

THE READING ADVOCATE



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MISSION STATEMENT

It is the goal of *The Reading Advocate* to provide our readers with the highest quality local coverage they desire and need, in a newspaper that is accurate, timely and filled with an intimate and lively portrait of the community in which they live, work and play.

Bad news for neighbors

Over the past several months, your newspaper has reported on numerous changes to site plans and drainage designs in connection with construction of a new elementary school.

Your newspaper has not reported on changes involving street access to the school, on site parking, and traffic flow to and from the school because there have been few or no changes to report.

To some, this may seem like a classic case of "no news is good news." In this case, no news means bad news for many residents who live near the site of the proposed school and for many users.

The root cause is the continuing expectation that one narrow, residential cul-de-sac street, Sunset Rock Lane, can reasonably provide the only means of access to and egress from the school from the southern part of the town for 80 percent of all vehicular traffic.

To those who live on or near this street, it is not too difficult to imagine the gridlock that will result when these vehicles attempt to navigate their way on Sunset Rock Lane while avoiding vehicles that are parked on the street; maneuver up a very narrow driveway to the "drop-off/pick-up" zone in front of the school; round the small circle in front of the school; descend the same narrow driveway; make their way out Sunset Rock Lane (again) while avoiding parked vehicles; and wait to turn onto Franklin Street.

The bad news is not limited to the above scenario:

- Sunset Rock Lane intersects

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. The location of this tree makes it unusually hard to detect vehicles heading in an east to west direction on Franklin Street. The view to the right is hampered by a curve in Franklin Street that makes it problematic to spot vehicles heading in a west to east direction.

- Anticipated traffic congestion on Sunset Rock Lane and Franklin Street may make it extremely difficult, if not impossible on occasion, for an ambulance or fire truck to maneuver around vehicles that are parked or slowly making their way on these narrow streets when responding to an emergency at the school or a nearby home.

- No definitive plan exists for building sidewalks on Franklin Street leading to the new school, despite recommendations contained in a recently released traffic study and the existence of sidewalks leading to every other school in the town. Sidewalks would provide the option of walking to and from the school, and would reduce traffic congestion on Sunset Rock Lane and Franklin Street, especially during drop-off and pick-up times. Although traffic mitigation and safety concerns warrant sidewalks at the time a new school opens, the town's official position on this issue is "[we] will be requesting the Selectmen to consider funding this construction in a future budget year(s)."

- Reductions in on site parking at the new school will force users

and visitors entering from Sunset Rock Lane to park several hundreds yards or more away from the school. According to the architectural firm in charge of building the new school, virtually every space on the south side of school will be occupied by full or part-time staff working at the school. The reduction of on-site spaces, combined with "no parking" restrictions on the narrow driveway to the new school, means that 100 or more vehicles will have to compete for limited parking space along one side of Sunset Rock Lane, since parking on both sides would make this street virtually impassable.

In an effort to formally bring these issues to the attention of the town, residents of Sunset Rock Lane and Franklin Street formed the Sunset Rock Area Association. The Association has proposed a host of sensible alternatives to the town. It has urged the town to address these issues, adopt the alternatives and/or develop remedial action plans of its own before the project moves forward. I sincerely hope that the lack of a positive response thus far does not reflect a lack of concern.

William T. Welch