



Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission
City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

TO: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Members

FROM: Jakob zumFelde, Public Works Planner

DATE: March 9, 2020

RE: Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission Summary for February 12, 2020 Meeting

The Transportation Safety & Advisory Commission met on February 12, 2020 at 8:30am in Room 011 of City Hall, 409 S Main St.

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

Advisory members and guests: Dastan Khaleel (Public Works), Jakob zumFelde (Public Works), Paul Helmuth (Fire Department), Matt Tobia (Fire Department), Greg Deeds (Police Department), Ian Steines (resident), Abbas Rawoot (representative of a business)

Welcome

Everyone in attendance introduced themselves. As two attendees were there for specific agenda items, those items were moved to the beginning of the agenda.

Safety at the intersection of Liberty Street & Wolfe Street

Mr. Rawoot introduced himself and said that he has a business at the corner of Liberty Street & Wolfe Street. He said that he has observed crashes at this location on average every 40 days or so, and he provided pictures of one of the recent ones in which a vehicle ended up very near the front door of his business. He noted that if it had gone a few more feet, multiple people would have been injured. He said that his concerns at the intersection include speed of those on Liberty Street and site distance for those traveling westbound on Wolfe Street. In particular, the parking at the building on the northeast corner of the intersection blocks the view of westbound traffic. He also mentioned that there had been a traffic light there that was removed in 2013.

Cpl. Westfall indicated that the parking by the building was legal and on private property, so could not be changed at this point. Mr. Lawrence asked whether speed was the main factor, and there was some discussion about driver behavior on this part of Liberty Street. Mr. Khaleel said that there are a few other intersections where there are similar concerns, with the intersection of Liberty Street & Gay Street being notable. He noted that traffic signals have benefits and drawbacks, as a signal would likely decrease crashes at this location, but would not eliminate crashes and would decrease efficiency of travel through the intersection. He also explained that an intersection must meet warrants for a traffic

signal and indicated that this intersection does not meet the warrants. As such, he indicated that staff want to evaluate multiple options to determine what is most appropriate. Cpl. Westfall, and others, noted that multiple crashes at this location have involved people turning left from the right lane. Mr. zumFelde noted that a brief review of crashes that occurred between 2013 and 2018 showed that crashes have occurred with eastbound traffic on Wolfe Street as well as the larger number of crashes involving westbound traffic. Ms. Yancey said that staff would continue their review of the crash history and conditions at the intersection and bring the information to the next TSAC meeting. Mr. Rawoot thanked the Commission for listening and working to respond to his concern.

Portland East Traffic Calming Plan update

Mr. Steines introduced himself as a resident of the Portland East neighborhood, there to discuss the Portland East Traffic Calming Plan implementation. Ms. Yancey provided an overview of the implementation actions taken to date. The treatments implemented so far are stop bars and double yellow lines at stop signs, a speed bump at the intersection of Fieldale Place and Springfield Drive, and a traffic island with a stop sign at the intersection of Springfield Drive and Portland Drive. Ms. Yancey noted that staff had discussions with The Retreat, and a representative of the owners on the other side of the Retreat access road who also have rights to the access road. No agreement was reached to do anything to the intersection of Reservoir Street and the access road that would discourage Retreat residents from using the Portland East neighborhood as a cut-through route. She said that the next step is to do a traffic study that evaluates whether conditions have improved following the measures that were implemented. If cut-through concerns remain, staff will continue to engage with VDOT and Rockingham County staff to identify potential measures that could be taken in the County.

Following some discussion of the cut-through concerns, including trucks driving through the neighborhood, there was discussion of what the impacts would be of closing the street, likely at the City/County line. Mr. Steines said his neighbors were split on this idea. Mr. Tobia shared concerns regarding emergency response and neighborhood egress in emergency situations if the road were to be closed. He indicated any closure should be done in such a way that the road could be used in emergency situations. Ms. Yancey said that every other option will be explored before considering closing the road. Mr. Lawrence noted that additional development, including upcoming development on Reservoir Street, is likely to make the issue worse and closing the road may be the only long-term solution. Ms. Leberz asked whether providing sidewalk through the neighborhood would address some of the neighborhood's concerns. Ms. Yancey noted that multiple constraints would make adding sidewalk a very expensive effort. Mr. Blessing said he didn't see closing the road as an option, in part because multiple agencies would need to approve of the closure. Cpl. Westfall asked if a neighborhood traffic circle could be considered instead of a full closure. Ms. Yancey indicated that the neighborhood had not been favorable on the idea of a neighborhood traffic circle during the process of creating the Traffic Calming Plan. She added that the idea could be proposed if discussions are held with the County, as there may be an opportunity for that in the County, potentially at the intersection of Fieldale Place, Secrist Lane and Bullpen Drive. Ms. Yancey said that data would be collected and then next steps will be identified.

Business

1. Commission business

- a. Elect a Chair of the Commission

Mr. Blessing indicated that he had been Chair of the Commission for many years and was ready for someone else to become Chair. Ms. Lebherz nominated Mr. Lawrence, and Cpl. Westfall seconded the nomination. All members present voted in favor of Mr. Lawrence as Chair for the 2020 calendar year.

2. Follow up items

- a. Grattan Street Speed Limit reduction

Ms. Yancey said that the speed limit reduction to 15 mph on Grattan Street was approved by City Council in January and implemented immediately. Staff will collect vehicle speed and count data before the end of the JMU semester to identify the impact of the change.

- b. Garbers Church Road curve

Ms. Yancey said that a curve sign was installed, and that staff will collect speed data to determine whether vehicle speeds have decreased while going around the curve.

- c. Port Republic Rd implementation follow up

Mr. Khaleel explained that staff evaluated reducing Port Republic Rd from 2 westbound through lanes to 1 through lane so that both right turn lanes would be dedicated turn lanes and could have flashing yellow arrows that would help remind drivers of the need to yield to pedestrians. He said that staff determined that reducing the number of through lanes would be challenging to do safely and efficiently. Mr. Khaleel said that staff are now evaluating having a flashing yellow arrow on the right-most traffic signal, as this may encourage right-turning drivers to yield to pedestrians, but he said the cost of this is not yet clear as it may involve upgrades to the hardware at the intersection. Mr. Lawrence noted that the original concern was that adding the shared through/right lane had made things worse for pedestrians. Mr. Khaleel said that the Port Republic Rd study had indicated notable traffic benefits from that change, so it is seen as important for flow on the corridor.

- d. STARS Study – S. Main Street, Erickson Ave & Pear St intersection

Ms. Yancey said that efforts on the STARS study for S. Main Street and the Erickson Ave/Pear Street intersection have continued to progress following the presentation by Mr. Reed from VDOT at the last TSAC meeting. She noted that the survey with the proposed alternatives had received a high number of responses. She said that the study would be wrapping up soon to provide information for SMART SCALE project applications.

e. Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program neighborhood updates

Ms. Yancey provided updates on implantation of the Sunset Heights Traffic Calming Plan. She said that concerns from VDOT led to the City not making the changes proposed at the intersection of W. Market and High Street. Otherwise, phase I efforts have been implemented and speed and count data will be collected in March to determine the impact of these measures. Ms. Yancey noted that implementation of phase II may be complicated, as a few residents in the neighborhood have concerns about the proposed changes. Mr. Lawrence asked if anything could be completed as a 'trial' effort before it is made permanent. Ms. Yancey indicated that the major improvement involves changing pavement marking and would be hard to do as a 'trial.' Ms. Yancey said that the Northeast Neighborhood was enrolled in the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program by City Council, so discussions, outreach, and creation of a plan will be completed in the neighborhood over the coming year or so.

3. Speeding and cut-through concerns

Mr. zumFelde said that a few residents recently e-mailed City staff, Mr. Blessing, or both. A resident who lives on Willow Street expressed concern about the speed and volume of traffic on Willow Street. Mr. zumFelde said that speed and count data will be collected as part of the Sunset Heights neighborhood traffic calming evaluation and then staff will be able to evaluate the resident's concern. Cpl. Westfall said that he will put the speed trailer on Willow after completion of the speed study by Public Works. The second resident who contacted Mr. Blessing lives on Park Lawn Drive and said that she regularly observes speeding on her road and suspects that people use it to cut through between Garbers Church Rd and W. Market Street. Mr. zumFelde said that Public Works staff do not see why drivers would use the section of Park Lawn Drive where the resident lives – in the vicinity of Fox Lane and Evergreen Drive – as a cut through. Cpl. Westfall noted that there are people who cut through that neighborhood to avoid the queue at the signal at Garbers Church Rd and W. Market Street. He agreed with Public Works staff that any cut through would primarily use Stoneleigh Drive and would not pass the house of the resident who expressed concern. Ms. Yancey said that staff had responded to the resident explaining the Team Up to Slow Down signs that Public Works has available and the efforts that the Police Department can take in response to speeding concerns. Mr. zumFelde said if the resident provided additional information, these steps could be taken.

4. 2020 SMART SCALE applications

Ms. Yancey provided an overview of the Virginia SMART SCALE funding program and the projects in the City that are likely to be submitted for funding. These projects include the two that have been identified as part of the STARS study – the improvements at the Pear/Erickson intersection and the addition of a median and sidewalk on South Main Street between Mosby Road and Erickson Avenue. Another project is on South Main Street at I-81 interchange 243, where turn lanes would be added to increase capacity at the intersection and sidewalk would be added along the west side of the road. Another application will include extending the existing left turn lane at Port Republic Rd onto Bluestone Drive and adding a sidewalk on the south side

of the road between Hillside Ave and Crawford Ave. Another likely application is for the North Main Street sidewalk from Holly Hill Drive to Vine Street. This is currently under consideration for TAP funding, but can be a SMART SCALE application if that is not successful. Mr. Lawrence asked whether the Bluestone Trail extension to the high school will be an application. Ms. Yancey said that staff are considering whether it will be competitive enough to submit as an application.

5. Safety at Liberty Street intersections

In addition to the previous discussion about the intersection of Liberty Street and Wolfe Street, Mr. Khaleel noted that staff will evaluate the conditions at the Liberty Street and Gay Street intersection to determine what can be done there to improve safety.

Other Business/ Announcements

Cpl. Westfall reported that HPD had issued 109 summonses in 5 days for noncompliance with the left turn restriction at the intersection of Port Republic Rd and Hunters Rd. He noted that Starbucks has not put up the sign that was required as part of their site plan, which is to direct people exiting Starbucks to use Bradley Drive to get back to Port Republic Rd. He said that enforcement does not appear to be enough to limit the left turns and suggested more permanent measures to restrict the left turns onto and off of Hunters Rd. Cpl. Westfall and Officer Deeds also noted that to some extent the problem has been moved to Bradley Drive, where one crash recently occurred and drivers are experiencing relatively long delays. Ms. Yancey said staff would follow up with Starbucks regarding the sign as well as evaluating the overall situation and potential actions that could be taken.

Adjourn