

**MINUTES
TOWN OF CONCORD
CITIZENS TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
Monday July 9, 2012
7:00 PM-9:30 PM
Clock Tower Room
Harvey Wheeler Community Center**

Present: Lisa Bergen, presiding
Rick Anderson
Ray Bruttomesso
Abraham Fisher
Louise Haldeman
Mark Hanson
Kate Damon joined the meeting at 8:15

Citizens Present: Cynthia Rainey, William Plummer, David Allen, Maureen Spada

1. Call to order:

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 by Chair, Lisa Bergen

2. The minutes:

The minutes of the June 21st meeting were approved

3. Correspondence:

Ms Bergen circulated a copy of a letter from the School Committee to the Selectmen explaining why the TAC would not look at the high school land. A member of the CTC pointed out that the CTC could do so.

4. Chairs Report: None

5. Citizens Comments: None

6. Reports and Issues for Discussion

- a. *Proposed hearing schedule:* It was decided that August 16 would be the preliminary hearing for the CTC with the idea of presenting the material collected so far and getting reactions and input from the audience. A draft of the report will be presented but the final report will not be completed until after the hearing on the 16th. The hearing may raise questions which the CTC still needs to answer.

It was decided that additional meetings of the committee would be needed and the following dates were proposed: August 2, August 9, August 16, August 23, and August 30. A second and final public hearing was proposed for September 13th which would also be a dress rehearsal for the final report to the School Committee. Ms. Bergen will check for availability for staying at the Harvey Wheeler Center.

- b. *OML Workshop:* Several members attended one of the two OML workshops which were held on June 14th. The chair was satisfied that the committee is functioning correctly but reminded the members that while background information could be shared there could be no cross-committee discussion. Any comments should be sent to the chair only using the 'hub and spoke' approach. The "reply all" button must be avoided!
- c. *TAC report:* As mentioned under correspondence the TAC will not be looking at sites on the CCHS land but will consider other sites. The next TAC meeting will be on July 17th following a joint School Committee meeting at which plans for housing the buses at Sanborn will be discussed.

- d. *Member reports on areas of research:*

Safety: Mr Bruttomesso reported that he is planning to meet further with the Concord Fire Chief to see how the school buses fit into the town's emergency response plan. The plan has not been updated for some time. He will also follow up with the transportation manager.

Ms Bergen reported that the transportation department puts a very heavy emphasis on bus safety. Drivers who are hired must pass extensive road tests and be interviewed by the transportation manager and the business manager. All are CORI checked. It has occasionally been necessary to ask drivers to "unlearn" practices that they may have used when driving for another company. In addition to the regular drivers, the managers and mechanics are all licensed to drive school buses.

Ms Bergen plans to have a write-up for the next CTC meeting from the June 21st meeting with the transportation staff that she and Mr Hanson attended at which many of the safety questions were addressed.

According to the NHTSA, school buses are the safest way for students to get to and from school with the most risk being when students are getting on and off. In spite of the laws drivers do still pass stopped school buses. Safety devices that would be good to add to a school bus are a rear swing arm and a camera which could photograph the license plate of the passing car.

There was some discussion about the type of buses used. Concord uses a top of the line rear engine bus. These are easy to drive and are quite comfortable but the rear engine is harder to maintain and the resale value is low. It was suggested that a front engine bus of similar quality might be a more practical alternative for the future.

Mr. Hanson is compiling data on bus accident rates looking at RMV data from comparable communities. This creates a more level playing field for comparison of accidents. It was noted that since the transportation department keeps a record of everything that happens to every bus, it has been necessary to separate actual accidents from "incidents" such as a bus getting scratched by a tree branch.

Mr Hanson's analysis will show the type of accident, whether the driver was at fault, and whether there were any injuries.

Eventually Mr. Hanson wishes to gather data from other communities across the state. In addition to accident statistics the committee suggested that the report include other criteria such as the percentage of student who were bused, whether the community outsources all or part of its busing, number of students etc. Other suggestions included the "geography" of a community, how many miles of roads, are there sidewalks, number of school buildings and are they close together or far apart? Is there a fee, with or without a cap? It was also suggested that in the case of towns which outsource, it would be useful to know how long they have outsourced to the company employed. The goal is to get as complete a picture as possible.

Social factors:

Ms Haldeman reported that the key intangible or social factors remain the same, confidence in the system and drivers, the ability and willingness of the bus management to respond to concerns, reliability and punctuality etc. Also important is that the bus drivers have a sense of partnership with the system. These are hard to measure but they certainly exist in our present system. She noted that towns which have dealt with the same company for a long time have worked out good relationships. Keys to a successful system in addition to the obvious safety concerns are having responsive on-site management of some kind, and having the buses nearby. When buses have to travel many miles from the yards to start their runs, lateness is almost inevitable.

Possible future sites:

Ms Damon has spoken with various construction companies about the type of transportation facilities which could be erected on some of the proposed sites. Not surprisingly many companies do not like to bid on public projects. Factors in construction would be the shape of the land, the preparation needed, the availability of utilities etc. She will also consult with some architects.

Cost analysis of the options:

Mr Anderson is reviewing the past five years of school budget actuals as well as the End-of-Year Reports submitted to the DESE to obtain an understanding of transportation costs. This is an ongoing question. It seems clear that our present system with onsite management and bus depot is less costly than replicating the same system on land which the town/school does not own but would be setting up a brand new facility. Even if a site were found with no additional land costs, additional costs will occur to replace the buildings. This needs to be further explored.

Also unknown is whether there would be a true savings if the bus drivers were no longer employees of the town. It was noted that the community wishes to see that the drivers are treated fairly. Are drivers in danger of losing accrued pension or other benefits?

Final Report format:

The committee members will work towards developing tables etc. which cover the information presented. Ms Haldeman will work on an overall summary. With luck some drafts may be ready for the next meeting.

8. Action Items

The Committee will proceed with its work. Tension still exists over the use of high school land. Does the transportation facility really need to be taken down?

9. Citizens Comments

Mr. Plummer presented the committee with detailed maps of the proposed high school site. In his opinion it would not be necessary to remove the current transportation facility to accommodate both the buildings and the buses once construction is completed. This prompted Ms Haldeman to ask if Carlisle's opposition would continue if there was no question of having to pay for a new facility.

Mr. Allen urged that the committee craft a careful neutral report with plenty of information hoping that such information would lead to a sane decision.

Ms Spada reminded the committee that in the process of doing cost analysis it would be important to look at the chapter 70 reimbursements.

The committee adjourned by unanimous consent at 9:30.

Respectfully submitted
Louise S. Haldeman, clerk