



# TRAFFIC COMMISSION - PUBLIC HEARING

City Hall—Council Chambers, 590 40th Ave NE

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

6:00 PM

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## APPROVED 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  
Captain Markham, Police (via Zoom)  
Sue Chapman, Administrative Assistant

Council Liaison: Amáda Márquez Simula

### APPROVE MINUTES

1. Motioned by Finkelson, seconded by Davis, to approve the minutes of November 16, 2021 as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

### PUBLIC HEARINGS

2. MODIFICATION TO THE TWO HOUR PARKING ZONE ON 3900 BLOCK OF CENTRAL AVENUE

Residents Present: Hajor Banalal, 3839 Polk St  
Ramona Anderson, 4132 Stinson Blvd  
Fateme Rabon, 3928 Central Ave (arrived late)

At the November Traffic Commission meeting commissioners called for a Public Hearing to change the two hour parking on the west side of Central Avenue from 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue to two hour parking 8 am to 5 pm.

There were no comments from commissioners or the public.

Motion by Finkelson to recommend the City Council designate two hour parking from 8 am to 5 pm on the west side of the 3900 block of Central Avenue. Seconded by Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

### NEW BUSINESS

Motion by Finkelson to move Policy Initiatives under Reports to New Business on the agenda. Seconded by Schluender. Motion passed unanimously.

Residents Present: Layla Rismoen (via Zoom)  
Ed Higgins

3. POLICY INITIATIVES
  - A. Vision Zero (Email correspondence attached)
  - B. Multimodal Transportation (Email correspondence attached)

Policy initiatives such as those listed above are undertaken by staff at the direction of the City Council. The Council has the authority to commit staff and outside consultant resources to address policy issues.

Finkelson stated members of the public requested the commission speak about these topics. He has done some research on Vision Zero and related topics. The idea of Vision Zero is for a city to try to reduce fatal and serious accidents to "0" through engineering modes and methods to slow down traffic and make things safe for pedestrians. If there is an accident, speeds are reduced so the accidents are not as serious. He would like to have someone from the City of Minneapolis Engineering Department speak to the Traffic Commission regarding Vision Zero and the challenges they face with their Vision Zero initiative.

Schluender asked if any surrounding first ring cities of Minneapolis have taken this up. Finkelson advised that when he checked the Vision Zero website all the cities on the list were very large, so he's unsure if Columbia Heights would be included on the list.

Mayor Simula advised that at the April work session staff will be discussing the stop signs that were tabled at the last council meeting and they will also be discussing any changes to the Traffic Commission that commission members would like to see; perhaps making it a more multimodal commission addressing and opening up more conversation about the different ways people are moving around the city. Other city's commissions bring in guest speakers to talk about different issues and to learn about opportunities that are happening in other communities. This is something that this commission could move towards. Also, some cities will visit other cities to check out roundabouts, trails, etc. This is something the council would vote on, but input from the Traffic Commission would be welcome. Staff would like any reports before the April work session. Schuender advised this will be put on the February agenda. Items for the February 15<sup>th</sup> meeting are due February 4<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Rismoen stated when they moved here approximately 10 years ago she had brought up to the City Council that they would like to see better speed control in the city. Her neighborhood is bustling like most neighborhoods in Columbia Heights. Wonders if there's more we could be doing to reduce speed overall in the city to make it safer in neighborhoods for children and adults to walk with sidewalks, paths, or something. On her block in particular, the streets are not on a grid system, they kind of wind around and there's no direct route anywhere, so people tend to use her street as one of the through streets. She lives on Lincoln Terrace which connects to Matterhorn Dr. and eventually goes out to Johnson St. and then 49<sup>th</sup> Ave. It's one of the only through streets that crosses the 694 bridge so they tend to get a lot of traffic from Fridley and people speeding. Last summer she was almost hit by a car in her own driveway. She was on her bike and hadn't pulled out yet. Their house is not on a corner or at an intersection. A car came down Johnson St. driving erratically, stopped at the stop sign, took off from the stop sign and began driving erratically and almost hit her in the driveway. The neighbors next door have had two car accidents in their yard; one took out a fire hydrant and a mailbox. Luckily no children were playing there at the time. Her yard is one where kids congregate. It's not safe for them to ride bikes in the street or through the neighborhood. Her neighbors feel the same way. The roads are wide and their yards are big. She would be happy to give up some of her yard for more walking and biking space in the neighborhood.

Ms. Rismoen happened to come across the Vision Zero plan in Minneapolis. She feels they have a lot of really good points and a good long-term plan to reduce speed throughout the city of Minneapolis and provide alternative solutions for pedestrians and bikers. It would be nice if Columbia Heights could adopt all or some of these policies. She understands that Columbia Heights does not have the budget that Minneapolis does but the safety of residents should be a top priority. The enjoyment of living here will increase if families can feel safe walking and biking. She's a capable adult and was almost taken out in her own driveway, which is scary, and it doesn't make her want to hop on her bike every day. Would like to see what we can do to make it safer for everyone that wants to be outside using the streets and so forth for walking and biking. More paths and bike lanes would be a great idea as well as narrowing streets and have them not be so representative of high speed driving. Implementing some of these ideas would be a nice improvement.

Mr. Ed Higgins stated that he and his wife love walking in Columbia Heights and walk their dogs often. They have trouble in some areas and were looking for a safer travel plan for pedestrians on the City website. Many surrounding cities have plans like this on their websites, including the City of Richfield. He likes the way other cities have incorporated traffic planning for the years ahead as well as successful projects on a separate website that people can review on their own time—without having to dig through the city government website. Edina calls theirs Living Streets and has a video posted on YouTube. Their plan discusses the history, challenges, and safety and maintenance as well as water resources. There are many other cities and counties along with MnDOT that post YouTube videos that residents can review and discuss. Even the US DOT has a Complete Streets initiative which has a trickledown effect from the federal level. They've developed a street design manual to implement their Complete Streets policies. Multiple pilot projects are underway that include public workshops to prioritize potential street improvements. It comes with the pros and cons of Complete Streets and ways to accomplish this. More and more cities are working towards diversity and mobility in our communities. There are some challenges with mobility in certain areas. He would like to know what our plan is for a walk, bike accessible friendly city. If there is no plan, is this something residents can look forward to in the future?

Schluender asked if anyone else from the public wanted to speak about Vision Zero. No one came forward. Public portion of the meeting was closed.

Finkelson is strongly in favor of the Traffic Commission taking action on this. While it's true most serious accidents in Columbia Heights occur on state or county highways, this doesn't mean streets in Columbia Heights are safe. He received a list of accidents from Captain Markham. The list was emailed to commission members because it was too long to print. Other attachments were distributed at the meeting. The map on page 6-133 of the 2040 Comprehensive Plans shows at least three serious crashes, one of them fatal, on city streets. He lives very close to the fatal accident at 39<sup>th</sup> Ave and Hart Blvd and feels that intersection should be evaluated. There are accidents happening on Columbia Heights streets that are serious. In the State Highway Safety Plan document on page 8 it shows that 23% of injuries and deaths occur on city roads. States it's not just about the crashes that get reported, it's also about the near misses. He was almost hit by a car while walking on 39<sup>th</sup> Ave at night. People drive crazy and there are no sidewalks. Pedestrians wear reflective vests and put LED lights on their hats because they don't want to get hit where there's no sidewalk to separate them from traffic.

When people are afraid to walk or cycle it's a denial of mobility. Everyone has the right to safely travel the streets of Columbia Heights, even where there are no sidewalks. Even though city staff has said that they keep multimodal transportation in mind, he feels this misses the point. Per Minnesota state statute if there is no sidewalk the pedestrian has the right of way to walk on the street and they also have the right of way to cross streets. In fact, because there's no interstate, per state statute all of Columbia Heights is multimodal. There is no place you're not allowed to walk. So he feels it's insufficient for staff to just say we're keeping multimodal transportation in mind.

The multimodal examples that were brought up by city staff are the 37<sup>th</sup> Ave and 53<sup>rd</sup> Ave projects. He feels because these projects were led by other cities, Minneapolis and Fridley, this is what triggered input from the public regarding the multi-use trails. It seems like it takes a public meeting and people having to come to ask for basic things like sidewalks and multi-use trails to get this at the forefront. He feels we need to be more pro-active. There is currently no plan and we should change that. The biggest issue is to increase the number of sidewalks. He understands this won't happen immediately but feels we need to have a plan and provide a forum for the public to ask for sidewalks. He has a lot of things related to Vision Zero that he feels the commission should do. He had an email attached to the packet but thinks it's going to take more than just stop signs to slow traffic, as most drivers tend to ignore or roll past them. He agrees with the MUTCD guidelines but there are alternative methods to slow traffic. His email contains a link to a state document that shows different things to slow down traffic that have been tried, proven, and failed, such as curb extensions, speed tables, etc. He encouraged commissioners to visit the link and take a look.

He has two motions he would like to present, the first being to bring in someone from Minneapolis to speak to the Traffic Commission. There's also an advisory committee from the University of Minnesota that would be good to try to bring in. The second motion would be to recommend the City Council consider those other traffic slowing alternatives at the discussion in April, the document from the state being one of the items for review.

Ciesynski stated sidewalks are a great idea but as an example, we spent \$3 million on a bridge at 49<sup>th</sup> and Central Aves for students to use so they would be safe, yet they still cross at the street level where it says "Do No Cross." We can have all the sidewalks in the world but if people don't use them they won't do any good. People also continue to jaywalk. Some of the fatalities in Columbia Heights involved pedestrians wearing dark clothing at night and they couldn't be seen. As a driver he would feel horrible if he hit someone he couldn't see. People need to be diligent with wearing reflective clothing at night so they can be seen.

Davis advised that the current pedestrian bridge replaced the first one and the reason it was built in the first place was because a child was killed at the corner. There are no stairs due to ADA compliance making it a quarter mile long. It's unfortunate that it did not include stairs for everyone else because it is a very, very long bridge. Also, Central Avenue is a MnDOT road and they probably don't want to stop all traffic.

Davis added that in regard to Hart Blvd, his parents live there and it's a particularly bad intersection because of the slope and the curves around it. He thinks the city previously looked at Hart Blvd as a road that could accommodate a trail. Residents there like to go for walks but there's only one-half block of

sidewalk. Historically he thinks that sidewalks have always been left up to the neighborhoods that want or don't want them and residents have typically said they don't want them due to the extra cost of building the sidewalk. If there is a neighborhood that wants sidewalks that's fine, but it should be more than a block or half a block or there's no benefit, unless you build a network in a certain area if the residents are in favor of it. But this is something for the City Council to decide. He's open to discussion.

Finkelson would like to bring someone in from Minneapolis. There is a Minneapolis Vision Zero website that shows projects they've done. One objection he received via email was related to cost. However, there are bollard-type curb extensions that cost less than \$2,000 along with a whole range items. Most of them are not extremely expensive or permanent. Minneapolis could talk about the projects they've done and the results.

Ciesynski is concerned about snow removal if we put up bollards. Would the snow be hand shoveled or would the bollards be removed for the winter? Davis agrees; there are already spots Public Works has trouble getting through with their equipment.

Finkelson advised he can email Minneapolis or the U of M on behalf of the Traffic Commission to see if someone can come in.

Motion by Finkelson for permission to contact the City of Minneapolis on behalf of the Traffic Commission and ask a representative to come and discuss Vision Zero at the next meeting. Seconded by Ciesynski . Motion passed unanimously.

## **REPORTS**

### **CITY ENGINEER**

Items were moved to New Business and have been discussed.

### **POLICE CHIEF**

Captain Markham wanted to touch on administration tickets discussed at the last meeting. The 2- 6 AM parking tickets are being issued on admin tags. Police were also issuing all other citations with admin tags but then the state said they couldn't do this. He just wanted to pass this information along.

He also wanted to advise that he thinks the fatal accident on Hart Blvd mentioned earlier was several years back and involved someone fleeing the police. The driver went off the road and into the pond, so that one may not be specifically intersection related. He'll look into it.

### **COMMISSIONERS**

Finkelson commented on the stop sign request that was denied because the commission followed the MUTCD guidelines. He feels commissioners denied this request because they thought they had to. The Traffic Commission only advises the City Council so commissioners should not be afraid to vote for or against something. Nothing is put into place without City Council approval. Davis recognizes the Traffic Commission is an advisory to the City Council but his understanding was that their advice had to be consistent with the guidelines, not just their opinion or what they would like in these types of situations. Young advised the Traffic Commission can certainly make a recommended motion that does not agree

with staff's recommended motion. When this happens it is presented to the City Council as a recommended motion and then an alternate motion. So if the Traffic Commission passes something that does not match what staff recommends, both motions are presented to the City Council. However, Young definitely recommends following the MUTCD guidelines.

The request for stop signs was appealed at the January 10, 2022 council meeting. The City Council did not take any action on the appeal but requested a map of stop and yield signs throughout the city for their April work session. Finkelson and Davis feel more information regarding the reason why the request was denied should have been in the body of the council letter. Finkelson feels the Traffic Commission should recommend that the City Council take into consideration the different alternatives of speed control besides stop signs. Davis advised he will look at the email link to get a better idea of what's effective and if we can afford to make those changes.

Schluender announced he is resigning as Chair of the Commission. He also suggested that commissioners discuss the possibility of having the chairperson elected annually. He would like to get this on the agenda for the next meeting.

Mayor Simula advised she had spoken with Kevin Hansen, City Engineer, regarding 38<sup>th</sup> Ave and Hart Blvd. There's no light by the park and it's a very dark corner. He advised that when Minneapolis does 37<sup>th</sup> Ave they will be performing electrical work and even though this corner is not on 37<sup>th</sup> Ave, it is on the plan to be looked at.

She also had a conversation with MnDOT regarding Central Avenue. In 2023 they plan to start putting in temporary bumpouts. These are plastic objects that cars can run over and they bounce back. MnDOT puts these out first where they want to direct traffic instead of pouring concrete to see how drivers respond. This shows if this is a good way for them to be working on Central Ave to slow things down and make it a better thoroughfare.

Captain Markham advised that he and the City Engineer have a meeting with MnDOT on January 25<sup>th</sup> and they plan to hold a public meeting at the library sometime in February. The meeting will touch on what the mayor just discussed. This will go back to the Central and University Ave corridor study that was done a few years back and what MnDOT has been doing to try to remedy some of the problems. The bumpouts are one of them. The presentation at the library will focus on the projects that they've done and future projects. Captain Markham will be letting everyone know about this as well.

Young advised there is a bumpout on the west side of 39<sup>th</sup> Ave for southbound traffic. This is an example of one spot; staff may try this at other locations. Mayor Simula wanted to clarify that the bumpouts are more for pedestrian safety versus parking. There's more of a curb and locations are based on the rapid bus transit that's being put in.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Motioned by Schluender, seconded by Davis to adjourn the meeting at 7:06 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.