



CITY COUNCIL ACTION REPORT

February 13, 2012

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: John Szerlag, City Manager
 Mark Miller, Director of Economic and Community Development
 Gary Mayer, Police Chief
 Gerry Scherlinck, Police Captain
 Steve Vandette, City Engineer
 Bill Huotari, Deputy City Engineer/Traffic Engineer

SUBJECT: Boyd Street Issues Relative to Baker Middle School & International Academy

Recommendations

City management recommends that the north side of Boyd Street, from Rochester Road to the school entrance on Boyd Street, be posted as a "No Parking – Tow Away Zone" during the morning arrival (7:15 a.m. to 8:15 a.m.) and evening dismissal times (2:00 p.m. to 2:45 p.m.) on school days only for the remainder of the 2011-12 school year, ending this June. Furthermore, it is recommended that the issue be re-evaluated in the fall of 2012 to determine the need for these signs after the school district changes the start times for Baker Middle School and the International Academy (IA), which is expected to considerably reduce traffic on Boyd.

Background

School districts in Michigan are exempt from local control or local oversight. They are under the jurisdiction of the State of Michigan. If the school district were not exempt, it is unlikely that the IA would have been approved by the city for this site.

Staff has been dealing with traffic issues on Boyd Street since the fall of last year. These issues are related to vehicles parked on the north side of Boyd Street, legally, during the arrival and dismissal times of the Baker Middle school and IA school site. The Baker school has been at this site since at least the early 1960's, while the International Academy was opened four years ago and started with its first freshman class. Each year, the IA has added a grade such that traffic has steadily increased up to this year when all four grades are now attending the IA.

There are two access points to the school site. One is from Torpey and the other from Boyd. The Torpey access is controlled by a traffic signal on Rochester Road, while Boyd can be accessed from Big Beaver via Daley from the south or Rochester Road from the west. Torpey is approximately 24' wide within a standard 60' wide right-of-way, while Boyd is only approximately 22' wide within the old standard 50' wide right-of-way. Both streets have no curb and gutter and no sidewalks, except for a portion of the east end of Boyd, east of the school site. The south side of Boyd Street is posted as "No Parking" due to fire hydrants along that side of the road.

Exacerbating the traffic issue is the fact that Baker and the IA have morning start times within 10 minutes of each other, so a large influx of traffic is attempting to access the site from Boyd and Torpey Streets during a very short period of time. Several changes have been made on the school site over the past few years with the help of the city and Traffic Improvement Association (TIA) to better facilitate the safe movement of traffic on the site. From all appearances, traffic and pedestrian movement on the school site itself is well controlled and moves in an orderly and safe fashion.

The issue arises when traffic is exiting the site via Boyd Street, primarily during the morning arrival. Drivers leaving the site are encountering parked vehicles on the north side of Boyd (the south side is posted No Parking due to fire hydrants), which impedes the flow of traffic. These parked vehicles create a situation where drivers must wait for a gap in oncoming traffic to try and dart around the parked vehicle(s) to head west on Boyd. This situation becomes confrontational for parents leaving the site and Boyd Street residents who observe the situation.

Staff met with the school district back in September when this issue first came up and originally the issue was school buses using Boyd to access the school site. Bus traffic is only for Baker Middle school. There are no buses for the IA as all students either drive or are dropped off. At this meeting, the Troy School District (TSD) agreed to reroute all buses to Torpey. In conjunction with this, city staff worked with the County to change the traffic signal timing at Torpey and Rochester Road to allow for more green time to better facilitate the bus movement to and from the site. The meeting was held on Friday, September 16, 2011 and the changes to the traffic signal and bus route were made on Monday, September 19, 2011. These changes did alleviate concerns relative to bus traffic on Boyd.

Subsequent to this, residents on Boyd would intermittently and intentionally park vehicles on the north side of Boyd to cause traffic issues. There has been an ongoing effort by the Troy Police Department to get voluntary compliance from Boyd Street residents to not park on the street during the morning arrival times. This has been somewhat successful, but there are enough occurrences of vehicles parking on the north side of Boyd and concerns from IA school parents to require the Police Department to have officers assigned to patrol Boyd Street almost constantly at considerable use of manpower and expense. A more permanent and economical solution must be found as we cannot continue to utilize limited police resources to provide ongoing traffic control in this area. We can no longer offer customized service with a customer service budget.

In an effort to seek a solution to this issue, staff and representatives of the Troy School District met with residents of Boyd Street on January 25, 2012. Several residents of the immediate area met with us to discuss the situation. Some points of discussion revolved around closing the access from Boyd, providing an alternate access to the site from another area such as Raintree Village or Wakefield and the posting of No Parking signs on the north side of Boyd. We also had our traffic engineering consultant, Orchard, Hiltz & McCliment (OHM), attend the meeting to discuss their review of the area. OHM was brought in to provide a 3rd party review of the school site and traffic operations on Boyd and Torpey. OHM's recommendation (attached) to post the north side of Boyd Street as a No Parking zone during AM arrival and PM dismissal times during school days was shared with the residents.

Since this meeting, voluntary compliance has been adhered to for the most part. The Troy School District has committed to changing the start time for Baker Middle School in the fall of 2012 such that it would start 30 minutes later than the IA. This change was not possible this year because of established times for internet class coordination with other area academies that could not be changed. The District has committed to notifying their parents, students and staff

to use Torpey Drive this fall as the primary access to the site. Boyd would still be used to some extent, but Torpey is a more desirable access due to the wider street and better access from Rochester Road. Traffic on Boyd is expected to go down this fall.

The issue at hand is what can be done now to ensure that all interested parties (residents, students, parents and school district staff) can be accommodated for the rest of the 2011-12 school year without continued confrontations and police presence. Voluntary compliance by the residents is encouraged, but to date there have been enough occurrences where a vehicle has been parked on the north side of Boyd to eliminate this as a viable option.

Police Department Background on Boyd Street Issues

The Police Department has been involved in the complaints along Boyd Street since the beginning of the school year.

Complaints have been received from both parents and residents. Parents inflicted a barrage of e-mails upon the department demanding the north side of Boyd be immediately posted with no parking signs to insure their uninterrupted access to the schools. Residents insisted on a total diversion of traffic from their street; they are and have been against the no-parking option.

Residents initially threatened to achieve complete gridlock in the area by parking vehicles along the north side of Boyd, at the entrance near Rochester Road, as well as by arranging for pedestrian traffic within the roadway to deliberately impede traffic. They have in fact organized and deliberately parked vehicles along the full length of the north side of the street from time to time, which resulted in significant traffic conflicts.

Parents have reported residents shouting at them; including the use of obscenities and comments about drivers' perceived ethnicity. Residents have reported vehicles leaving the roadway, damaging their lawns and mailboxes. Residents have described their cause as "a war." Comments were reported involving threats to place nails in the roadway. As a result of this situation, the Police Department has had to post officers at this location almost constantly while attempts were made to analyze the problem and develop solutions.

Despite Police Department requests for voluntary compliance regarding not parking on the north side of Boyd, the Police Department recently received a report of a large SUV being parked on the north side of the street during the morning rush and two residents standing in close proximity to it and the travelled roadway, causing back-ups. During the same time period, two residents were reportedly approaching children as they walked to school, asking if they felt safe given the traffic situation.

In response, the School District voiced concern over adults approaching children walking to school. Residents were reportedly photographing drivers and license plates. On February 7, 2012 a report was received indicating one of the male residents was walking his niece in the roadway, causing traffic conflicts.

Whenever the Police Department withdraws, the problems re-emerge, requiring the re-assignment of officers to the location.

Options

Staff has looked at numerous options for this area. Each option has shortcomings, but the typical and customary solution as well as the quickest and most economical solution is to post the north side of Boyd Street as a "No Parking – Tow Away Zone" during the morning arrival

and evening dismissal times during school days for the remainder of the 2011-12 school year. This is consistent with the traffic control in place on Torpey and the majority of school sites within the City.

Other options that were considered:

1. Opening up the barricades at the east end of Boyd, adjacent to the West Oaks Subdivision which were required as a part of the City Council resolution approving the development. This option would allow for traffic to disperse from the schools Boyd Street driveway and then travel east or west along Boyd Street, thereby reducing the traffic heading west to Rochester Road or south to Big Beaver. This option would require City Council approval to remove the condition of approval of the West Oaks development. In addition to requiring City Council approval, the residents adjacent to West Oaks were vehemently opposed to cut through traffic from the new development along the public roads in their subdivisions, including the residents along Boyd Street at the time West Oaks was approved.
2. Approval of a Special Assessment District (SAD) to widen Boyd Street. This would allow for an increased cross section to better facilitate the flow of traffic to and from the school, but due to weather limitations alone, the improvement could not be completed until the current school year is nearly over. No Parking on the north side of Boyd Street would still be recommended even with a wider cross section so that traffic could move freely. The SAD costs could be assessed to adjacent property owners, the city at large and possibly a share to the school district. A SAD can be approved by City Council by their own volition; however, our policy has been that 50% or more of the residents in the SAD project area must support the project in order for it to be presented to City Council. Boyd Street is due for road maintenance and if a widening project were to move forward it would make sense to incorporate a larger cross section at that time.
3. Construction of sidewalks along Boyd Street. Again, this would be proposed as an SAD as new sidewalks are not considered as a city cost but an improvement to the adjacent property. The city at large historically does not pay for a benefit for the residents adjacent to the improvement. This was discussed at our meeting on January 25th but was not supported by residents in attendance.
4. The “take no action” option was also considered. This is not considered a viable option as it requires that voluntary compliance by the residents to not park on Boyd Street be adhered to at all times during the morning arrival and dismissal times. This has been used to date, but requires considerable use of limited police resources to patrol the area to ensure that no vehicles are parked on the road.

January 25, 2012

Mr. William Huotari, PE
City of Troy
500 W. Big Beaver Road
Troy, MI 48084



Subject: Baker Middle School / International Academy

Dear Mr. Huotari:

The Troy School District has been operating Baker Middle School located off of Torpey Drive and Boyd Avenue for at least 50 years. The International Academy was constructed next to Baker MS in 2007. This school year, 2011-12, is the first that incorporates the full 9th through 12th grade levels at the International Academy, so is also the first school year that a number of senior students have been driving themselves to school. Bus service is provided for Baker MS students, but not for those at the International Academy (IA).

Vehicle access for the school campus is by way of Torpey Drive and Boyd Ave. Faculty and parents using Torpey are instructed to use the parking area and drop-off loops located on the north side of the buildings. Parents and students using Boyd are instructed to use the parking area and drop-off loop located on the west side of the IA building. The driveway off Torpey is partially coned off each day to limit traffic between the drives to the north and south sides of the campus. The intent is that school busses are to arrive via Torpey and only they are to cross this line of traffic cones. The parent drop-off and pick-up policies of the two schools have helped regulate the traffic patterns occurring on-site. A high percentage of parents are following the established patterns.

With that said, we note that one of the substantial traffic safety issues with these schools involve vehicles parking on the north side of Boyd west of the school driveway during the morning arrival and afternoon dismissal periods. The observed vehicles were legally parked; however, they formed an obstruction to the two way flow of traffic on Boyd. This resulted in significant confusion as drivers arriving and departing the schools attempted to navigate around the parked vehicles. The drivers were generally well behaved, but the situation held the potential for traffic safety conflicts.

Given the size of the school campus and the number of students and staff in attendance, it is our professional opinion that this site needs a minimum of two points of open vehicle access. We thus believe that there is no question that access must be maintained from both Torpey and Boyd. To resolve the congestion issue, we note there is a remedy commonly used for many other streets adjacent to schools in Troy and surrounding communities.

We recommend that the north side of Boyd Ave from Daley Dr. to the school entrance be posted no parking during school arrival and dismissal periods.

Orchard, Hiltz, & McCliment, Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Stephen B. Dearing'.

Stephen B. Dearing, PE, PTOE
Manager - Traffic Engineering