



TRAFFIC COMMISSION

City Hall—Council Chambers, 590 40th Ave NE

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

6:00 PM

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Schluender at 6:00 p.m.

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

Staff present: Kathy Young, Assistant City Engineer

Staff absent: Captain Markham, Police

Council Liaison: Connie Buesgens (for Amáda Márquez Simula)

APPROVE MINUTES

Motioned by Davis, seconded by Ciesynski, to approve the minutes of February 15, 2022 as presented.

Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

CONTINUE DISCUSSION ON TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

At the February meeting Commissioners agreed to continue the discussion on traffic and pedestrian safety. Commissioner Finkelson has recommended two motions for consideration, the first being updating the Traffic Commission page on the city website and the second to reduce the speed limit on city streets to 20 mph.

Finkelson would like to update the city website to make the process for traffic control requests clearer and easier for residents. Some residents are unsure of how to submit a request and of the process that follows. He would like the website to explain this in more detail. He would also like to add links to appropriate resources that will provide requesters with other options for traffic calming measures besides stop signs. Currently residents ask for a stop sign and it's either approved or denied per the MUTCD guidelines. Ciesynski feels the city's website is difficult to navigate. Davis agrees with providing residents with better access to information. It would be helpful if the website was more user-friendly.

Commissioners would like a link placed on the Traffic Commission webpage to the Report a Concern form with an explanation that the resident will receive a response and instructions once the form is reviewed by city staff. Commissioners would also like a list of all communication from residents, even if the items do not make it to the agenda. They would like this information included in the agenda packet. They would like a link to the Report a Concern form as well as links to the bicycle and city trails, maps, etc. placed on the Traffic Commission webpage. They feel including more information on the Traffic Commission page will make it easier for residents. Davis stated the sidewalk and trails map was last updated in 2011. Young thinks the trails map was updated more recent than 2011 but the date wasn't changed—she will check on it. The bicycle map was updated in 2019. Young advised that staff can add the links to the Report a Concern form and maps on the Traffic Commission webpage. However, commissioners should check what the City Council is going to support before posting links to sections of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. If there's a traffic calming option listed in the plan that the council is not going to support, it would be a disservice to residents

to present that option. Finkelson asked how they are supposed to know what the council is going to support. Young advised she would leave those items as recommendations directed toward the City Council. Schluender feels it would be useful to link to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan transportation section because it's already on the website.

Finkelson stated that when the Traffic Commission recommended changing the speed limit on Stinson Blvd to the beach it was in the minutes but there was no follow up by the City Council. His understanding is that recommendations from the Traffic Commission first go to the City Manager and then the City Manager decides what is placed on the agenda. He feels this recommendation was pocket-vetoed by the City Manager. Young advised that the City Council wants to have a broader discussion regarding the speed limit and that this recommendation will then become part of that broader discussion.

Councilmember Buesgens explained that sometimes things take a long time. The council will be discussing the Traffic Commission at the next work session. Commissioners cannot participate but they can email items to councilmembers of things they want to see changed. She would like to see the Traffic Commission transformed into a more multimodal commission and that will be up for discussion. She advised that sometimes the City Manager will put items on her list if she knows a discussion is coming up down the road, which sometimes may take years. This is usually due to staffing limitations, time constraints, etc. There are many different reasons why an item may be addressed later. Things don't always get done quickly. She strongly suggests they all come to hear what the council has to say about the Traffic Commission. Davis asked about the timeline for addressing the speed limits. Councilmember Buesgens is not sure. Young advised the discussion she's aware of is that they plan to address the speed limits when they discuss 37th Ave and if Columbia Heights is interested in lowering the speed limit to 25 mph. The discussion will take place later this year or early next year and then they will plan what to do citywide.

Davis suggested posting items on the website that the council supports within item c (the link to the MnDOT best practices documents, Minnesota's Best Practices for Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety) to assist residents making requests. Young advised this may be part of a discussion with the City Council. Schluender feels their recommendations are broad enough that they can follow up at the next meeting and see what's happening with the links on the website. There is enough detail in the minutes for people to see what's being discussed. The motion does not have to be specific as long as they can follow up at the next meeting.

Motioned by Finkelson to adopt Item (1) requesting the Traffic Commission page of the city website be updated to make the request for traffic-related improvements process clearer for residents and provide links to the Report a Concern form and appropriate resources. Seconded by Schluender. Motion passed unanimously.

Finkelson feels we should reduce the speed limit in Columbia Heights citywide. His understanding is that there are two options. You have either a blanket 25 mph limit, which is what St. Anthony did, or you can implement a tiered limit where minor and residential streets are 20 mph and collectors are 25 mph. He personally favors the 20 mph. He would like to register the Traffic Commission's opinion regarding the speed limits with the City Council. Per the minutes the council wants to be consistent with the speed limits and the goal is to increase safety. The Traffic Commission heard from Ethan Fawley of Vision Zero that Minneapolis has seen good results with their speed limit reduction. Finkelson would like to make a motion

to recommend the City Council take a tiered approach of 20 mph on minor and residential streets and 25 mph on collector streets such as 37th Ave.

Davis opposes. He feels any road designed for truck traffic should stay at 30 mph. Because 37th Ave is the main east-west route from Central Ave to I-35W he feels it's important to keep it at 30 mph. He would support residential roads being at 25 mph but there are certain roads that should remain at 30 mph. These are roads that have a yellow centerline. Some of these are county roads so the speed limit may not change anyway. You do want to encourage the use of certain roads and avoid others. Some speed limits should remain at 30 mph to prevent heavy traffic in residential areas. There needs to be a balance and speed limits should be considered reasonable by most people. He would prefer more discussion before passing a motion.

Schluender feels one benefit of lowering the speed limit is that it sets a baseline expectation for the neighborhood roads. These are expectations where residents are not expecting through traffic. There should be justification for major roads versus residential roads. He agrees this needs additional discussion. A lower speed limit long-term is beneficial because it helps with redesigning the streets. You do not want a speed limit of 20 mph on 40th Ave with four lanes and parking. Staff should compare St. Anthony and Minneapolis speed limit changes to see how they're working. He would like to see more information.

Davis asked if 30 mph is a choice with the tiered approach. Finkelson will need to check. There are still a couple of city roads in Minneapolis that have a higher speed limit than 20 mph so there are exceptions. The real restriction is that you can't make every city road 20 mph but you can always increase the limit. Nekora agrees with contacting St Anthony and Minneapolis. Davis would like to table this for discussion.

Motioned by Davis to table reducing the speed limit on city streets until the next meeting. Seconded by Schluender. Motion passed unanimously.

REVIEW OTHER ITEMS DISCUSSED AT FEBRUARY MEETING

A representative from MnDOT will be attending the City Council Work Session on April 4th via Zoom. MnDOT will be updating the council on the PEL Study (Planning and Environmental Linkage) for TH 47 and TH 65. Opportunities for comment are provided on the MnDOT website:

<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/hwy47andhwy65study/index.html>

Comprehensive Plan: Review and analyze high traffic crash locations on a biannual basis.

The 2040 Comprehensive plan talks about analyzing high traffic crash locations. Staff has not done a formal review on TH 47 and TH 65, but MnDOT does inform us of the locations they're concerned about. There are opportunities for residents to approach staff and council about areas of concern. These are:

- Email and phone
- Traffic Commission
- Listening sessions with council and staff
- Annual city picnic
- Annual Public Improvement Hearings

Davis asked if there will be more traffic signal replacement along Central and University Avenues within the next year or two. Young will need get back to him. There are four signals that will be painted, so those will not be replaced. Minneapolis wants to replace one signal on 37th Ave as part of the 37th Ave project.

Finkelson asked about the listening sessions with council and staff. Buesgens advised these took place when they held the city expos, these were held on a Saturday. He also asked about the annual improvement hearings. Young explained that the majority of street projects are assessed, so as part of that process staff will host at least two informal meetings with the affected residents. Residents then can bring up both construction issues and issues they've seen on their street.

NEW BUSINESS

None

REPORTS

City Engineer

37TH AVENUE CONSTRUCTION

At the last meeting the 37th Ave plans were part of the discussion so the City Engineer included these at this meeting for commissioners to go over.

Davis stated there have been a few changes since the last review and asked where this input came from. The first change he noted is that there are quite a few crosswalk islands. Young advised those were generated by Minneapolis. Davis understands Polk St but is questioning the others. Young explained these were part of the agreement to move forward with the project.

Parking will be limited on 37th Ave, buses will stop in the traffic lane which is a safety request by the transit company.

Davis stated that on the north side of 37th west of Buchanan St. there is a row of houses that face 37th Ave. Can a second parking bay put into that section? Young explained parking bays were reviewed based on the driveway lengths and this would have had to have been brought up during the open houses with staff. Davis feels residents were unaware of the open houses as many are rental properties. He would like to see the parking reconsidered.

Davis is also concerned about the pedestrian bays because of what he saw on in Minneapolis on Johnson St, where the road curves throughout, especially with truck traffic having to meander through. He feels this is problematic, especially because it's a narrower road with no parking which leaves nowhere to go. Starting at Central Ave there's a tiny jog that goes in between there and Polk St. Can the median be kept a little wider so it's not going in and out—it gets wide, then narrow, then wide, etc. Young stated that when driving it will seem fairly straight. Davis did not find that when driving on Johnson St and he does not want to see the same thing on 37th Ave. He would like a more detailed map.

Davis asked the width of 37th Ave on the west side of Central where the parking was removed to add the trail and if the east side will be the same width or will it be narrower? Young will need to check the distance between the curb and centerline stripe on the east side compared to the west side. She advised for the most part it's 13', an 11' lane and 2' curb reaction. Davis would like her to let him know that west of Central will be designed the same as east of Central to make sure the lanes are both the same width.

Finkelson likes the pedestrian islands. Currently 37th Ave is difficult to cross. He likes the way it weaves a little because this will slow people down and the pedestrian islands will make it safer to cross. Young advised

part of that was at the request of Minneapolis. Because the bike trail is on the north side they want their residents to be able cross from the south side to the north side.

Davis stated there are some pedestrian areas that are rather close. Polk St to Central Ave in particular and between Johnson St and Buchanan St. Young advised the medians will not be removed. Davis does not want them removed but he feels the geometry is wrong. He would like to see these areas stay wide rather than narrow and then widen so it's not so extreme for truck traffic. It would make more sense to keep these wider through those sections. He would like more width to deal with the traffic. Young advised that other than at Central Ave, the lanes going in both directions are essentially 13' feet wide, an 11' lane with 2' reaction before you get to the vertical part of the curb. Davis stated with snow it's essentially 11'.

He also asked if the chokepoint at Hayes St could be created so there's not such a significant jog between the north and south side of Hayes St. The boulevard on the south side could be wider on the left instead of the right so there's less of a jog between the north and south side. Cross traffic now must veer at more of a diagonal.

Davis questioned Hart Blvd becoming narrower when traffic already is coming in at an angle at that spot. Young explained this definitely will force vehicles into one lane in each direction, but this makes it much safer for pedestrians to cross the street. It was done this way to try to square it up so it's at more of a 90 degree angle with 37th Ave.

Finkelson asked about Anoka County doing work on 40th Ave. Young advised they've applied for a couple of grants and so far, have been unsuccessful. The work will not be done without grant money because of the costs. She provided the costs we have to date for 37th Ave to give commissioners an idea of the financial impact for this type of construction. Originally the project started at \$11 million but as the design progressed the cost increased. They are looking for more funding sources. For example, they plan to approach the Mississippi Watershed Organization for the green infrastructure such as the stormwater type projects. New signals have been added at both Central Ave and Johnson St as part of the project.

Davis asked if there will be a change of configuration with the new signals. At one point he had suggested a change to the signals at 37th and Central Aves. He had suggested a green arrow for the westbound dedicated right turn lane onto northbound Central Ave. The lane is signed no turn on red. The green arrow for southbound traffic on Central Ave turning left (eastbound) onto 37th Ave follows the green light for the right turn lane onto northbound Central Ave and westbound traffic on 37th Ave. Davis had suggested having the green arrow for the dedicated right turn lane onto northbound Central Ave and the left turn signal for southbound Central Ave turning east on 37th Ave cycle at the same time. He feels this would allow a lot more traffic to go through and alleviate backups in the dedicated right turn lane during rush hour. There would still be the protection that no turn on red provides but it would allow more traffic to flow.

Councilmember Buesgens stated she was liaison on the Traffic Commission several years ago and she has seen a change in the commission since then. This commission is taking more initiative and more interest in being involved. She will bring this up to the city manager, council, and staff. Hopefully the council will allow the Traffic Commission to be more self-initiating and find a more formal way for them to bring items to the council. She strongly recommends zooming in or attending the April 4th work session at 7:00 pm. They meet

at the Public Safety building in the downstairs training room. She strongly recommends if anyone has ideas or suggestions about transforming this commission to send them to the council.

Police Chief

None

Commissioners

None

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Davis, seconded by Schluender to adjourn the meeting at 7:29 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.