

Editorial: Pulaski Elementary School needs a second street to enter and exit its property



The Pulaski Elementary School in New Bedford's Far North End needs a second way of entering and exiting its property as it is the only elementary school in the city abutting one street. (edlinesites.net)

By Carol Strupczewski

The Pulaski Elementary School is a magnet school serving students from every ward in the city. This school has an enrollment this year, according to the DESE, of 660 students. Add to that the teaching staff and support staff making approximately 700 or more people in that building on a daily basis during the school year. This is the only elementary school in the entire city in which one enters and exits the school property from one street, Braley Road. The school is not visible from the street as it is set back more than 200 feet from the road, has less than 300 feet between the entrance and exit, is abutted with the entrance to the annex parking lot located in the Pulaski Park, woods, wetlands, and backyards of homeowners.

Why the need for a second point of entry and exit? SAFETY.

1. A few times at the beginning of the school day, 911 calls were made, one in September of 2014. Because of the gridlock on the Braley Road, the emergency vehicles (ambulance, cruiser, and fire apparatus) were waiting in traffic to enter the school grounds. Cars are parked on both sides of the street by parents dropping off their child(ren).
2. There have been at least 4 natural gas leaks on Braley Road, 2 at the entrance and 2 at the exit. About 2 years ago when there was a gas leak on the street at the end of the school day. The principal made the 911 call reporting the leak and NStar and the fire engine from Station 5 responded.
3. This is the only elementary school in the city that has one street in which people can enter and exit the school property. Most of the elementary schools are surrounded by four streets, some are surrounded by three streets, and one or two are surrounded by two streets. At all of these other elementary schools, if the school had to be evacuated, at least students, teachers, and staff would be able to exit the building onto another street surrounding the school.
4. If Braley Road was closed to traffic because of an unexpected occurrence, how do you evacuate all the people from Pulaski School?
5. Some people would say that people in the Pulaski School could walk through the park and exit onto the dead end Jordan Street as an alternative; however, what happens if there is snow on the ground or muddy conditions as a result of snow melting or rain storms? How do you get students and adults with physical disabilities through the park? Just look at the two feet of snow we currently have on the ground from the blizzard.

The most logical place of creating a second way of safely evacuating people from the Pulaski School onto another street like every other elementary school is by paving a driveway

from the Pulaski Park leading to another street abutting it. More than a decade ago the School Department and the City worked hand-in-hand at putting in the annex parking lot on the City land of Pulaski Park. This annex parking lot abuts Maddie Drive which exits onto Acushnet Avenue.

Some of you might mention the cost factors of the driveway and about the wetlands being slightly impacted. My questions are:

1. What price tag do you put on a person's life?
2. Are wetlands more important than a person's life?
3. Would you want members your family or friends going to or working at Pulaski School knowing there is only one road to enter and exit?

Safety should be first and foremost for everyone and should always trump cost. I have addressed this at the School Committee meetings, neighborhood meetings, and have sent out emails to members of the City Council and School Committee members.

Pulaski needs a second way of getting everyone on and off of the school grounds onto another public street. It is now time to take action.
