



TRAFFIC COMMISSION

City Hall—Council Chambers, 590 40th Ave NE

Tuesday, August 17, 2021

6:00 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Schluender at 6:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members present: Ciesynski, Davis, Finkelson, Nekora, Schluender

Staff present: David Cullen, Street & Park Superintendent
Captain Markham, Police

Council Liaison: Amáda Márquez Simula (via Zoom)

APPROVE MINUTES

1. Motioned by Davis, seconded by Schluender, to approve the minutes of July 20, 2021 as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

2. DESIGNATE “NO PARKING” ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF 42ND AVENUE FROM UNIVERSITY AVENUE TO 4TH STREET, NEXT TO PRODEO ACADEMY; AND DESIGNATE “LOADING ZONE 6 AM TO 3 PM SCHOOL DAYS” ON THE WEST SIDE OF 4TH STREET FROM 235’ SOUTH OF 42ND AVENUE TO THE SOUTH PROPERTY LINE OF PRODEO ACADEMY.

Present: Christopher Elsenbast, Prodeo Academy (via Zoom)

At the July Traffic Commission meeting commissioners called for a Public Hearing to designate “No Parking” on the south side of 42nd Avenue from University Avenue to 4th Street, next to Prodeo Academy; and designate “Loading Zone 6 AM to 3 PM School Days” on the west side of 4th Street from 235’ south of 42nd Avenue to the south property line of Prodeo Academy.

A Public Hearing notice was published in the LIFE newspaper on August 6, 2021 and affected residents were notified via postcard.

No residents were present at for the public hearing.

Mr. Elsenbast reiterated the importance of having the signage for their student arrival and dismissal periods. He added that Prodeo Academy wants to be a good neighbor and make sure things are as least restrictive as possible. Having these signs should make things efficient for arrival and dismissal of their students and will hopefully eliminate the hassle for residents in the area. They are enjoying their new spot in Columbia Heights and want to maintain a good relationship with the City and everyone else in the neighborhood.

Motion by Davis to designate “No Parking” on the south side of 42nd Avenue from University Avenue to 4th Street, next to Prodeo Academy; and designate “Loading Zone 6 AM to 3 PM School

Days” on the west side of 4th Street from 235’ south of 42nd Avenue to the south property line of Prodeo Academy. Seconded by Finkelson. Motion passed unanimously.

3. DESIGNATE “NO PARKING” ON THE EAST SIDE OF HEIGHTS DRIVE BETWEEN THE DRIVEWAY ENTRANCES FOR 4617 HEIGHTS DRIVE AND 4623 HEIGHTS DRIVE

Residents Present: Mike Morris, 4713 Heights Drive

At the July Traffic Commission meeting commissioners called for a Public Hearing to designate “No Parking” on the east side of Heights Drive between the driveway entrances for 4617 Heights Drive and 4623 Heights Drive.

A Public Hearing notice was published in the LIFE newspaper on August 6, 2021 and affected residents were notified via postcard.

There were no comments at the public hearing.

Motion by Davis to designate “No Parking” on the east side of Heights Drive between the driveway entrances for 4617 Heights Drive and 4623 Heights Drive. Seconded by Nekora. Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

4. REQUEST FOR STOP SIGNS AT THE INTERSECTION OF 6TH STREET AND 41ST AVENUE

Residents Present: Erikka Curran, 4220 6th Street
Alexandra Evens, 4040 6th Street

Mr. Nathan Maghan and Ms. Erikka Curran have requested stop or yield signs at the intersection of 6th Street and 41st Avenue. The concern is accidents and near misses at the intersection.

The visibility at the intersection is somewhat limited because of the moderate rise in ground elevations behind the sidewalk on the east side of 6th Street, similar to many intersections in Columbia Heights. On 6th Street, traffic stops at 40th Avenue and 42nd Avenue. On 41st Avenue, traffic stops at 5th Street and Jefferson Street.

The Police Department found one reported accident at this intersection in the previous five years and four reported accidents in the previous 10 years.

Ms. Curran lives at 4220 6th Street which is one block down from the intersection of concern. She has lived there four years and stated she can’t count how many times she’s run down the street after hearing a crash. She understands part of the requested signage is dependent on the number of reported accidents but stated many accidents go unreported for various reasons. There have been two accidents within the last 14 days, approximately 10 days apart. In one accident a minivan ended up in someone’s yard three houses down and there’s still chemical dust on the street from the last accident. There are lots of pedestrians and children in the area. Stated her neighbor who’s lived there for 40 years said this intersection has always been an issue and there have always been a lot of accidents. Ms. Curran stated Columbia Heights has grown approximately 10% in the past year and younger families are moving into the area, potentially meaning more friends coming to visit who don’t live in Columbia Heights and know there are uncontrolled intersections. When she

moved here from NE Minneapolis she had no idea there were uncontrolled intersections in Columbia Heights. Many people are moving here from the city because it's affordable so they're not used to these uncontrolled intersections; feels they seem indicative of a smaller town, which Columbia Heights is not anymore.

In reading the guidelines, besides the number of accidents—three crashes in two years or five crashes in three years, another qualifier is if it's an unsignalized intersection in a signalized area. Every other intersection within that one block range has some type of signage so it seems shocking that this intersection is unmarked, and many drivers don't know who has the right of way. Also many vehicles cut through from 40th to 4th on her street.

Ms. Evens lives at 4040 6th Street so she's right by the intersection. She stated the two really bad accidents in the past two weeks encouraged her to come and support putting up a stop sign. She's lived here since 2013 and the seemingly random uncontrolled intersections in the city have always thrown her off. The traffic control in Columbia Heights has always concerned her.

Captain Markham had crash data dating back to 2012. There were two accidents in 2012, one in 2014 and one in 2019. He did not have anything yet for the two most recent accidents. He did state that there are more controlled intersections on 41st Avenue because there was a school there prior to Prodeo Academy. Schluender advised he drives this road often and this intersection does cause him to slow down, but only because he knows it's uncontrolled. If you didn't live in the area he sees how it could take you by surprise, also many drivers assume they have the right of way when they come upon an uncontrolled intersection. He thinks this is the only intersection in a long stretch that does not have any traffic control which makes it a little more dangerous.

Finkelson asked if a third party can report an accident, thinking if residents report the accidents this may bring the number up to meet the MUTCD guidelines. Captain Markham stated a third party can report an accident but one or both parties involved would need to be present to qualify it as a reported accident.

Schluender questioned the MUTCD definition of reported crashes. Do they have a specific definition of reported, i.e., we have the accidents reported to the police, but if we had a report from residents of the number of crashes here at a public hearing would we, as a body, be able to take that report(s) into consideration. The guidelines do not state reported to police, it just says reported.

Commission members discussed moving the stop signs so they are more evenly distributed so there's not a stop sign on every corner—perhaps going every other. Davis questioned if we are allowed to deviate at all from the MUTCD guidelines. Captain Markham did not have the answer; he thinks they need to be followed. He advised that perhaps going with the unsignalized intersection in a signalized area and focusing on 41st Ave may be a better option than the number of reported accidents, but would need to speak with the Assistant City Engineer to see if this is a possibility. Davis is open to installing some type of signage on 6th Street but would need to know if we're allowed to do this because it doesn't meet the MUTCD guidelines. Schluender agrees he would like to see some control at this intersection. The guidelines are produced federally and then passed down to the state and then the city. They provide guidance to implement safe and correct traffic safety but there's also the matter of local control; there's a reason we have a Traffic

Commission and we may want to do something we feel is safer. He feels we need input from the Assistant City Engineer as to how closely we need to follow these guidelines. He would like to see a diagram at the next meeting of uncontrolled intersections in the core of the city to see if this is indeed a rare uncontrolled intersection.

Ms. Curran questioned the MUTCD guideline of three accidents in two years. The last reported accident Captain Markham had was on December 10, 2019. Ms. Curran asked if we would be at the three accidents in two years mark if you include the two accidents that just occurred. The report Captain Markham had was run on August 9th so he would need to check his records for the two accidents on the 5th and 14th. If they're not in the state records he will check the database.

Motion by Schluender to table this item until the next meeting pending additional information from Police, either a crash report or details of the two accidents. He would also like a report showing the location of unsignalized and signalized intersections in the general area of Central Ave and University Ave to see if there is a pattern. Seconded by Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

REPORTS

City Engineer

None

Police Chief

None

Commissioners

Finkelson advised that due to the construction of the new City Hall he sees a lot of people walking in the street where the sidewalk is closed and feels there should be more crosswalk signage for pedestrians. Davis agreed we've gone quite a while without pedestrian access. There's no easy way to get around the construction. On Central Avenue it's difficult to see pedestrians due to the turn lane and the way the fencing is put up. Davis suggested we contact the developer to get the pedestrian access back soon. Currently the only place to cross is on Gould Ave unless you walk all the way to Reservoir Blvd and come around down 37th Ave. Commissioners would like a report from City staff showing the timeline and options to improve pedestrian safety, especially for the handicapped.

Ciesynski asked if speed monitoring was done on 49th Avenue between University and Central Avenues. Captain Markham would need to go back and look at his notes. Ciesynski stated 49th Avenue is a very fast, high traffic street. Captain Markham advised he can request more speed enforcement there.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Finkelson, seconded by Davis to adjourn the meeting at 6:45 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.