

October 16, 2000

Anne Krieg
Town Planner
Reading Town Hall
16 Lowell Street
Reading, MA 01867

Dear Ms. Krieg:

We, the undersigned current and future residents, and abutters, of Sunset Rock Lane, wish to express our strong opposition to the use of this street as the only means of "southern" access to the proposed new elementary school.

Our opposition is based on several important and fundamental concerns that we believe must be addressed by your office, as well as the School Department, Fire Department, Police Department, CPDC and the school architect before the school project moves forward.

First, and foremost, is a concern that significant and potentially dangerous traffic volumes and congestion will occur at the corner of Sunset Rock Lane and Franklin Street if this intersection continues to be the only way to enter and exit the school from the south. In the absence of a detailed, professional traffic analysis and until proven otherwise, we believe that more than 150 vehicles will use Sunset Rock Lane each day, at least twice a day, to transport children to and from the school.

To those of us who live on or near Sunset Rock Lane, it is preposterous to believe that this street, by itself, can accommodate such an enormous volume of traffic. It is not too difficult to imagine the gridlock, frustration and, unfortunately, hostility that undoubtedly will occur on a daily basis as drivers of these vehicles attempt to turn right or, worse, left onto Sunset Rock Lane from Franklin Street; snake their way up the narrow street while negotiating vehicles that are parked on both sides of the street; maneuver up the even more narrow slope to the "drop-off/pick-up" zone in front of the school; wait for the little one(s) to get out of the car or truck, or find the correct car or truck in which to climb; round the circle and dodge other vehicles as they are backed out of the woefully inadequate number of parking spaces; descend the same narrow slope; inch toward the end of Sunset Rock Lane while, again, negotiating vehicles that are parked on both sides of the street; and stop, for who knows how long, as 10, 15, 25 or more cars queue up desperately trying to turn right or, worse, left on to Franklin Street while a steady stream of 10, 15, 25 or more drivers and their vehicles whiz by on Franklin Street hoping or, worse, making sure that no vehicles exit Sunset Rock Lane to slow them down or, worse, stop them.

The scenario that we describe above, while disturbing in its own right, omits circumstances that may have far more serious and tragic results. Assuming our portrayal of the traffic congestion on Sunset Rock Lane and Franklin Street is accurate,

or even close to accurate, it is our contention that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible on occasion, for an ambulance or fire truck to circumvent vehicles that will be parked, waiting or crawling on these two streets while responding to an emergency at or near the school, or at a home on our street. It is inconceivable to us that the life of a friend, neighbor, classmate or teacher could be jeopardized because an emergency vehicle could not get in -- or out -- of Sunset Rock Lane or on -- or off -- Franklin Street because too many cars were clogging a too narrow, dead-end street.

It also is our contention that Sunset Rock Lane intersects with Franklin Street at a particularly hazardous point. When exiting Sunset Rock Lane, the view to the left is hindered by an enormous, possibly centuries-old tree on Franklin Street. The location of the tree makes it unusually hard to detect vehicles heading in an east to west direction until entering Franklin Street. The view to the right, while not encumbered by a large tree, is hampered by a curve or bend in Franklin Street that makes it problematic to spot vehicles heading in a west to east direction. Once again, it is not too difficult to imagine the potential for a serious or, worse, deadly accident as parents, through no fault of their own, fail to see oncoming vehicles when exiting Sunset Rock Lane onto Franklin Street or, worse, walking across Franklin Street to a waiting or parked vehicle. This perilous situation will be worsened by large, slow commercial trucks that will be using these same two streets to get to and from the new school.

In our collective view, several critical steps must be taken, now, to address our concerns as design of the new school enters the final stages. The first step that must be taken is development of one or more additional access roads to the new school from the southern part of town. Alternative means of access and egress from the new school is the only way to avoid or reduce the risks that are associated with using Sunset Rock Lane as the only road in and out of the new school from a southerly direction.

These alternatives include, but are not limited to, using Fox Run Lane as a second street for southern access to the school. In many respects, this street is better suited as an access road than Sunset Rock Lane because it is wider, has sidewalks on both sides of the street, intersects Franklin Street at a more advantageous location and, therefore, offers drivers increased visibility when entering Franklin Street. Another alternative is the use of Dividence Road and Emerson Street as access roads to the parking lot that currently is proposed for the north side of the school. This parking lot could be converted into a turnaround like the one that is proposed for the front side of the school, or a separate drop off/pick up spot could be established at or just beyond the point where these two streets now meet.

Of equal importance is the need to construct a sidewalk on Franklin Street so that parents and children can walk to and from the school if they so desire. A sidewalk would provide them with an option that is available to parents and children visiting or attending every other school in the town. It also would help to reduce vehicular traffic and congestion on streets near the school, the consequences of which we have noted are both alarming and in obvious need of attention.

In closing, we would like to point out that our concerns about traffic density and safety are no less important than those expressed by residents who live on or near the

much-maligned housing development on George Street, much-talked about redevelopment of the former Addison-Wesley office building on South Street, or the much-debated and ill-fated Wendy's restaurant on Main Street. There should not be and can not be a double standard by our town representatives when responding to the interests of residents involving a so-called private project versus those involving a so-called public project.

We, the undersigned residents and abutters of Sunset Rock Lane, believe that the access road plan, as currently configured, is impractical and infeasible for all of the foregoing reasons. We urge you to heed our request for alternative means of access to and from the proposed new elementary school. We offer our assistance in planning, developing and implementing these alternatives. We invite you to contact any one of us, soon, to begin work on these alternatives. We stand united and ready to serve -- and to be heard.

Sincerely,

Denis Ferrone
52 SUNSET ROCK LANE

John Lee
31 SUNSET ROCK LANE

Cindy Rodrigues 31 Sunset Rock Lane

Dean Mela 47 Sunset Rock Lane

Paul Collins 39 Sunset Rock Ln.

Shawn A. Anthony 39 Sunset Rock Ln.

M & Mabel 35 Chapel Hill Drive

Holly Welch 35 Chapel Hill Drive

Carolyn Walsh 19 Sunset Rock Lane

Michael R Walsh 19 Sunset Rock Ln.

William Rose 341 Franklin St.

Eugene P. Higgins 12 Sunset Rock

Mary Ann 12 Sunset Rock

Lisa Brannigan 11 Sunset Rock Lane

Robert Siskin 26 Sunset Rock

- cc: Susan Cavicchi, Chair-School Committee
Donald Wood, Chief-Fire Department
Edward Marchand, Chief-Police Department
Richard Howard, Acting Chair-CPDC
Peter Hechenbleikner, Town Manager
Matthew Nestor, Chair-Board of Selectmen