway into Lot C

Combinations of letters like A/B represents an intersection between Lot A and Lot B, another example would be HD/B which represents an intersection between the health department drive and Lot B.

Strategies:

- 1) Health Dept. 1-way out South side
 - 1.1) 1-way out North side Health Dept.
- 2) Health Dept. 1-way in South Side
 - 2.1) 1-way in North side Health Dept.
- 3) Health Dept. 2-way (in & out) South side
 - 3.1) 2-way North side of Health Dept.
- 4) Bypass to Lot C, 1-way in
- 5) Bypass to Lot C, 1-way out
- 6) Bypass to Lot C, 2-way (in & out)
- 7) Maintain oval exit through HD
- 8) Widen Finley for a left turn at HD
- 9) Use HD as entrance only with 2 lanes in
- 10) Use the signal for exit only with 3 lanes out
- 11) Loop Road from Lot D behind RHS to Lot A
- 12) One way from municipal complex to lot C
- 13) One way from municipal complex to lot D
- 14) One way from Collyer behind PD to Lot D
- 15) 2 way from Collyer behind PD to Lot D
- 16) Only parents use oval for drop off
- 17) Only parents drop in A, re-enter oval to exit
- 18) Only buses drop in oval
- 19) Only buses drop in A, re-enter oval to exit
- 20) Only parents drop off in lot D/PAC
- 21) Only buses drop off in lot D/PAC
- 22) Bus and C/D traffic through oval to lots
- 23) Only C/D parkers* use HD bypass to lot C
- 24) Buses and C/D parkers use HD bypass to lot C to enter
- 25) Buses and C/D parkers* enter and exit
Via HD bypass to lot C
- 26) Reverse traffic flow employed
- 27) Parking stickers

- 28) Blackouts
- 29) Busing policies
- 30) Parking practices
- 31) Improved pedestrian pathways/sidewalks

*Without a left turn lane into the HD drive, buses and cars travelling south on Finley would use the signal to turn left into the oval (cars only) or use other public roads to approach the HD driveway from the south (buses or cars).

V. Recommendations

Having spent considerable time developing, evaluating and discussing everything that has been reported on thus far, the joint task force began to identify key issues or problems that kept coming up as various iterations of strategies and concept plans were analyzed. The following represents the central issues that the task force grappled with:

- 1) Coming up with a solution that was user friendly and would not create a situation that encouraged noncompliance or increased (instead of decreased) safety concerns.
- 2) Devising a flow of traffic that was continuous, with the least number of merges or intersections. Keep the flow as simple as possible to minimize management problems.
- 3) Completely separating the flow of parent drop off traffic from the flow of bus traffic.
- 4) Creating safe, curbside drop off locations.
- 5) Avoiding solutions that created an overburdening effect elsewhere.
- 6) Keeping cost within reach and getting the greatest benefit out of the least investment.

Ultimately the joint task force came to a consensus that creating a new ingress and egress separate and apart from the traffic signal was the best way to solve the problem. Specifically, Concept Plan #9 was the best overall solution we could devise because it created two non overlapping ingress/egress traffic loops. Concept plan # 9 can be constructed with little or no infringement on private property owners. The ingress can function as a right hand turn in only for vehicles travelling north on Finley Avenue (a left hand turn in, while convenient, would not be constructed). Exiting vehicles will turn right only to head North on Finley Avenue. During the morning rush the exiting vehicles would be restricted to buses only. In the afternoon the current practice would prevail: vehicles exiting lots C and D can do so through the health department (north bound) or through the oval and traffic signal. The existing ability to leave the oval through the health department drive would be eliminated with little impact since vehicles can easily proceed to the signal to turn north.

On campus traffic flow will be greatly improved. Buses and vehicles parking in Lots C and D will only enter through the new ingress adjacent to the health department. Buses will drop off in Lot D with students entering the building quickly at the performing arts center or the 700-wing entrance. Buses will exit without entering the oval maintaining the safer and desired separation of buses and automobiles. Excepting southbound South Finley traffic utilizing the traffic signal, vehicles parking in Lots C and D would not need to enter the oval; their ingress would occur at the widened health department drive. Vehicles coming from southbound Finley to park in Lots C or D can be managed with a combination of blackouts and parking assignments minimizing circulation impacts to the oval during peak rush times. With these changes in place, efficient parent drop off at the oval is maximized. Parents with items to unload can utilize Lot A to drop off near the athletic director's office so as not to disrupt the flow in the oval. Option 9 also allows for the possibility of devising alternate scenarios should the building administration wish to make adjustments for potential efficiencies.

VI. Appendix

Each of the appendix documents below can be accessed by clicking on the link. Alternatively, all of these documents may be found by going to the Bernards Township Board of Education website at www.bernardsboe.com and clicking the Joint Task Force link under Board of Education along the left margin.

[Appendix A = Concept/Option Plans](#)

[Appendix B = Pro and Con lists for each concept/option](#)

[Appendix C = Dolan and Dean Report 2006](#)

[Appendix D = Dolan and Dean Report 2012](#)