

Mayor's Column

March 2, 1015

The dreadful winter that we are experiencing with constant periods of snow that narrow the roadways, followed by ice and bone chilling cold has served to crystalize the problems near the Bronxville School at drop off and pick up times.

The Village Police Department has purposely turned a blind eye to many of the vehicle infractions occurring on Pondfield and Midland during arrival and dismissal, understanding the difficulties involved in getting little ones into the buildings.

However, when called to respond to an unsafe situation or traffic violation, our officers have a duty to act and ticket when warranted.

There has been a significant uptick in calls received at our Police Department, primarily from other school parents who report dangerous behavior or parking patterns of fellow parents, and request enforcement.

The recent spate of constant double and triple parking has caused Midland Avenue and Pondfield Road to be rendered impassable at times. So much so that the Fire Department and ambulance service have had to reroute, losing precious time on their way to our homes or Lawrence Hospital.

Also in an effort to navigate around double parked cars, other drivers are crossing the double yellow line, placing themselves head-on into oncoming traffic.

Due to the "stacking" of cars for pick-up, the sight lines at corners have become dangerously obscured especially at Crows Nest, Masterton Road and Meadow Avenue.

To improve safety, our police department asks that parents not allow children to open car doors on the traffic side of the road and direct them to walk to an intersection with a school crossing guard or a traffic control device.

The most dangerous places to cross children are near the Bronxville Public Library's rear door and the middle of Pondfield Road from the school's front door to Bolton Gardens. Both locations have the safe options of guards and lights less than 200 feet away.

The Village is in partnership with the school, primarily through the Safety Committee, which our Police Chief has served on from its inception.

We work collaboratively to improve what will always be a less than perfect traffic pattern near the School.

Our Police Department has made a point of increased observation of the flow of traffic this winter, especially at dismissal time and has come up with suggestions they will offer at the March Safety Committee meeting.

They include:

- Revisiting the staggered dismissal times. Unless you have only one child, the schedule doesn't seem to work. If a parent needs to pick up a child in two or three schools, cars arrive around 2:30 in preparation for the first dismissal and wait almost half an hour for the last one. This results in parking or double parking for an extended period of time or circling blocks for almost 30 minutes. Realistically, no one is picking up the first small child, driving them home to wait in an empty house and then coming back for their brother and sister. Thus parents have no choice but to do what they are currently doing.
- Exploring the possibility of more school staff outside, especially the Elementary entrance, as was custom in the past, to meet the students and assist in an orderly drop-off procedure.
- Encouraging parents to designate a meeting spot for older children to be picked up a block or so away from the congested area and carpooling if at all possible.

The Village also has a major role/duty to assist in the traffic mitigation primarily for the safety of our students and parents, but also for other residents and visitors who must use these same roads and intersections.

We have explored removing the island on Midland Ave but traffic engineers convinced us of its utility as a calming device which inhibits speeding near our school. The vast majority of the traffic on Midland Avenue is cars not stopping in the Village, rather using it as a passage to nearby highways.

We have also hired a traffic engineer to analyze the Midland/Pondfield intersection to facilitate an upgrade including the possibility of designated turning lanes and pedestrian crossing buttons.

The Police Department also directs as many resources as available to the school zone at pick-up and drop-off, with the caveat that there are only two cars and two officers on the road at any time.

If an emergency or any kind of incident is called in, both officers and cars are then diverted. Any other police presence requires overtime from the normal schedule.

Our DPW has also been vigilant in removing snow piles near the school, even those deposited by private contractors, to improve winter site lines.

We owe a debt of thanks to our extraordinary crossing guards, Theresa, Phil, Mike and Jane who do an exemplary job under some less than ideal conditions. They are treasures.

As is the wonderful tradition in our Village, if we work together – Village, School and Citizens, in a positive spirit of cooperation, we can improve upon almost anything.