



TRANSPORTATION SAFETY & ADVISORY COMMISSION

CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

TO: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Members, Council members, City Manager Kurt Hodgen, Assistant City Manager Anne Lewis

FROM: Brad Reed, Transportation Planner

DATE: Monday, October 19, 2015

RE: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Summary from September 9, 2015 Meeting

The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on Wednesday, September 9, 2015 at 8:30 AM in Room 205 of the City Municipal Building, 345 S. Main St.

Members and Advisory Members present included: Blessing (NE Citizen Member, Chairman), Len Van Wyk (SW Citizen Member), Calvin Ferrell (SE citizen member), Joshua Humphries (At-Large Citizen Member), Brad Reed (Public Works member designee), Sgt. Pete Ritchie (Police member Designee), Tom Hartman (Public Works), Thanh Dang (Public Works), Ian Bennett (Fire), Lee Eshelman (JMU), James Wininger (Transit)

Guests Present: None

Commission meetings are open to the public and citizens are provided the opportunity to voice their views/concerns about any item before the Commission. It is the policy of the Commission to move relevant agenda items to the beginning of the meeting when citizens are in attendance to avoid detaining them for the entire meeting.

Welcome

New Business

1. Request for speed limit study on Stone Spring Rd

Mr. Reed shared a request from City Council to consider the appropriateness of the speed limit on Stone Spring Rd – Erickson Ave. Public Works selected for further evaluation Stone Spring Rd from Ramblewood Rd to the south city limits because it is the only section of the connector roadway where the design of the street could potentially support a speed limit above 35 mph. A

traffic study was performed in this area of Stone Spring Rd just west of its intersection with Manor Dr. The 85th percentile speeds of traffic were 42.1 mph in the eastbound direction (downhill) and 45.4 mph in the westbound direction (uphill). Typical Traffic Engineering practice is to set speed limits 0-5 mph below the measured 85th percentile speeds, as the 85th percentile speed is considered a measure of the upper end of free flow speeds on a roadway. The 85th percentile speeds measured for this study indicate that the majority of drivers are comfortable traveling at or slightly above 40 mph.

A consideration when evaluating speed limits is the strong influence of the roadway environment on prevailing speeds. Research cited on the FHWA's website indicates that increasing a speed limit is unlikely to increase the 85th percentile speeds, as a driver's chosen speed is not strongly influenced by the posted speed limit and is instead driven by factors such as the number of lanes, lane width, presence of pedestrians and cyclists, amount of vehicle traffic, and other environmental factors.

To understand the level of safety on Stone Spring Rd, a review of crash history was performed. Five crashes were reported between August 2013 and August 2015. These incidents are listed in the slides attached at the bottom of this document. One of these crashes was a sideswipe collision caused by a driver abruptly trying to pass a slower moving vehicle. This could be an indication that the speed differential between drivers is high at times.

Two of the crashes were rear end collisions with vehicles slowing to turn into private driveways. It is arguable whether a higher speed limit would increase the likelihood of such rear end incidents, but commercial and residential entrances on 40 and 45 mph speed limit roads are not uncommon and sight distance of those slowing to turn is very good on this section of Stone Spring Rd.

Also of note is that there was a single T-bone crash at the intersection of Stone Spring Rd & Ramblewood Rd involving a vehicle turning left off of Ramblewood Rd and not yielding to a vehicle traveling eastbound on Stone Spring Rd. Sight distance for vehicles coming off of Ramblewood Rd/Leland Cir is insufficient to support an increase in the speed limit from 35 mph. Complaints have been received from 2 citizens about this challenge and the high speeds of eastbound traffic from the direction where sight is most limited. For this reason, any speed limit change on Stone Spring Rd needs to occur to the east of Ramblewood Rd/Leland Cir so that higher speeds are not encouraged through the intersection. Sight distance was also evaluated at Manor Dr and other entrances to the southeast of Ramblewood Rd and it was found that they are sufficient to support an incremental increase in the speed limit.

Given these findings, Public Works proposed that the speed limit on Stone Spring Rd be increased to 40 mph from the south city limits where VDOT has a posted 40 mph speed limit to a point approximately 500 feet east of Ramblewood Rd.

Sgt. Ritchie commented that speeding tickets have been tossed in court because drivers have said that it is hard to tell what the speed limit is on the section of Stone Spring Rd studied by Public Works. He suggested a speed limit of 45 mph be considered, saying that Virginia Ave is a

similar roadway and is 45 mph. Mr. Van Wyk said that a gradual drop in speed seems better to get appropriate speeds where you want them. Mr. Hartman added that VDOT has a posted decrease in speed limit from 45 mph to 40 mph between Peach Grove Ave and the south city limits, and the city should try to match that speed zone. Mr. Blessing said that he thinks 40 mph would be OK, but is curious to know why VDOT has a 40 mph speed limit for ¼ mile just outside the city. He said he would be inclined to suggest a 45 mph speed limit if not for that.

Mr. Van Wyk commented that he likes the idea of extending the 40 mph speed limit, but could see some people who live off of Ramblewood Rd being upset. Mr. Reed added that Public Works believes the speed limit change would be far enough away from the Ramblewood Rd intersection so as not to encourage higher speeds where they aren't desired.

The Commission unanimously agreed that the proposed 40 mph speed limit on Stone Spring Rd would be appropriate, but asked that Public Works ask VDOT why it uses the 40 mph speed zone in question. The Commission agreed that, if the 40 mph speed limit is there only because the city has a 35 mph speed limit, then consideration should be given to extending a 45 mph speed zone from Peach Grove Ave to just before Ramblewood Rd.

Update after Commission meeting: VDOT set their 40 mph speed zone between Peach Grove Ave and the south city limits because of the more urbanized roadway environment entering the city. VDOT desires to keep this 40 mph speed zone as is and not increase it. For this reason, the Public Works Department will proceed with the Commission's recommendation to increase the speed limit on Stone Spring Rd from 35 mph to 40 mph between the south city limits and a point approximately 500 feet to the east of the intersection with Ramblewood Rd/Leland Cir.

2. Citizen pedestrian safety concern and request for crosswalks on Vine St at E Washington St and Old Furnace Rd

Mr. Reed shared a citizen complaint with the Commission regarding pedestrian safety on Vine St. The individual stated that vehicles turning off of E Washington St onto Vine St are generally unaware of pedestrians crossing E Washington St in front of them while stopped at the STOP sign. It was requested that a crosswalk be installed for this north-south crossing along Vine St to draw attention to pedestrians. Crosswalk installation was also requested for the north-south crossing of Old Furnace Rd on the west side of Vine St due to the popularity of this movement and the potential for conflict with vehicles that are not looking for pedestrians.

Mr. Reed informed the requestor that the marking of crosswalks at these locations would not be possible without the provision of an accessible route as per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). ADAAG is enforceable by the Department of Justice and requires that curb ramps attached to an accessible pedestrian route be provided with all street crossings. An accessible route is typically sidewalk, but it can also be a slip-resistant grassed surface that is 4 feet in width on the public right-of-way and has a maximum 2% cross slope and a maximum 5% slope parallel to the direction of travel.

Sidewalk currently runs along the east side of Vine St between E Washington St and Old Furnace Rd and accessible curb ramps are provided on the corner with the sidewalk at each intersection. Curb ramps are not present at the opposing side of either intersection. The grassed area along the east side of Vine St to the north of E Washington St appears that it might meet the ADA requirements for an accessible pedestrian route, but further evaluation would be needed prior to installing a curb ramp and crosswalk to this area.

The grassed area on the east side of Vine St to the south of Old Furnace Rd has challenges with the terrain both in terms of the slope and the presence of privately installed vegetation on the public right-of-way blocking the area where pedestrians might walk. Further evaluation would be needed prior to installing a curb ramp and crosswalk to this area and it is expected that there would be additional costs involved to design, clear, and grade the corner of the intersection.

Due to the costs involved in fulfilling these requests, Mr. Reed informed the citizen that both items would be considered as project requests for the Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan update that is currently underway. It was also noted that the requestor volunteered to collect pedestrian & bicycle data at the Vine St & E Washington St intersection during this year's annual city-wide Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project.

Mr. Hartman added that it is tough to consider grass an accessible route and a good deal of evaluation would be needed before making such a determination.

Mr. Van Wyk noted that, on South Ave, curb ramps were installed where the sidewalk ends at S Dogwood Dr as with the sidewalk on Vine St. Mr. Reed explained that, historically, ramps have been installed on a single side in some cases to make the most of available project funds. It is less expensive to install such facilities while the sidewalk is being constructed rather than coming back later and tearing out the sidewalk to install a ramp when sidewalk is constructed on the opposing side of the street. Mr. Hartman added that such ramps do help people get into the street, if needed. Mr. Humphries suggested using a sign to warn pedestrians that the sidewalk is ending in these cases. Mr. Reed said that the primary issue with installing ramps on only one side of the street is that it has the potential to lead blind pedestrians into a street with no receiving facility. Unfortunately, a sign would not help with this issue.

Mr. Blessing commented that he sees a good amount of pedestrian traffic on Vine St and has seen near misses because pedestrians are not visible while walking along the street where there is no sidewalk.

Mr. Van Wyk added that consideration needs to be given to how many people are not walking because it isn't safe in certain locations. He said he considers whether a 10-year old could safely cross the street at a given location. If not, then the location is not walkable.

Ms. Dang asked the group's opinion as to whether the city should construct ramps on a single side if a sidewalk project is underway. Mr. Hartman said that the city fights both sides of the issue. Funds need to be used efficiently and people may question why a ramp wasn't installed if one isn't put in with the sidewalk project. No other comments were voiced on this topic.

Other Business / Announcements

Adjourn