

Parkways here are no picnic

Arborway, Jamaicaway have lots of problems

By CRAIG NICKELS
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

A number of streetlights on the Jamaicaway were recently fixed, but some JP residents still feel the local parkways are broken.

According to John Iappini, chair of the Jamaica Pond Association, the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) recently replaced 11 broken streetlights on the Jamaicaway between Kelly Circle and Leverett Pond. The neighborhood group had been pushing for the lights to be

fixed since last fall. [See sidebar on page 19 for information on streetlights.]

However, Iappini is one of many who are still unhappy with the overall condition of the Jamaicaway. "It's been abandoned," he said in a recent interview.

Iappini said the placement of the lights is a problem. "They're aesthetically pleasing," he said, "but they're too close to the road."

Broken and missing streetlights are just two of a list of problems

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Parkway Lights Out

The Gazette did an informal inspection of streetlights on the Jamaicaway and Arborway on March 22 between 9 and 10 p.m. These are the findings:

Area	Burned out	Posts down/missing
Arborway		
Shea Circle to Murray Circle	3	4
Murray Circle to Kelly Circle	2	0
Arborway totals	5	4
Jamaicaway		
Kelly Circle to Willow Pond Rd.	3	3
Willow Pond Rd. to Rt. 9 overpass	4	6
Jamaicaway totals	7	9
Kelly Circle proper	2	0
Totals	14	13

Compiled by Craig Nickels

Parkways

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described recently by residents regarding the Jamaica way and the Arborway. Other concerns involve design, maintenance, traffic enforcement and calming, displeasure with state management and confusion about city and state responsibilities.

"We need to make these streets safer," said Michael Reiskind, chair of the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council's (JPNC) Public Service Committee, at a recent meeting.

Sam Sherwood, who lives on the Arborway near Kelly Circle, agreed. "We need to introduce some sanity on these roads," he said.

Design and use

At the heart of the issue lies the design and use of the entire parkway system. Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Eliot designed the parkways in the late 1800s as a way to connect Boston's parks and green space. They were created primarily for recreational use and not to be the commuter thoroughfares they have become. Commercial traffic is still forbidden on them.

"They're sensitive areas," said Joe O'Keefe, a spokesman for Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, which oversees DCR, the agency that manages the parkways.

A common mantra among parkways fans is, "A parkway is not a road, but a park with a road in it." As such, they are curvy, lined with old trees and feature multi-use pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists. However, the same attributes that make parkways attractive as multi-use green space also make them a nightmare for commuters.

That doesn't stop commuters from using the roads. According to the City of Boston's "Access Boston" studies, the Jamaica way sees

approximately 41,000 vehicles per day, ranking it as the fifth-most traveled roadway in Boston (excluding limited-access highways). By comparison, nearby Centre Street gets 16,000 vehicles per day and Huntington Avenue accommodates 24,000.

According to O'Keefe, there isn't an easy way to reduce that traffic flow. "There's nowhere else for it to go," he said.

Reiskind echoed that sentiment. "You have to balance the needs of the commuters with the needs of the neighborhood," he said. Any solution that slows traffic also increases commute time.

Who's on first

Since JP's parkways are state roadways within the city that intersect with city streets, confusion about who is in charge of what becomes an issue. For example, while the state police have primary authority over the parkways, City of Boston Police also have jurisdiction over the Jamaica way and Arborway.

According to a state police spokesman, the state police are responsible for the parkways, but city police are responsible for property—such as houses—located along the parkways.

Boston Police spokesman Michael McCarthy said "whoever's closest" will respond to calls for accidents and emergencies on the parkways. He said that the city works to coordinate with state police to control traffic flow.

Such overlap can leave residents unsure of whom they should approach with concerns about speeding and traffic calming.

Jurisdiction is also an issue, to some extent, with maintenance issues.

Dave Isberg, local City Councilor John Tobin's chief of staff, used a hypothetical scenario at the corner of Perkins Street and the Jamaica way as an example: After a snowstorm, the city plows the sidewalk up to a corner where a city street intersects with a park-

way. The state plows the parkway sidewalk up the same corner, but neither clears space to walk on the corner. "It's just really silly," he said.

City Councilor at large and mayoral hopeful Maura Hennigan, who lives in Jamaica Plain, was involved in a car accident on the Jamaica way in 1996 that left her with a broken foot. She has called for a public hearing at City Hall on overlapping authority and inter-governmental communication on the parkways. A hearing has been tentatively scheduled for April 19.

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Sam Sherwood
Arborway resident

Tobin has also been planning a neighborhood summit to discuss the Jamaica way and Arborway, but he may decide to coordinate with Hennigan, according to Isberg.

Not everyone agrees that overlap is an issue. The DCR's O'Keefe said that, while residents may suffer some confusion about who does what on the parkways, it is fairly clear to the agencies involved. He also said that his agency does its best to clear up confusion when it receives calls.

The Pond Association's Iappini said that, while overlap may be an issue, DCR management of the parkways is the bigger issue.

The parkways "have always been a problem," he said. "It's gotten much worse since [the state] eliminated the MDC [Metropolitan District Commission]." The MDC was replaced by DCR as part of a reorganization effort of the Romney administration.

Iappini cited improper planting of trees as an example of DCR

ineptitude. "They plant them at the wrong time of the year," he said. "So the trees die. Then they go out and do the same thing again the next year."

State Rep. Jeffrey Sánchez agreed that, while he recognizes the inherent difficulty in keeping up the parkways, the DCR "still has some work to do. They're still trying to figure out who they are [as an agency]," he said.

The DCR did not return several calls requesting information on tree planting and streetlights.

Unsafe spots

The biggest traffic trouble spots mentioned by the JPNC Public Service Committee were the two rotaries, Murray Circle (near the Arborway), Kelly Circle (near Jamaica Pond), the intersection of Pond Street and the Jamaica way (near the boathouse), and the intersection of Bynner Street, Willow Pond Road and the Jamaica way.

Left turns and crosswalks are problems at the intersections, they said. Drivers attempting to make left-hand turns back up traffic, and left turn arrows are confusing to pedestrians and motorists.

The rotaries both have an older, larger design. Modern rotaries are built to be more compact, which clarifies traffic flow and encourages motorists to slow down.

Redesigning the rotaries on the Arborway has been studied by Rizzo Associates, an engineering firm. Redesigning the two rotaries would be "a seven-figure" option, according to Reiskind. Reiskind advised the committee to look at the reports, but also pushed for more immediate solutions.

Improvements needed

The Public Service Committee has identified four main areas for improvement of the Jamaica way and the Arborway:

Maintenance: Repair of potholes, replacement of streetlights, better signage, better lane and crosswalk marking, and plowing of

sidewalks.

Enforcement: Address speeding and drivers running red lights. Along with increased police enforcement, the committee has discussed red light cameras and speed boards—which list drivers' speeds as they pass—as options.

Education: Push for a media campaign to remind drivers of the mixed-use nature of the parkways and to drive safely. Enlist groups such as Walk Boston and MassBike to educate pedestrians and bicyclists.

Re-engineering: Redesigning Murray and Kelly Circles is not an immediate goal of the committee, but they would like to keep it “on the agenda.” The committee identified one major issue as the split from four to eight lanes between the rotaries. According to the committee, the lane split—and a general lack of driver courtesy—make it difficult for traffic to merge. The committee said that ideally, the middle four lanes should be for through traffic and the outside lanes should be for local access. Currently, the outside lanes act as “express lanes” and filter traffic away from the rotaries.

The committee plans to bring these issues up at upcoming hearings.

In the meantime, O'Keefe said that residents with specific complaints should call one of two numbers: The DCR community relations hotline at 626-4973 or the DCR's 24-hour line at 722-1188.

If residents have concerns about city property (streetlights, plowing, etc.) they can call the Mayor's Hotline—which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—at 635-4500.

The City of Boston's “Access Boston” studies are available at www.cityofboston.gov/access_boston/transportation_fact.asp

Reports by Rizzo Associates on redesigning the rotaries on the Arborway can be found at www.rizzo.com/arborway.

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Gazette Photo by Craig Nickels

The Arborway looking from Murray Circle toward Kelly Circle.