

February 3, 2016
New Paltz, New York

New Paltz Central School District

District Considers Long-Term Solution for Pedestrian Safety and Traffic Congestion Issues at Middle School

NEW PALTZ – The New Paltz school community will see significant changes in vehicular access to the Middle School parking lot and the student drop-off/pick-up areas as part of its voter-approved Capital Project.

The District's architect, Bill Wisbauer from Tetra Tech Architects and Engineers, shared details of the proposed pedestrian and vehicle traffic pattern during a Board of Education meeting on February 3, 2016. The recommendations reflect input from the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), the New Paltz Police chief, school administration, traffic engineers from GTS Consulting, the District's Facilities Committee, and construction professionals from both The Palumbo Group and Tetra Tech. Suggestions from members of the community group Safe Routes to School were also considered. Findings from a professional traffic study conducted in October are also addressed in the proposed solution.

“Our primary goal was to increase pedestrian and vehicular safety on and around campus, as well as improve traffic distribution and efficiency for vehicles entering and exiting the drop-off and pick-up area,” said Wisbauer. “While doing this, we also paid careful attention to improving handicapped parking, maximizing available parking spaces, and preserving as many of the existing trees as possible.”

Highlights of the plan include being able to enter and exit the Middle School from either Main Street or South Manheim Boulevard. The Main Street access point will be reconfigured to allow vehicles to make a right turn into the parking lot and it will remain a right-turn-only exit. The

second access point from South Manheim Boulevard will allow drivers to make either a left or right turn both onto and off of campus.

To achieve this, the current entrance from South Manheim will be closed and turned into an emergency access route, complete with a key-access gate. The half-circle driveway that is located south of the current entrance will be reconfigured to merge into the existing drop-off/pick-up line. The driveway will be widened to allow for two-way traffic. This will more than double available space for vehicles dropping off and picking up students. In addition to this lane, two additional drop-off/pick-up spaces will be added for vehicles coming from Main Street. In total, three separate zones will be created, which will expedite the process (see accompanying site plan).

In addition, during an on-site meeting, the NYSDOT made recommendations to help direct pedestrians to designated crossings and reduce the number of students crossing at non-designated locations. By adding sidewalks along the parking lot and closing the existing South Manheim access point, pedestrian traffic patterns will change, eliminating the mid-block crossing location.

According to Wisbauer, official approval of the plan from the NYSDOT is still pending, however he is hopeful it will arrive soon. "Since their [NYSDOT] suggestions were incorporated into the submitted design, we feel approval is very likely."

"Finding acceptable permanent solutions to the many constraints at this location has been a long and frustrating process over the years," said Superintendent Maria C. Rice. "The new configuration addresses a host of issues and provides features to improve both pedestrian and vehicular safety, as well as creates an overall more efficient vehicle flow. We are excited to finally have a permanent solution built with feedback from so many experts."

In the meantime, the District is implementing a temporary solution to address the congestion challenges presented with the existing traffic pattern. Beginning on Friday, February 5, 2016, the Middle School's half-circle bus loop that is accessed from South Manheim will be opened and used as an additional student drop-off/pick-up area. Vehicles will enter from the south side of the loop, let students out along the existing sidewalk, and exit from the north side. It will be a single-lane, single-direction pattern and vehicles will be able to turn either left or right onto

South Manheim. This measure is being put into place to help relieve the traffic back up onto Route 32 South. The current entrance and drop-off/pick-up area and Main Street exit (right turn only) will remain in use.

Summary of Long-Term Traffic Plan:

- Focuses on pedestrian and vehicular safety
- Supports entering and exiting from both South Manheim and Main Street
- Increases area for student drop-off/pick-up; increases efficiency of process
- Adds sidewalks and parking lot striping that direct pedestrians to designated cross-walks
- Increases parking lot efficiency without large loss of parking spaces (went from 94 spaces to 91 spaces for a loss of only 3 spaces)
- Improves Handicapped parking and building access
- Provides designated emergency access
- Preserves as many existing trees as possible
- Represents feedback from experts from a range of affiliations including the NYSDOT, New Paltz Police, traffic engineers, construction/architectural professionals, community members, and district administration