

TO: Mayor, South Bethany
CC: Town Council, South Bethany

From: Pat Voveris, Chair
& Committee on Traffic Restriction on Black Gum Drive

Date: November 10, 2011

Subject: Report and Recommendations

Recommendation: After a thorough review, the committee recommends that the restriction currently in effect daily from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. Memorial Day through Labor Day be retained but reduced to 7 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.

We further recommend that this change be implemented for the summer of 2012 and that the traffic again be monitored July 4th week, after which the committee will reconvene to determine the effectiveness of the revision.

Background: This committee was established in response to Mayor Headman's memorandum of July 29, 2011. He asked that the committee:

- Review the extensive and well-documented past regarding establishment of the restriction, and conduct any additional research that it feels necessary.
- Clarify previous assumptions held by the Town regarding the loss of Municipal Street Aid (MSA) if the town privatized the streets involved.
- Discuss pros and cons of continuing or modifying the current practice.

Committee Members are Pat Voveris, Chair, Al Rae, Melvin Cusick, Chief Deloach and Dick Oliver.

Mayor Headman felt that this review was necessary based on the results of the Town of South Bethany April 2011 Comprehensive Plan Community Survey. In response to the question about the barricade, 197 were for continuing it, 198 were for eliminating it, 158 favored exploring other options and 397 had no opinion. There were 114 written comments. The comments range from those angrily opposed to the barricade to those passionately defending it. Most agree that it is inconvenient, but many say that the minor inconvenience for a relatively short time confined to the summer is worth it.

Committee Process: The committee members first met on September 2, 2011. They were joined by George Junkin who had prepared a detailed analysis of the survey results including all of the written comments, as well as aerial maps and other analytical data.

The committee is indebted to Mr. Junkin for his contributions and would like to thank him formally.

Pat Voveris, with the help of Pam Smith, assembled a briefing book to include extensive historical data about the barricade. The committee members drove to the intersection of Black Gum Drive and Kent Avenue and the streets involved to familiarize themselves with the actual configurations. They returned to the Town Hall and after a brief discussion adjourned to allow the members to study the materials independently.

Three committee members, Pat Voveris, Al Rae and Dick Oliver, met again on September 27, 2011 and had a general discussion of the issues and determined that reducing the number of hours was likely the best option, but agreed to study the installation of a gate at Kent Avenue which would allow residents only to enter during the restricted hours and then only if a card key or some other means was available. Dick Oliver and Al Rae drove separately to the intersection to determine if a sign limiting truck traffic was indeed in place. It was not. Al Rae took pictures which are a part of this report. Dick Oliver and Chief Deloach returned again to the intersection to look for the sign, as both remembered that there had been one at one time. Again, they didn't see one. Chief Deloach agreed to follow up with the appropriate authorities to have one put in place.

The entire committee met again on October 14, 2011. Al Rae did not attend due to the tragic death of his son. Pat Voveris presented supplemental information highlighting heaviest traffic occurred from 11-12 and 3-4 in 2003, and 11-12 and 5-6 in 2006. Further information included updated figures on projected growth in Ocean View and beyond, background material on gated communities, and the feasibility of installing an access limiting gate or E-Z pass system.

The initial cost of a gate would be \$32,145.00, with further maintenance a factor. The E-Z Pass system would cost twice that, and not feasible given the geography of Kent Avenue and Black Gum Drive. The privatization of Black Gum Drive would result in the loss of MSA funds, and burden the Town with the maintenance of Black Gum Drive. Dick Oliver also presented artwork for the new signage on prohibiting trucks on Black Gum Drive.

After some discussion the committee decided that it would not recommend installing a gate as it is cost prohibitive as well as impractical to administer and maintain. It also agreed to deal with the here and now rather than basing any recommendation on an unpredictable future as to traffic increases. It felt that the issue is sufficiently well documented and can be reviewed easily if the situation changes.

The committee decided that the wisest course was to recommend that the barricade be retained but the hours reduced in line with the recommendation above, and agreed with Chief Deloach in keeping to the seven day restriction.

History, Observations and Considerations: The current restrictions have been in place since 2003. The barricade has been the subject of 4 traffic surveys since 2000. The surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 reaffirmed the conclusion that the barricade should remain in place. The committee chose to focus on the 2011 survey results since they reflect today's reality. It should be noted, however, that the prior surveys are remarkably consistent. Even though the raw numbers may differ the percentages remain very similar. Basically, about 30% to 35% favor, 30% to 35% oppose and the remainder are either not familiar with the issue or are ambivalent.

The streets involved, Black Gum Drive, Tamarack Drive, Cattail Road, Russell Road, Canal Drive and Evergreen Road, are narrow. There are no sidewalks and no way to build them. There is considerable pedestrian and bike traffic, particularly in the summer. Though this presents a hazard, there have been no serious incidents at this writing. There is some "shortcut" traffic. This consists of some commercial and construction vehicles, as well, as private vehicles. There is currently no signage at Kent Avenue to restrict trucks or commercial traffic. It is within the Town's authority to establish such restrictions and post appropriate signage. The private vehicles are primarily South Bethany residents, property owners, their guests or renters. The town may not post signs on Coastal Highway limiting west bound traffic as there is no town property available for this purpose and DelDOT would likely not do so.

ENTRY WEST INTO CANAL DRIVE



ENTRY NORTH INTO TAMARACK DRIVE



ENTRY SOUTH INTO BLACK GUM DRIVE



SIGN ON LEFT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH SIGN

Many residents, particularly those on the ocean side of Route 1, and almost all guests and renters have no idea that the “shortcut” even exists. Some of the “shortcut” traffic comes from people who live in Ocean View and beyond using it as a route to the beach. However, most people from outside of South Bethany are unaware that the “shortcut” route exists. Cut through traffic may increase as the economy improves and more developments are built.

The distance from the intersection of Black Gum Drive and Kent Avenue via the “shortcut” route to Evergreen Road and Route 1 is 1.7 miles. There are 5 stop signs, 5

right angle turns and 9 speed bumps. The committee concluded that, given this configuration, excessive speed is unlikely, and this is confirmed by the Traffic Surveys.

One committee member observed that to put the scope of the issue in context, there are 8760 hours in a year and current restrictions are in place about 300 hours over a 3 month span.

Pros/Cons/Recommendations: The committee acknowledged the following options in their assessment:

- A. Keep the barricade restriction in place.
- B. Modify the barricade restriction.
- C. Do away with the barricade restriction.
- D. Privatize Black Gum Drive.

- A. Keep the barricade restriction in place.

The barricade has successfully been in place since 2003. The town residents are rather evenly split between those in favor and those opposed.

In reviewing the history of the restriction, the committee found that speed was not an issue in the area but congestion and safety concerns were.

The DelDOT Traffic Calming Expert proposed the existing restriction with the idea that a change in early morning travel would result in a change of return travel later in the day. Residents acknowledged the restriction did improve the amount of traffic (lessened it), thus resulting in a safer environment.

Traffic monitoring studies did not, however, support the early morning restriction. It would be doubtful that beach traffic would begin at 7 a.m., and the committee concluded it must be "worker" traffic – people traveling to their jobs in South Bethany or neighboring towns.

- B. Modify the barricade restriction.

On the premise that worker travel accounted for early morning traffic from Kent Avenue through Black Gum Drive, the committee reviewed traffic studies done in the years 2003 and 2006. Traffic was peak from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. in 2003 and 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. in 2006. This seemed to point to beach traffic.

If heavy traffic resulted from worker travel, the committee concluded that most would need to be at their jobs by 8:30 in the morning. This resulted in the committee's final recommendation that the barricade be modified to half the time of its current restriction. The restriction from Memorial Day to Labor Day should be reduced to 7 a.m. through 8:30 a.m.

C. Do away with the barricade restriction.

Since the barricade has been successful in reducing traffic congestion, thereby increasing safety, and half of our residents favor the barricade, the committee did not see fit to discontinue it. This would be a most drastic action, and the modification, instead, posed a compromise rather than a radical move to support residents who do not favor the barricade, and possibly re-open congestion and safety issues.

D. Privatize the road.

In response to those residents who requested access to Black Gum Drive while the barricade was in place, privatization of the road was investigated.

Privatization would mean loss of MSA (Municipal Street Aid) funds to South Bethany. These funds are grants by the State for use in road maintenance and signage. If Black Gum Drive was made private, the maintenance of the street would fall on the shoulders of our Town.

Privatization would also mean establishing a system to deny access to Black Gum Drive by anyone other than South Bethany residents, who would use a card or pass for entry. Both a gate and an E-Z pass system were considered and found to be an enormous expense for South Bethany in cost, administration, and maintenance.

Respectfully Submitted By:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pat Voveris". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Pat Voveris, Chair
Committee on Traffic Restriction on Black Gum Drive
November 10th, 2011