



TRAFFIC COMMISSION

City Hall—Council Chambers, 590 40th Ave NE

Tuesday, May 17, 2022

6:00 PM

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Davis at 6:03 p.m.

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

Staff present: Kathy Young, Assistant City Engineer
Captain Markham, Police
Sue Chapman, Administrative Assistant

Council Liaison: Amáda Márquez Simula

APPROVE MINUTES

Motion by Ciesynski, seconded by Schluender, to approve the minutes of March 15, 2022. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Schluender, seconded by Ciesynski, to approve the minutes of April 19, 2022. Motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC MEETING

Residents Present:

Cliff Johnson, 1027 43-1/2 Ave

Hajor Benalol, 3839 Polk St

Barb Schommer, 4102 Quincy St

Saudia Epps, 3804 2nd St

Ramona Anderson, 4132 Stinson Blvd

Gordon Anderson, 1850 49th Ave

Derek Schansberg, 3804 2nd St

Justice Spriggs, 4645 Chatham Rd

Gregory K. Sloat, 4731 6th St

Kt Jacobs, 4104 Monroe St

Joe Manshiem, 3722 3rd St

The law setting the minimum traffic speed of 30 mph has changed in Minnesota. The City Council has the authority to set speed limits on local roads only. This does not include MnDOT or Anoka County roads.

Lowering the speed limit has been an ongoing discussion at Traffic Commission meetings. The Traffic Commission called this public meeting to seek input from residents and property owners regarding the speed limit on city streets.

Finkelson advised he brought forth the motion to recommend changing the speed limit in the city. There have been a lot of requests for stop signs because of speeding and/or accidents, as well as residents feeling unsafe while walking due to the lack of sidewalks.

Mr. Sloat lives at 4731 6th St. He feels this is a “stupid” idea. He personally tries to avoid Minneapolis and St. Anthony due to the restriction of traffic and speed limits. When he drove to this meeting he did not come across one pedestrian. If lowering the speed limit will make it safer, at what point do you stop lowering the speed limit? Why not ban cars and make everyone walk or bike. He grew up in Columbia Heights and

when he was three years old his mother taught him how to cross street. He learned you don't cross when cars are coming. The legislature has changed it so that cars now have to watch for pedestrians, which they should, but drivers also need to watch out for other cars. A person steps off the curb and expects the car to stop. A car weighs 2-3,000 lbs., takes a while to stop, and he hasn't seen an interaction yet between a car and a pedestrian where the pedestrian doesn't lose. So, as a pedestrian, he watches and makes sure it's safe to cross even if he has the right of way. The 30 mph has worked for all these years. This is a solution looking for a problem. Lowering the speed limit to 20 mph will make it take longer to get anywhere causing drivers more frustration along with more traffic congestion and pollution. People will take chances and cut corners to get where they're going creating more situations conducive to accidents, so need to think long and hard before changing something that's been working for decades.

Kt Jacobs, 4104 Monroe St, speaking as a resident not as a councilmember. She asked if any studies have been done since St. Anthony changed their speed limit to 25 mph. Davis advised they have not done a study. Jacobs stated if there is no data to show this was a benefit to the community, we would be basing the speed limit change on what another community did without any data to support the decision. Davis concurred.

Ramona Anderson, 4132 Stinson Blvd, advised she looked up the stats for pedestrian fatalities in Minnesota. There are 4,000,000 people in the metro area and the number of pedestrian fatalities in 2019 was 19. This number has remained fairly steady at 20-23 for a population of 4,000,000. She agrees with Mr. Sloat, we are creating a solution where we don't need to. Some of these fatalities occurred because the driver or pedestrian was intoxicated, it had nothing to do with the speed limit. Do not change the speed limit for 20 accidents a year.

Joe Manshiem lives at 3722 3rd St across from Wagamon's which he states is frequently used as a Daytona 500. Instead of dropping the speed limit down to 20 mph why not enforce 30 mph. On Main St if you see someone doing less than 50 mph that's a good day. The sign at the end of his alley says 10 mph Slow Children Ahead. People drive 20-30mph through this alley. He saw a jaywalker on the way to the meeting trying to cross University Ave that was almost hit twice. Bicyclists drive faster than 20 mph and do not honor stop signs or obey speed limits. He questioned how much it will cost to change all the signs from 30 mph to 20 mph, instead we could hire another police officer to slow people down. He's a local truck driver and sees kids playing in the streets every day. He would like to see a stat on how many kids are hit every day. Even Minneapolis does not honor the 20 mph. Solve real crime such as carjacking in Columbia Heights. Start focusing on the real problems facing Columbia Heights instead of the speed limit—for 20 people in a 4,000,000 population. This is a waste of time, money, and this meeting is a waste of our resources.

Barb Schommer, 4102 Quincy St, states she does have a sidewalk and it's very well used. However, there are very few sidewalks in Columbia Heights so it's not a pedestrian city like Minneapolis. She is a hard no for a 20 mph speed limit. She assumes this speed limit is for pedestrian and bicycle accidents. She sees people cross Central Ave wherever they want in the dark. When you step out on a 4-lane road, what logic is that? Pedestrians should yield to cars.

Finkelson advised that per state statute every intersection in the State of Minnesota is a crosswalk unless there is a sign that states otherwise, such as the 49th Ave pedestrian bridge. Ms. Schommer stated she waits to cross the street until cars are done coming, it's just common sense. A week ago there were three little boys approximately 11 years old that kneeled in the street on 41st Ave in the westbound lane. The three of them lined up on their knees basically daring cars and the cars had to go around them. She took a video and someone else called the Police. She's seen this in north Minneapolis, it's a game. Kids will wait on the sidewalk until the last second and then dash in front of your car. We do not need this mindset and to accommodate irresponsible behavior—where pedestrians don't know enough to look for cars before crossing the street and that's what is happening. She's never been hit by a car. The blame gets put on the motorists. She does not like the bikes on the roadways, but she will wait for them. Asked if pedestrians can still get a ticket for jaywalking. Finkelson advised per state statute the only time you're not allowed to cross mid-block is if there's two lights on both of the intersections. Ms. Schommer feels 30mph is a natural speed. When she drives to Minneapolis her anxiety goes up as the speed goes down. High traffic areas should be 30 mph not 20 mph. She is responsible for herself and her dog when crossing the street, the cars are not.

Krisma lives at 40th and Central Ave. She does not agree with footing the bill for this. She grew up in New York City and has lived in Columbia Heights 18 years and loves it here. Her brother was hit by car when he was a child in New York City. Her grandfather and cousin were both killed together by vehicles but that's New York, this is Columbia Heights. She thinks this would be a real waste of money. What about all the drivers running red lights? People are so distracted and on edge and after two years of COVID she feels lowering the speed limits will raise the level of stress in our community.

Gordon Anderson, 1850 49th Ave, does not believe the fatalities due to speeding are evenly distributed across Columbia Heights. He would like to find out where the problem is and then lower the speed limit in those areas if you believe it's a fix instead of penalizing everyone.

Saudia Epps, 3804 2nd St, is also against lowering the speed limits in Columbia Heights. She lived in Minneapolis for eight years and hated what they did to people who did care about pedestrians. She feels lowering the speed limit makes people drive more aggressively because they're going from stop sign to stop sign and driving behind slower driving people and get upset by that as well. She doesn't think it's going to help anything.

Davis advised lowering the speed limit has been an ongoing discussion of the Traffic Commission for a variety of reasons. Last year it was related to requests to add stop signs at uncontrolled intersections questioning a possible stop sign policy. That discussion led to the speed limits. The Traffic Commission felt it was important to get community input before making any considerations. He received approximately 12 electronic responses all saying they have no interest in changing speed limit and would prefer increased enforcement of the existing laws. He put out a public post and those are the people who responded via social media.

Three people were present via Zoom, none wanted to speak at the meeting.

Krisma asked about light dimmers or motion sensors in the parking garage on 40th Ave. Then you would know when someone was in there as opposed to when someone's not in there. A friend had his car stolen in the area a month ago and he lives where he can see his vehicle. However, if the lights would have come on, he would have been alerted to the fact that his car was being stolen. Also, parking in Columbia Heights is very difficult for families that have multiple cars.

Captain Markham advised there is currently work being done to the parking ramp to improve safety, which the City Council approved. They are replacing all the lighting with LED's and installing new security cameras and elevators. Krisma still feels motion sensors would be better. There are lots of kids that play in there and skateboarding. It would be nice to know when there's activity going on. The continuous light inhibits the entire street and they are affected by that light. Motion sensors would give an alert. Captain Markham is aware of the light pollution and this may be something they can look at. They have been doing extra patrol of the ramp and are aware of the issues that have been going on.

He also wanted to touch base on enforcement. All four of their patrol shifts have increased traffic enforcement, specifically on Central Ave. Between Feb 12th and March 28th there were 38 citations issued for various offenses on Central Avenue. From March 29th to May 13th they increased proactive traffic enforcement on Central Ave and citations went up to 85, which is a 124% increase. The main focus was speed. They put out traffic signs and enforcement was done on shift levels when officers had free time. Speeding was the highest ticket number along with multiple DWIs, no license, seat belts, and other various things. They are working on this and he appreciates the support for more police officers. The department is authorized for 29 officers and they are currently four officers short, they are trying to hire more but there is a shortage in the entire state. If they can get more officers they can be more proactive and less reactive. Reserves are pretty much non-existent at this point. They've had their best success with hiring Community Service Officers.

Ciesynski asked if Columbia Heights is number one in carjackings. Captain Markham does not know where this comes from and if it's accurate. He knows Columbia Heights is high for vehicle thefts but is not the highest in the county. A lot depends on if they're able to solve some of these cases. In 2018 and 2019 only 8 cars fled from them each year. In 2020 it went up to 24, in 2021 it was 32 or 34, and in 2022 it's already at 17. The sudden rise in violent carjackings is metro state-wide. A lot of information is gained from social media sites that follow police dispatch, but this is not always accurate. For example, recently they were dispatched to a shooting on Central Ave where a bus shelter window was shot out. When they arrived they found an intoxicated person, there was no gun or shooting, and the bus stop window had been broken forever. They have not had that many carjackings where people are physically removed from the car and this is different from a vehicle theft. As far as carjackings, most are juveniles from Minnesota.

Young advised that of the three emails she received, two were in favor of reducing the speed limit and one was against. Davis received an email from a resident on the 4200 block of Arthur St who is strongly in favor of lowering the speed limit in the city. Arthur St is currently posted at 30 mph which is too high for a residential street. Vehicles regularly drive 10-15 mph above that speed limit and she is frequently tailgated while driving 30 mph. There are many children on the block and she is concerned about the speed of traffic

traveling through the area. She is in favor of the 20 mph speed limit on residential streets, the same as has been posted in the Minneapolis. Lowering the speed limit should stop drivers from speeding in our residential areas. Also, road design that is more conducive to traffic calming should be studied and implemented. There are uncontrolled intersections in the area and few sidewalks.

A resident asked about speed bumps. Speed bumps are counter-productive. They need to be removed in the winter, are noisy for residents when cars go over them, and as soon as drivers are over they gun it to make up the time. They are also detrimental to emergency vehicles. Finkelson is not in favor of speed bumps but there are many other traffic calming measures available to slow traffic down. He would prefer gentle traffic calming measures that slow traffic to a steady 20-25 mph and eliminate some of the stop signs. Driving a steadily at 20-25 mph is actually faster than stopping and starting every block or two for a stop sign. He brought forward reducing the speed limits in Columbia Heights. It's his least favorite way to slow traffic but it's the most inexpensive.

Ms. Schommer asked Finkelson what he meant by fixing the traffic flow. He stated the Traffic Commission is trying to be more proactive. Previously a resident would request a stop sign due to an uncontrolled intersection and/or accidents. The Traffic Commission would follow the MUTCD guidelines to approve or deny the stop sign. The result has been a lot of stop signs throughout the city. Ms. Schommer asked how you would fix the flow of traffic on Jefferson St for example. The State of MN has best practices guide for residential streets. One example is a bump out to make the street a little narrower at the intersection by removing part of the shoulder so cars would need to slow down. It has been proven that the wider the lanes are on a roadway, the faster cars will travel. So, if you conservatively narrow the lanes, psychologically drivers will reduce their speed.

Resident asked how many fatalities occurred on residential roads last year. Finkelson advised there have been none but there have been car crashes. Resident stated there are always going to be crashes; we are talking about something that doesn't exist. We have zero fatalities.

There were no further comments from the audience or via Zoom.

Motion by Davis to close the public meeting. Seconded by Schluender. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Davis to recommend the City Council make no changes to the residential speed limit and it be maintained at 30 mph. Seconded by Ciesynski. Roll call vote: Ciesynski aye, Davis aye, Finkelson nay, Nekora nay, Schluender nay. Motion failed.

Motion by Finkelson to recommend the City Council reduce the minimum speed limit to 20 mph. Motion failed for lack of a second.

OLD BUSINESS

ADDRESS ANY FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS FOR SARA ION, CITY CLERK, REGARDING MEETING ATTENDANCE/OPEN MEETING LAWS FOR BOARD/COMMISSION MEMBERS

Commissioners had no questions. Sara left copies of the Roberts Rules of Order and advised she is always available for questions, not just at the meetings.

37TH AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Young advised 37th Ave from Central Ave to Stinson Blvd is slated for reconstruction in 2023. It will be a 2-lane road with one lane in each direction. There will be a pedestrian and bicycle trail on the north side and sidewalk on the south side.

Davis advised there were a series of public meetings jointly with Minneapolis and Columbia Heights last year. There have been significant changes to the project requested by the City of Minneapolis since that time. This personally makes him less enthusiastic for the project. His understanding is that it's \$3M over budget. One of the notable changes is that pedestrian islands have been added to allow residents from Minneapolis better access to the shared trail on the north side of 37th Ave. Another change is the curb cuts where the road gets narrower as you approach 37th Ave. Feels we are over budget because of the way the road approaches 37th Ave. Because of bump outs and pedestrian islands there is a waviness to the road and most parking has been eliminated. Buses will stop all traffic on 37th Ave. Also, 37th Ave will not be as wide as the west side of Central Ave.

Davis asked about rounded corners at 37th and Central Aves to allow trucks and semis to make the turn—Young advised this was removed by Minneapolis. Instead the stop bar is set back to allow room for the trucks to make the turn. Davis stated there is the same issue on Johnson St. Young advised they looked at the turning movements at each of these intersections and made whatever adjustments needed for making the turn.

Resident asked if there is anything that can be done to improve the quality of 37th Ave before 2023. The road is and has been in terrible shape.

Kt Jacobs, speaking as a resident, advised that at the initial virtual meetings residents along 37th Ave attended, they stated parking was not an issue. Also, it was her understanding that the lanes were to be slightly wider than what they are now. Young advised the travel lanes are 11' wide with a 1-2' curb reaction distance making them 12-13' from the centerline to the curb. She is unsure if this is wider or not. Kt advised part of the delay for reconstruction was due to applying for grant money. Minneapolis was not on board at the same time as Columbia Heights and the project is a coordination of effort because it's a split roadway. Both cities had to re-apply for grant money which took a couple of years and then go through the entire engineering process. She travels that way a lot and knows it is and has been a terrible road. They're currently doing water line work along 37th and once that's done they'll be able to begin the road project.

NEW BUSINESS

None

REPORTS

City Engineer

None

Police Chief

None

Commissioners

Finkelson advised a number of residents in Columbia Heights have started a petition drive to MnDOT regarding Central Ave. MnDOT is currently conducting a PEL study of Central and University Aves regarding projects over the next 10-20 years. Residents can google Highway 65 and Highway 47 for information. MnDOT is doing outreach so residents have an opinion. The idea in general is asking MnDOT to treat Central Ave as a main street in Columbia Heights. It is a highway with four lanes and in Columbia Heights it is a main street with driveways to businesses, intersections, residential on both sides, and people crossing the street. The idea is to treat Central Ave as a main street versus a highway. There will be two public meetings at the library, not associated with the Traffic Commission. He read the card and advised he would be around after the meeting for any questions.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Davis, seconded by Schluender to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.