

Project, parents win traffic safety demand

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The House of Mercy Organizing Project scored its first victory on behalf of the neighborhood it serves when the City School District Safety Committee agreed to install flashing lights around Nathaniel Hawthorne School No. 25.

The committee voted to install the lights by April 1 — weather permitting — during its monthly meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 26, at the school, located at the corner of Bay and Goodman streets, following requests by the organizing project and school parents.

The safety committee declined, however, to install signs reducing the speed limit around the school, citing studies indicating the signs' ineffectiveness in slowing down motorists.

"I feel pleased, and I think the kids will feel pleased," commented Greg Mercer, a school parent and a leader of the organizing project. The project operates out of the House of Mercy, 102 Central Park, an outreach center operated by the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester.

Mercer was among approximately 50 people who attended the committee's meeting, marked by several impassioned speeches by parents and students on the issue of pedestrian safety around the school.

Last year, the organizing project surveyed 566 area residents and found traffic safety around School No. 25 was their top concern. Three children, ages 4-6, have been struck by vehicles near the school in the last several months, leading residents to complain that the school's presence in the area was not obvious to motorists.

This concern fed the organizing project's request that school speed-limit signs and flashing lights be installed around Nathaniel Hawthorne School.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

During a Jan. 26 town meeting, members of the House of Mercy Organizing Project joined teachers, concerned parents and students in voicing concerns about the lack of flashing lights around Nathaniel Hawthorne School No. 25. (Above) Durran Henderson, a fifth-grader at School No. 25, speaks to the committee. (Right) Committee member Sister Mary Smith, SSND, principal of St. Boniface School, answers questions from neighborhood residents. The committee later voted to install the lights.

After a November meeting with the safety committee, pentagonal signs showing an adult and a child figure crossing the street had been put up around the school, but the committee noted that it needed more time to study the feasibility of other traffic signs.

At the meeting last week, the safety committee was presented with a petition signed by 487 neighborhood residents, and letters from 200 students, reiterating the project's demands. Terrence J. Rice, safety committee chairman and a Monroe County traffic engineer, handed out the results of a study made concerning



traffic around School No. 25. The study concluded, among other things, that motorists tended to exceed the 30-mile-per-hour limit on Bay and Goodman streets.

"Based on our findings, I believe there is a need to make the school area more identifiable to motorists," Rice wrote, adding that "flashers on the (pedestrian) signs will increase motorists awareness and reduce speed."

Rice explained that the lights would only flash during arrival, midday and dismissal periods. "We have had some success at reducing prevailing speeds at locations where we have installed these

flashers," he wrote.

Since the state mandates that school speed limits must be in effect from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Rice and Frank L. Dolan, the county's director of transportation, said that the effectiveness of school speed limits tend to be muted by driver indifference, a point the committee agreed with when it voted to decline the request for speed-limit signs.

However, committee member Mike S. Petromallo, a traffic safety manager with the Automobile Club of Rochester, requested that the committee also examine changing the sequence of traffic lights leading up to the Bay-Goodman intersection. The lights could be programmed to incrementally slow down drivers as they approach the school, he noted.

City Police Officer Gary J. Ras, a member of the safety committee, also told school parents that a police crossing guard could be

made available for midday crossings — a provision some parents had called for — but that more than half of the crossing guards are almost always idle at their posts due to lack of need. Nonetheless, the committee left open the possibility that a guard could be used in the future if necessary.

Noting the organizing project's success with the traffic safety issue, Mercer pointed out that it is planning to tackle such other neighborhood issues as landlord-tenant relationships down the road.

"We want to build relationships with the community," he said.

Auburn Catholic schools face fiscal woes

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

AUBURN — Auburn's two diocesan Catholic schools — Blessed Trinity and St. Mary's — are scrambling to find additional funding sources due to impending reductions in parish subsidies for the 1994-95 school year.

Unless such funding can be found, the committee that oversees the schools may be forced to propose consolidation or restructuring of the schools.

The committee — a subcommittee of the local area board which oversees all components of Catholic education in the Finger Lakes Cluster — is scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to discuss the schools' budgets. The committee is slated to meet with the local area board March 2.

According to Thomas Lewis, chairman of the school committee, Auburn parishes have been paying too high a percentage of the schools' budgets, and are no longer able to maintain the current level of support.

The parishes this year supplied just less than 50 percent of the schools' combined operating budgets of approximately \$900,000, Lewis said.

The diocese's cluster framework plan under which the schools operate, however, requires that parish subsidies account for 40 percent of school budgets. The diocesan target is close to the national average of 38 percent.

Originally, diocesan officials had suggested a three-year effort to gradually reduce parish subsidies to the 40 percent figure. But during a Jan. 26 meeting between the diocesan superintendent of schools, Timothy Dwyer, and the

pastors of Auburn, the pastors made it clear that they needed to reduce their contributions between \$50,000 and \$60,000 for the 1994-95 school year, Dwyer reported.

St. Mary's Parish alone will reduce its subsidy from \$210,000 this school year to \$160,000 next year, according to its pastor, Father Robert Schrader. Last year, the parish was forced to take out a loan to cover the subsidy, he reported.

"I think what the pastors are saying is the pot does have a bottom to it as far as parish subsidies," Father Schrader said.

Lewis reported that his committee had considered consolidation or reconfiguration in light of the financial crunch. But, he noted, the committee rejected both options at this time, partially because a parents' survey had shown opposition to both options.

Consequently, Lewis said, "As a school committee, the option we thought best is to keep the present grade configuration, try to get the schools more uniform in some of the things they are doing, and put together a marketing group."

At this point, the schools will retain their current configuration: Blessed Trinity offers a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade program, while St. Mary's provides a pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade program. Whether such a configuration will continue depends on the budget the school committee can develop, Dwyer said.

"They are charged with coming up with a realistic budget to accomplish that," Dwyer said. If not, he added, they may have to reconfigure the schools for the 1994-95 school year.

Among the options being considered,

Lewis continued, are raising tuition, creating an adopt-a-kid program and implementing joint fundraising efforts. The tuition increases for some parents could range from \$200 to \$400, he acknowledged. The current budget includes approximately \$93,000 in revenue from fundraising efforts, he said.

Sister Walter Anne O'Malley, SSJ, Blessed Trinity's principal, said it is in the interest of both schools to cooperate.

"We want Catholic education to flourish in Auburn, and clearly we have to work together for it," Sister O'Malley said.

In addition, Cayuga County parishes outside Auburn — which do not participate in the subsidy program — are considering fundraising efforts of their own to assist the two schools.

Father Paul J. Ryan, pastor of the Cayuga Team Ministry Cluster — comprising St. Patrick's, Aurora; St. Joseph's, Cayuga; Our Lady of the Lake, King Ferry; and St. Michael's, Union Springs — said he and the pastors of the other Cayuga County parishes outside Auburn are working out details of a three-year commitment to raise funds for the two schools.

One possibility is sponsoring a cruise, with the profits earmarked for the schools, according to the cluster pastor.

Father Ryan pointed out that the parishes in Cayuga County have been developing closer working relationships in recent years, and that this effort would simply be part of that pattern.

"We in Cayuga County are looking to be considered as the Cayuga County Catholic community," Father Ryan observed.

'Turn Off TV Day' set to battle sex, violence

NEW YORK (CNS) — Morality in Media will sponsor its third "Turn Off TV Day" Feb. 11 to protest what it says is the continuing erosion of broadcast standards.

"Excessive violence on TV is justifiably the hot-button issue today," Morality in Media president Robert Peters said in a statement.

"But when the TV pendulum swings away from violence, it traditionally swings toward gratuitous sex — sleaze! Both exploitative sex and violence must be curbed."

As other examples of the erosion of broadcast standards, Peters cited "Catholic-bashing" on CBS' "Picket Fences" and ABC's "NYPD Blue," a show that contains rough language and nudity and was the subject of a Morality in Media protest last August.

Morality in Media is asking boycott participants to write to three major advertisers — Procter & Gamble, Warner-Lambert and Slim-Fast Food Products — with a plea to not sponsor socially irresponsible programs.

Procter & Gamble is network TV's leading advertiser. Warner-Lambert, the group said, has a reputation for buying ad time for shows most other companies refuse to sponsor. Slim-Fast, the group says, advertises on "NYPD Blue," "Picket Fences," "Donahue" and a cable channel's erotic soap opera, "Eden."

For information, write to Morality in Media, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10115, or call 212/870-3222.