



Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission  
City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

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**TO:** Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Members

**FROM:** Jakob zumFelde, Public Works Planner

**DATE:** December 18, 2019

**RE:** Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Summary for December 11, 2019 Meeting

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The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on December 11, 2019 at 8:30am in Room 011 of City Hall, 409 S Main St.

Commission members present: William Blessing, Marian Lebherz, Chance Ebersold, Kyle Lawrence, Len Van Wyk, Erin Yancey (Public Works), Cpl. Wayne Westfall (Police Department)

Advisory members and guests: Tom Hartman (Public Works), Jakob zumFelde (Public Works), Brad Reed (VDOT), Doug Stader (DMV), Jason Good (resident)

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*Welcome*

*Business*

**1. Grattan Street Speed Limit reduction**

Ms. Yancey provided an overview of the Report that had been provided to TSAC members prior to the meeting. She described the speeding concerns that were raised by residents and the data that was collected on the segment of Grattan Street between S. Main Street and S. Mason Street. She noted the various possible actions that could be taken to improve the situation, and which had been discussed at previous TSAC meetings. Having considered the benefits and drawbacks of each potential action, staff are recommending reducing the speed limit to 15mph as the first step to take to improve safety. The goal of this would be to reduce the speed of vehicles on the road and potentially discourage cut-through trips. Mr. Hartman said that if recommended by TSAC, reducing the speed limit could be put on the City Council agenda in January, and implemented in January if approved.

Mr. Van Wyk asked what the safe speed was determined to be. Cpl. Westfall indicated that having the speed limit at 15 mph would make it so that Police officers could warn drivers going over that speed and potentially write citations for those going around 20 mph or higher. Ms. Yancey indicated that this is in line with the speeds that are expected to be safe on the roadway. Ms. Lebherz asked about closing the entrance to Grattan Street from Liberty Street, as this

would decrease the ability of traffic to use the street as a cut-through route. Ms. Yancey indicated that this would be a more dramatic measure, and would negatively impact the residents of the street, so it would only be considered if many other efforts were attempted first. Mr. Ebersold asked whether anything would be done to bring attention to the new speed limit – for example an orange placard above the sign or a flashing light. Ms. Yancey indicated that staff would consider this, if it proves to be needed. Initially, orange flags will be placed on the new speed limit signs to draw attention to them. Mr. Ebersold also asked whether it would be setting a precedent of reducing speed limits that residents on other streets would then request to have implemented. Ms. Yancey stated that the report very clearly identified the narrow width of the street as a primary reason why the lower speed limit was chosen. Cpl. Westfall and Mr. Hartman echoed this, saying that very few other streets are as narrow as this segment of Grattan Street.

Mr. Van Wyk made a motion to recommend that Council take action to set the speed limit on this segment of Grattan Street to 15 mph, as indicated in the Report. Ms. Leberherz seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Mr. Good, who lives on Grattan Street, thanked staff and the Commission for their efforts in addressing the concerns.

## 2. Follow up items

### a. Garbers Church Road crashes

Ms. Yancey said that staff have collected speed data at the curve on Garbers Church Rd where residents have expressed concerns about drivers traveling at unsafe speeds. The speed data showed an 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed of about 45 mph, including vehicles going in both directions. Staff evaluated whether a curve warning sign (shown below) is warranted and determined that it would be appropriate to install a sign for northbound drivers approaching that curve.



Mr. Van Wyk asked whether the curve sign would actually slow drivers down, particularly given that anyone who drives the route every day already knows that there is a curve there. Ms. Yancey noted that there are many young drivers in the area going to the High School, and that the sign may cause even experienced drivers to be more aware of their speed. Ms. Yancey said that speeds would be monitored after the curve warning sign is installed, and Public Works staff would purchase and install a speed radar sign (that shows drivers the speed they are going) if the speed of the northbound traffic has not decreased.

b. Port Republic Rd implementation follow up

Mr. zumFelde said that staff have implemented a suggestion from the last TSAC meeting to extend the left turn restriction at Port Republic Road and Hunters Rd to 9:30 AM on Tuesday and Thursday, given that the JMU class schedules on those days leads to significant traffic between 9:00 and 9:30. He also reported that staff evaluated the situation at S. Main St and Maplehurst Ave following a complaint about not being able to make a left turn onto S. Main Street from Maplehurst Ave due to northbound traffic blocking the intersection. Mr. zumFelde said that an evaluation indicated a relatively low frequency and duration of that intersection being blocked, with a few instances being related to trains crossing Main Street, so staff determined that no action was necessary at this time.

**3. Appointment of Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee Members**

Closed session.

**4. Traffic Studies**

Ms. Yancey introduced Mr. Reed from VDOT and said that he would be presenting information regarding the STARS study that is currently being completed. She said that he would be providing significant updates on efforts that TSAC had been briefed on before, including studying S. Main Street in the vicinity of Mosby Road and Stone Spring/Erickson and developing an alternative intersection design at the Erickson Ave & Pear Street Intersection. Ms. Yancey said that there would be a public meeting and public survey in the next few months where TSAC members and all residents can provide input. As such, the presentation is primarily informational and there are no items where staff are looking for recommendations from TSAC at this time.

Mr. Reed explained that the STARS (Strategically Targeted Affordable Roadway Solutions) Program works to bring together VDOT, City, and other relevant agencies to develop feasible transportation projects that can address issues such as safety or congestion. He said that consultants have been procured for the study and a few meetings have been held with VDOT and City staff. He provided background regarding why the intersections and segments were chosen for evaluation, and noted the safety and operational concerns at the locations. He presented the results of a public survey that was conducted and received over 200 responses. The survey showed a desire for improvements at the locations, and also provided information about the receptivity of the public to certain traffic concepts that may be considered.

Mr. Reed presented the concept that is being considered for the Erickson Ave & Pear Street intersection, which TSAC had reviewed at a previous meeting. The configuration will not allow left turns from Pear Street onto Erickson, but will accommodate northbound left turns onto Erickson Ave through a signalized U-turn on Erickson Ave that requires a right turn first. Mr. Reed explained the safety benefits and that the improvement is important for accommodating

the increased traffic expected from development in the area, which is how the proposal came to the City in the first place.

Mr. Reed presented information about the number of crashes that have occurred along S. Main Street between Mosby Ave and Stone Spring Road. Cpl. Westfall noted that the database that was used does not include crashes that did not meet a certain threshold, which is any injury occurring or at least \$1500 in property damage. Given the large number of business/restaurant entrances on the corridor, installation of a median that restricts left turns into and out of these entrances would be expected to provide a significant safety benefit. Mr. Reed showed the initial concept for this. In order to install the median on this corridor, the consultants have identified multiple alternatives. The first alternative would install the median in the current roadway footprint by removing the existing bike lanes. The second alternative would expand the roadway to include both the median and new bicycle lanes. Mr. Reed said that the cost for the first alternative is estimated at less than \$1 million, while the cost for the second alternative is estimated to be \$2-3 million. In addition to either alternative, a sidewalk or shared use path could be added along the east side of the roadway. Mr. Hartman stated that due to cost considerations the City's preferred alternative is to remove the bike lanes in order to install the median in the existing roadway and to install a sidewalk along the east side of the roadway. Mr. Van Wyk expressed concern about removing the bike lanes, particularly given the fact that this is the corridor that will be used to access the new High School. Ms. Yancey and Mr. Lawrence indicated that the preferred bicycle infrastructure to provide access to the new High School would be an extension of the Bluestone Trail that would parallel S. Main Street but would follow Beery Road and Blacks Run. Mr. Reed noted that the existing bike lanes are 3' wide, which does not meet current standards for bike lanes. Ms. Yancey indicated that if the bike lanes versus the median were viewed as a tradeoff, the safety benefit of the median protects many more travelers in this area of the city. This segment of bike lanes is the very end of the segment that has bike lanes on S. Main Street. People on bicycles are able to use the sidewalks on this segment, and the project would add a sidewalk on the east side of the road. Ms. Yancey acknowledged that a sidewalk is not the ideal facility for cyclists, but it is a safe separated facility that has the potential to be funded, while widening the road for bike lanes or constructing a shared use path would increase the cost too much to remain a competitive project for funding. Transit users and bicyclists would both benefit from a new sidewalk connection on this segment.

Mr. Reed provided information about the S. Main Street & Mosby Rd. intersection and potential improvements. The primary alternative being considered would change the signal phasing so that eastbound and westbound traffic on Mosby Road flow concurrently, instead of the current split phase configuration where the directions have the green signal separately. To do this, the consultants have recommended relocating the crosswalk from the north side of the intersection to the south side of the intersection. Mr. Lawrence asked why crosswalks could not be included on both sides of the intersection. Mr. Reed said the high amount of traffic turning left from Mosby Rd (eastbound) onto S. Main Street (northbound) could be a safety issue for people walking in the crosswalk. He noted that this may be particularly true given that there are few

pedestrians in this area and thus drivers may not look very closely for pedestrians in the crosswalk. There was a discussion about where pedestrians in the area would be going, with the general understanding being that they are probably going from destinations on the west side of S. Main Street to bus stops on the east side of the road. Mr. Lawrence reiterated that with the plan for a new sidewalk along the east side of the road, it is important that planning for the intersection take into account wait times for pedestrians, as removal of the crosswalk on the north side of the intersection would create a situation where pedestrians would have to cross three legs of the intersection which would increase their travel time from existing conditions.

Mr. Reed said that he had information regarding alternatives that have been developed for the intersection at S. Main Street and Erickson/Stone Spring. Due to limited time, it was decided not to have this information presented at this meeting. It will be presented at the public meeting to be held in February.

#### *Other Business/ Announcements*

Mr. Hartman ensured that all Commission members were aware of the public hearing that will be held by VDOT regarding the major project that will take place at I-81 Exit 247. The project will replace multiple E. Market Street bridges (over I-81 and the railroad tracks), construct a shared use path along E. Market Street between MLK Jr. Way and Burgess Rd/Linda Lane, and change the configuration of multiple interstate ramps. Mr. Hartman noted that VDOT had created a video that provides an overview of the project, which can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ez\\_nojn3Mg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ez_nojn3Mg).

#### *Adjourn*