

City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

In City Council 1/25, 1999

Agenda # 19

	YEA	NAY	ABSENT	PRESENT
Ms. Kathleen L. Born	✓			
Ms. Henrietta Davis	✓			
V. Mayor Anthony Galluccio	✓			
Mr. Kenneth E. Reeves		✓		
Ms. Sheila T. Russell	✓			
Mr. Michael A. Sullivan		✓	✓	
Mr. Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.		✓		
Ms. Katherine Triantafillou		✓		
Mayor Francis H. Duehay	✓			

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WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 1999

INTERNET ADDRESS: <http://wsj.com>

Why Did the Officer Cross the Road? To Fill His Monthly Quota

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It May Seem a Bit Pedestrian,
But Cops Go Undercover
To Bust Impolite Drivers

By NANCY KEATES

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
BEAVERTON, Ore.—When he joined the police force, Brian McNeel knew he would be putting his life on the line. He just didn't know it would be in front of a Range Rover.

"It's part of the job," he says as the vehicle careens past him on SW Hall Boulevard. "You do what you have to do."

The next time you see someone trying to run across a street, look twice—he might be a cop in disguise. Police have long tried to convince motorists to slow down for people at crosswalks. Now they have found a way to throw themselves into the mission: posing as pedestrians in the middle of busy roads.

In little towns along the West Coast, these decoys spend hours strolling back and forth between curbs, while patrol cars and motorcycles lie in wait around the corner. Even the Los Angeles Police Department is experimenting with these stings, to the inevitable protests from drivers.

"A lot of people cry entrapment," says Lt. John Miner, who heads the pedestrian sting operation in the suburban town of Redmond, Wash. There, the police have nabbed almost 200 "perps," so far without so much as scratching an officer. "But there have been some close calls," he says.



Brian McNeel

Rather than feeling protected by their men in blue, many pedestrians just feel puzzled. Going undercover to nab drug dealers is one thing; doing it to scold drivers is another. "It's pretty ridiculous," says James Perkins of Beaverton, who manages to cross the street on his way to a store with little trouble hours before the cops swoop in.

It all started in Glendale, Calif., when Sgt. Lewie Guay was working a special detail outside a movie shoot in late 1996. Mr. Guay saw two women and a baby in a marked walking area narrowly escape being hit by a car. The next day, he hatched his sting idea at the station. In 1996, the city had an all-time high of eight pedestrians killed by cars while they were in a crosswalk. Last year, after ticketing at least 800 people, it only had one such death.

Here in Beaverton, a sprawling suburb of Portland, police chief David G. Bishop makes no apologies for trying to shield his citizens on foot. Many of the culprits, he says, are outsiders who aren't familiar with West Coast crosswalk laws that command drivers to yield at all painted lines.

"We won't stop until they stop," vows Chief Bishop, who plans on carrying out several more sting operations in the coming months. To bolster his six-man traffic squad, he's bringing in backup cops from neighboring towns, using a \$9,000 grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

On a recent Monday morning, about a dozen officers gather at the Beaverton Police Headquarters for a sting briefing by Sgt. Steve Wilson, a 30-year veteran and an FBI academy graduate.

First, Sgt. Wilson says, set up an orange cone 150 yards in front of the crosswalk. Prepare to walk before the car reaches the cone—after looking both ways, of course. But once the car passes the cone, the officer should stand down. No need for injuries in the line of duty.

An hour later, Officer McNeel, dis-

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This Cop's Job Is a Bit Pedestrian

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guised in a royal-blue wind breaker and jeans, is standing curbside in front of a Lutheran Church and an elementary school. On a normal day, at this time, he would be hauling prisoners back to jail from court. "This is more exciting," he says, as he ambles into the crosswalk, whistling a bit with his hands in pockets.

About half-way across the street, on his first try, a Pontiac approaches from the other direction—and fails to stop for the decoy. Sirens blare and a hidden squad car pulls over Keith Fisher, a retired engineer on his way to an aerobics class. "I thought the guy was safe in the middle of the road," he tells the officer, who is wearing a bullet-proof vest and is sympathetic this time. "Next time it will be a ticket," he says, which would set Mr. Fisher back \$170.

The next trick: Officer Robert Davis plays bike rider, complete with a Northface sporting jacket, a backpack, a bike helmet and black Trek mountain bike. (Never mind that "Police" is written on the fender.) Officer Davis has gone undercover many times before, and was even shot at once. But the threat of getting hit by a car is scarier. "It's 5,000 pounds of metal hunkering down a roadway," he says. "You can't read what these people are doing. You can't see their eyes."

Barreling toward the crosswalk is David Likins, whose 12-seat transit van is carrying

elderly and handicapped people to the train station. Annoyed at a sight of a wayward biker, he honks his horn and yells a few profanities—before he's pulled over. "I couldn't just slam on the brakes, I have people in my van," he says, as his occupants peer out the window. "How am I supposed to see someone who just jumps into the middle of the street?"

Over the next three hours, the squad stops 42 people but issues only verbal warnings because it's the sting's first day. Once stung, the offenders try every excuse to wiggle out of trouble. "I didn't see him standing in the middle of the road," Rachel Lucas, a homemaker, tries to tell an officer who stops her turquoise Mercury Villager GS van on the way home from the chiropractor. A few cars later, it's Michael St. Onge's turn: "I'm usually really good about pedestrians," he insists. It's just that this time, "I was getting a cassette out of my glove compartment" and didn't see the cop.

Some cities take these drivers at their word when they plead ignorance to crosswalk rules. After looking at 400 intersections over five years, San Diego officials found that there were twice as many accidents in marked walking areas than in unmarked ones. The conclusion: Painted lines create a false sense of security for pedestrians, while drivers hardly noticed them at all. So now the city is removing crosswalks, either by painting them over, or by chipping vinyl stripes off the streets, one by one.

January 18, 1999

To: The Honorable, the City Councillors
From: Elie Yarden, co-chair Cambridgeport Neighborhood Initiative (CNI)
For: Council Meeting of January 25, 1999
Re: Pedestrian Safety and Law Enforcement

I enclose for your consideration an item from The Wall Street Journal of January 4, 1999. I did suggest some time ago at a Council Meeting that pedestrian safety can be improved by rigorous enforcement of traffic regulations. While a program of rigorous enforcement seems to find little favor in the eyes of city government officials -- for whatever reasons -- the fact is that it seems to work. The example which I gave at that meeting was Great Barrington, MA, somewhat closer to home than the West Coast. When will the city look at the issue from a point of view which regards the safety of those who prefer to walk as paramount, from a point of view which *subordinates* commuter and other commercial automobile traffic concerns, as well as casual use of our streets by motorists to the freedom of movement of pedestrians?

The attention currently being given to problems of pedestrian safety in Huron Village, the costly 'educational' effort, being made by the Department of Traffic, Parking and Transportation is highly commendable. (Equally commendable was the attention given by many members of the City Council who attended the community meeting at the Fayerweather School to address the problems of pedestrian safety in Huron Village area.) Cambridge distinguishes itself by our responsiveness to incidents which touch the lives of individual citizens. But let's not suggest that the energy (for this outpouring of concern) might not be equally available to intelligently resist the desire of 'developers' and their agents in the Planning Board for lower safety standards. This lowering of standards by DTPT has occurred at least once, during the hearings on the IPOP thus far.

Nevertheless, the ongoing attention to the problem in Huron Village is both commendable and exemplary. We hope that serious injury to a child will not be required for the DTPT to direct its attention to far more dangerous situations and problems of pedestrian safety which exist as of this writing on other residential streets such as River Street, Putnam Avenue, Western Avenue, Prospect Street. These streets are used by many children. Invoking and responding to the community concerns of people whose socio-economic position is very different from those of the residents of Huron Village should be an immediate concern. I hope that an 'incident' that would invite a comparison of the responses never occurs. I urge you to act now!

Enclosure: article from The Wall Street Journal
Reference: Packet for the the Community Meeting scheduled for January 25
sent out by DTPT on January 9, 1999.



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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

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Consent Communication #19

A communication was received from
Elie Yarden, Co-Chair, Cambridgeport
Neighborhood Initiative (CNI),
regarding pedestrian safety and
law enforcement.

In City Council January 25, 1999

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