

Ashland Traffic Safety Commission

Minutes

March 27, 2008

Members Present: Alan Bender, Patti Busse, Matt Warshawsky (Chair), Greg Lemhouse, Doris Mannion, Colin Swales, Kate Jackson

Members Absent: Terry Doyle, Eric Heesacker

Staff Present: Karl Johnson, Jim Olson, Nancy Slocum, Officer Steve MacClennan

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chair Matt Warshawsky called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM in the Council Chambers, 1175 East Main Street. February 28, 2007 minutes were approved as submitted.

II. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:

A. PUBLIC FORUM

Ambuja Rosen, 211 Wightman Street, advocated for a dog tethering ordinance. She explained how tethering was cruel to dogs and addressed the argument that loose dogs could possibly create a traffic hazard. She asked the Commission to recommend to City Council that they pass the dog tethering ordinance. She also asked individuals to write Councilors Chapman, Jackson and Silbiger letters of support.

B. REVIEW OF TRAFFIC REQUESTS/PROJECTS PENDING/ACTION REQUIRED

Mannion noted that the Alida Street request for designation as a school zone was not on the agenda as discussed in the February 28th minutes.

1. Request for Stop Sign on Clear Creek Drive at Oak Street

Karl Johnson presented the staff report explaining the structure of this T-intersection. A recent traffic analysis showed approximately 265 Vehicles Per Day (VPD) on Clear Creek Drive and 5,553 VPD on Oak Street. Although the intersection did not meet state warrants for a stop sign, staff was recommending approval because of the heavy traffic moving quickly on Oak Street. In addition, traffic on Clear Creek was expected to increase with increased build-out.

Discussion:

Jackson noted that, by law, traffic on Clear Creek must yield to those traveling down Oak Street.

Decision:

Warshawsky / Busse m/s to accept staff's recommendations to install a stop sign at Clear Creek Drive. Motion passed 6 to 1.

2. Bike Safety on Oak Street

Olson reported that the Bicycle & Pedestrian Commission requested the Commission look at the option of installing bike lanes on Oak Street. Oak Street is a 40' wide collector that carries over 4000 VPD. There are sidewalks on at least one side of the street and unrestricted parking on both sides. Bikelanes on both sides of Oak along with parking on both sides would require 44' necessitating restricting parking to one side of Oak. Olson doubted that that would be acceptable to the residents. Also the existing bumpouts on Oak Street would interfere with a bike lane. Staff recommended surveying residents and reviewing other options.

Steve Ryan from the Bicycle & Pedestrian Commission addressed the Commission noting that the request came from a bicyclist living on Oak Street. The citizen requested a bikepath

connecting downtown to the greenway. The Bicycle & Pedestrian Commission discussed the issues brought forth by staff. He said a fog line was in essence a bike lane.

Swales wondered about designing a two way multiuse path instead of two bikelanes. Olson noted that design standards require a bikelane be on both sides on a street unless there was a physical separation.

Decision:

Lemhouse / Swales m/s to table item to a future meeting after such time as staff could gather data regarding bicycle crash statistics, speed, bike usage and conduct a neighborhood survey. Motion passed unanimously.

Tom Burnham, Bicycle & Pedestrian Commission, noted that he rode Oak Street from Eagle Mill. He thought Oak was used a lot by bicyclists on certain days. He said he was more concerned about slower bikers. He did an informal survey of cars parked on Oak Street and thought many of the spaces were unavailable due to fire hydrants, mailboxes, etc.

3. Siskiyou Boulevard Pedestrian Safety

Olson summarized the recommendations of the March 27th meeting and the commission's desire to discuss the Siskiyou / Garfield crosswalk in depth at this meeting. The Commission's recommendations were presented at the City Council on March 18, 2008. Unfortunately the Council ran out of time before reaching a definitive conclusion. The matter was tabled.

Olson asked the Commission for consensus and clarification on non-controversial recommendations. He emphasized the need to act on these items as quickly as possible. He noted that no matter how much engineering, education and enforcement were utilized, it was not possible to 100% solve the pedestrian safety problem. Both drivers and pedestrians must stay aware. Olson reported that since the last meeting Southern Oregon University (SOU) offered to pay for two of the four pedestrian-activated flashing beacons at crosswalks adjacent to SOU.

Lemhouse did not see a need to alter last month's decisions. He suggested quickly reviewing the decisions and then discussing the Garfield Street crosswalk. Busse said three citizens have died in crosswalk accidents since she had served on the commission. She thought it wrong that the Council stalled in making a decision.

Bender noted that all stakeholders agreed on lowering speed limits on Siskiyou Boulevard. Warshawsky suggested expanding the ODOT request to include Highway 66 from Siskiyou to Walker Avenue. Swales said the ultimate goal was not to post a slower speed, but to actually slow traffic. Traffic studies show that 80% of cars exceeded 25 mph. He asked that the issue of lowering speeds on Siskiyou be placed on next month's agenda.

Commission unanimously agreed to move forward with the request that ODOT reduce the speed on Siskiyou Boulevard from Gresham Street to Walker Avenue from 30 mph to 25 mph. The same reduction on Highway 66 from Siskiyou Boulevard to Walker Avenue should also be requested, but the request was not to delay the Siskiyou Boulevard request. The governor's office would be contacted to expedite the process. Swales asked that ODOT be requested replace "SPEED" signs with "SPEED LIMIT" signs.

There was consensus on moving forward with the immediate installation of rumble strips noting the strips should not extend into bikelanes. Swales was concerned about the affect of studded tires on rumble strips.

There was also consensus on installing pole-mounted pedestrian-activated beacons on all four crosswalks adjacent to SOU with the condition that SOU pay for the improvement of two crosswalks.

Staff distributed pedestrian accident data that showed a large percentage of crashes on Siskiyou occurred between 9 am and 6 pm. Larry Blake, VP of Facilities Management and Planning at SOU, noted that many students wear dark clothes. He thought the decorative light poles caused glare to oncoming vehicles. Morris noted that many students cross Siskiyou for evening meals at McNeill Hall.

The Commission acknowledged that many questions existed regarding their decision to recommend increasing cobra head lights to 150 watts from Morse Street to Frances Lane. Street lighting was beyond the Commission's expertise and included many variables beyond wattage including types of poles, colors, shielding of existing poles. Commission did not want to hire a street lighting engineering, but agreed to use the expertise of citizens such as David Chapman and Matt Warshawsky along with staff.

An unofficial citizens group met this week and ascertained that the existing poles and lighting were not uniform on Siskiyou. In addition, there was a wide variety of types of poles and there no lights at all near Garfield. They recommended experimenting with small sections at a time on Siskiyou Boulevard to monitor results. The Commission and staff agreed.

Commission voted to form a "street lighting" committee to begin trials as soon as possible. Swales asked for reflective stripping on the poles. Craig Morris, SOU Vice President of Finance, agreed that more study was needed before wattage was increased. He would, with City's support, add appropriate lighting on the SOU (west) side of Siskiyou. The Commission was in favor of this. Olson noted that ongoing regular meetings with SOU were planned.

Decision:

Lemhouse moved to direct staff to collaborate with local volunteers, with an expertise in lighting, to design and implement experimental lighting options to improve street/crosswalk lighting on Siskiyou Boulevard. Bender seconded the motion and it passed 6 to 0 with one abstention.

Garfield Crosswalk:

This crosswalk is an angle crosswalk that crosses five lanes of traffic (including a turn lane) and does not intersect the raised median. It is the longest of the four crosswalks adjacent to SOU. Recent traffic counts showed a projected 826 Average Daily Trips (ADT). The left turn onto Garfield from south-bound Siskiyou was 402 ADT and the driveway into SOU's main parking lot was 389 ADT and included turn movements both north-bound and south-bound. Olson noted that the relocation options of the crosswalk were constrained including left hand turn lanes. It could be moved to the opposite side of Garfield, however; there was question as to whether students would use the crosswalk if it were relocated.

Public Forum:

Craig Morris, Vice President of Finance at SOU, was not against removing the left hand turn lane if it would improve pedestrian safety, however; many trucks use the turn to access the Stevenson Union loading dock. He suggested extending the left median to block left hand turns to the main parking lot, but leaving the left turn access to the loading dock open.

David Chapman, City Councilor, distributed an alternative configuration for the intersection. Commission discussed the alternative, but noted their lack of expertise and the need for a traffic professional's opinion.

Cate Hartzell, City Councilor, noted that a group of citizens were involved in the Siskiyou Boulevard redesign in 2004. She recommended that experts work with staff on key uses. She also noted that the Bridge Street intersection is lower in elevation perhaps contributing to the lack of pedestrian visibility. Hartzell commented that Siskiyou Boulevard had a large number of various poles that may reduce viability. She suggested using 55 gallon drums to experiment with removing left hand turn movements.

Swales recommended installing a curb bumpout on Garfield at the intersection with Siskiyou.

Larry Blake, Associate Vice President for Facilities Management & Planning at SOU, suggested that the driveway into the large parking lot at SOU “felt awkward.” He was in favor of removing that left hand turn lane.

Steve Ryan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Commissioner, favored straightening the crosswalk to make it shorter thus forcing pedestrians to look toward oncoming traffic.

Deltra Ferguson, Women’s Resource Center, favored Chapman’s alternative. She thought making the crosswalks shorter would make it safer. She also favored hiring an expert to examine the “culture” of those that used the crosswalk. High school students jaywalk or cut the crosswalk. She had no answers, but obvious decisions should not wait. She agreed that slowing traffic was the long-term solution.

Discussion:

Swales noted there were competing goals for Siskiyou: sharing space with students and getting people through town as quickly as possible.

Warshawsky suggested forming a subcommittee to expedite the process, calling a special meeting of the Commission, and/or hiring an expert. Lemhouse agreed with Warshawsky and wanted to interview potential engineers to make sure they understood the community’s values. Olson noted that whoever was hired should have engineering expertise and work closely with a citizen’s committee. He said an ODOT engineer lived in the City of Ashland and may be willing to assist the city. Busse agreed that knowing the community was important. Olson’s options for hiring an expert included amending our existing contract with HDR to include the Siskiyou Boulevard study, amending the contract with the engineer on the Traffic Impact Analysis, or going through the month-long request for proposal process. Swales recommended Michael Rankin formally of ODOT Bike and Pedestrian Division. Jackson noted that redesigning an intersection took time and could not be sole-sourced.

Commission asked staff to move forward with quotes to expand the two existing contracts to include the four SOU crosswalks. Commission recognized that engineering fixes to the intersection may be expensive.

Decision:

Lemhouse moved to request that the mayor and city council approve formation of an ad hoc committee to assist in the redesign of the Siskiyou/Garfield crosswalk as well as other pedestrian safety improvements. The committee would include two TSC, two Bike & Pedestrian Commissioners, a City Councilor, a SOU representative and perhaps an ODOT employee. Swales seconded the motion and it passed 6 to 1.

Swales asked staff for more speed counts including counts in the downtown core. He would like staff to research options to slow vehicular traffic including narrowing Siskiyou to two lanes.

5. ACTS Oregon Grant Allocation

The City was successful in obtaining \$5,000 for the ACTS Oregon 2007-08 Building Safer Communities Mini-Grant for a DUI campaign. Slocum asked the Commission for volunteers to assist her in implementing the program. Lemhouse and Warshawsky volunteered.

6. Bicycle & Pedestrian Issues

No additional items were discussed.

7. Agenda Items for Next Month

No additional items were discussed.

C. OTHER – None.

NEXT MEETING DATE: April 24, 2008

III. Adjourned 9:52 PM

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