

Brian Ristuccia
73 Rhinecliff Street
Arlington, MA 02476

Town of Arlington Select Board
730 Mass Ave
Arlington, MA 02476

April 9, 2020

Re: Traffic Rules and Orders / Mandatory Sidewalk Use

As you may know, many decades ago this board (then known as the Board of Selectmen) enacted traffic rules and orders which made it mandatory for pedestrians to use a sidewalk wherever one is provided. I am respectfully requesting that in light of the current public health emergency, the board vote to amend the rules and orders to temporarily suspend this requirement by striking Article XII Sections 5 (c) and (d).

It has always been a problem that sidewalks are too narrow for folks traveling to pass one another comfortably, particularly when there is snow or one of the travelers involved is using a walker, wheelchair, or other mobility aid. Given that many sidewalks in town are too narrow for pedestrians to pass one another at a safe distance under ordinary circumstances, folks today are finding it increasingly necessary to walk in the street for at least part of their journey in order to maintain the 6 feet of distance recommended by health authorities.

I am also requesting this board empower other town officials or employees to identify points of congestion on busier streets where pedestrians have insufficient space to pass one another safely and automobile traffic is heavy or fast enough to present a safety hazard for people walking in the street and to take remedial action. In these locations, cones, signs, sawhorses, and similar temporary measures could be employed to turn surplus parking or travel lanes into additional space for non-motorized travelers so folks can get around on foot without having to worry about dodging car traffic.

Finally, I realize repealing a largely unenforced traffic rule may seem like a feel-good measure. To be clear, it is not. Rarely enforced laws and regulations can produce seriously bad outcomes for our most vulnerable populations. They can create a situation where a person who is injured by a reckless or unqualified auto driver might be denied or reduced compensation on the argument that they contributed to their injury by engaging in an unlawful activity. For someone of modest means, and without health insurance, the resulting costs may have life altering consequences.

Sincerely,

Brian Ristuccia