



Looking from Hudson, down Ringgold toward Peekskill Middle School 10/21/21. Note poor condition of signage, inconsistent times for school days between the three signs. All images and captions provided by coalition members.



Franklin Street, looking toward Union from the intersection of Depew. Photo taken during November site visit. Note that there are 2 school zone signs within a few feet of each other. There are two more on this block: at the corner of Franklin and Union, and at the intersection of Franklin and Ringgold. A crossing guard is stationed at this intersection during drop off and pick up to assist pedestrians crossing to the school. Regardless, we observed multiple drivers speed through the stop signs without stopping or even slowing, while parents and children crossed the street.



View of Highland Avenue/ Bear Mountain entrance. This photo was taken 3/4/22 by a volunteer assisting with our mapping project. Note the poor conditions of the sidewalk, road, crosswalk and paint. This is a very long and dangerous stretch to cross with minimal signage, speeding traffic, faded crosswalk across the entrance ramp and Fernart in front of the church – with no sidewalk between them. Crosswalk across Highland is also faded and the sidewalk on the other side of the street is also in disrepair.

Peekskill coalition aims for safer walks to school

Plans trial run of a ‘walking’ bus

By Regina Clarkin April 6, 2022

Employing the adage that people learn by doing, a Safe Routes Peekskill coalition is working to create a safer environment for children walking to school. The coalition is composed of co-equal partners, said Margery Rossi, co-chairperson of the advocacy committee for the school district’s Parent Teacher Organization. City and school district officials, citizens’ advocacy group Peekskill Walks and parents of school children have been meeting since last summer, creating an action plan to increase pedestrian safety around the district’s six schools. Safe Routes is a national group that works to create an environment of safety in communities.

Rossi, the parent of a graduating senior, was looking for a project that could train members of the PTO in advocacy work that didn’t involve lobbying the state for funding – which is where the advocacy focus had been for the past few years. “We needed to find a way to engage families in advocacy work that was less intimidating than figuring out the quagmire of Albany funding. We wanted something that would have a benefit other than funding.”

“This is an issue that is not partisan, contentious or controversial. We didn’t want to turn our advocacy into a battleground. We want a safe environment for all our children to walk to school,” said Rossi. An additional goal of this promotion of safe routes to school involves training parents on how to work with city government to get action on such issues as crosswalks being painted and accurate signage in school zones.

In their initial meetings last summer, the group identified how they would work together in the fall and drafted a plan to visit each of the district’s schools during morning drop-off. Over the span of six weeks, they visited all the schools, observing and taking pictures and video. Some days there were two members of the coalition present, other days there were eight members at the site visit. For instance, Carmine Crisci, the director of facilities for the school district and Jennifer Sampson, assistant director of transportation were present to see what issues could immediately be resolved. Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education Dan Callahan was on hand at the middle and high school visits. At the



Students walk to Hillcrest Elementary School up Westchester Avenue at the corner of Horton Drive. Photo taken in October during site visit. Note the sign: Horton is only one way during school days; but the end time for this designation is missing. No sidewalks; no school zone signs.



City Tax map of area around the middle school. Squares in red show missing crosswalks, squares in blue show existing signage but faded, squares in green show existing signage that's in good condition. Red stars show a sign is missing. Red x's show a crossing signal doesn't work.



Pernart Street, looking toward Division. Photo taken during November site visit. Note the condition of the crosswalk and paint on the street. During morning drop off, school staff put out cones to set up a drop off lane so through-traffic can continue unimpeded. Security guard from PHS comes to Uriah Hill to support administrators and teachers assisting families with drop off. No crossing guard is designated to Uriah Hill Elementary School. This school educates pre-Kindergarten students (4 year olds). All students must arrive by car or on foot; there are no buses to Uriah Hill.

end of the six weeks the group compiled their notes comparing and contrasting them, just as students are taught to do in writing classes.

From this exercise, a list of priorities was created that noted consistent issues across all locations. In January the group met with then City Manager Andy Stewart and Police Chief Leo Dylewski who agreed the priorities were reasonable and set a March date to follow up. In March, Matt Alexander, who was acting city manager at the time, joined the meeting with Chief Dylewski and they reviewed a document the volunteers created using tax maps, with a legend to mark up the conditions of crosswalks and signage. The committee learned about some of the constraints the city faces regarding union rules affecting DPW work involved in placing signs and painting crosswalks.

The group also discovered that traffic enforcement inside a school zone has different consequences than outside a school zone. School zones must be clearly marked with a beginning and end point so that drivers and police know where the boundary is. Without clear school zones designated, police cannot provide proper enforcement. One of the goals of the coalition is that before each school year, signage needs to be inspected for clarity and consistency. On its site inspection tour, the group found three different enforcement times posted on signs on Ringgold Street where an entrance to the middle school is located.

The Washington Street entrance to the middle school is a particularly dangerous location. One of the programs at the May 21 Saturday Academy at the middle school will include information for parents and students on how to manage the dangers posed to student pedestrians crossing streets. "A component of the program will include training about what are traffic safety rules here," said Rossi. "We have families that come from other municipalities and countries, and they may not know what the rules are here." Later this month a 'walking' bus will introduce families at Oakside to the concept of walking as a group to school. According to coalition member Cathy Matone who represents the Peekskill Walks group, the 'bus' has a parent in the front, middle and back and kids come out of their houses to join the 'bus'. The route has been safely mapped out – including assessments of how safe various sidewalks are. Information will include the state of repair of each sidewalk; are bushes overgrown, impeding safe passage, etc. The goal is that it's safer for a child to walk with a group than alone. "I remember from growing up the freedom and joy that came from walking to school," said Martone, who added that she was trusted to walk to school. "I wish that for all kids."

<https://peekskillherald.com/4766/news/peekskill-coalition-aims-for-safer-walks-to-school/>