



TRAFFIC COMMISSION

City Hall—Council Chambers, 590 40th Ave NE

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

6:00 PM

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Schluender 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

GUEST SPEAKER

Sara Ion, City Clerk / Council Secretary

Sara gave a brief refresher on meeting attendance/open meeting laws for commission members.

CHAIRPERSON APPOINTMENT

Chairperson Schluender has resigned as Chair of the Commission.

Motion by Finkelson to nominate Adam Davis as the new chairperson, seconded by Schluender. Nomination accepted by Davis. Motion by Schluender to implement nomination immediately. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Ciesynski to nominate Jared Finkelson as Vice Chair of the Commission, seconded by Davis. Motion passed unanimously.

APPROVE MINUTES

Motion by Davis, seconded by Schluender, to table acceptance of the March 15, 2022 minutes until the next meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

CONTINUE DISCUSSION ON TRAFFIC AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

At the March meeting commissioners agreed to table reducing the speed limit on city streets until the April meeting.

Finkelson advised he pulled data from MnDOT regarding reducing speed limits. Excluding data from 2020-21, which is preliminary, the data shows that from 2011-2019 approximately 48% of all crashes occurred on city or municipal state aid roads. He doesn't have the criteria for what MnDOT categorizes as serious crashes but out of 15 serious crashes, six were on city streets and two on municipal state aid roads, which is just over half of the streets under the City of Columbia Heights jurisdiction. He would like to make a

recommendation to the City Council to adopt a 20-25mph maximum speed limit. The 20-25mph would be consistent with the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Per Vision Zero lowering the speed limit does have some effect on slowing down traffic. Feels this would set the expectation for city staff when redesigning streets to keep the speed limit lower for people to be safe.

Davis asked Mayor Simula if there has been further discussion since the MnDOT meeting about what direction the City Council wants to take regarding the speed limit. She advised she wasn't at the work session but her notes indicate that for the most part the council was okay with MnDOT's presentation, but they still want to hear from the community. One councilmember was hoping for more traffic slowdown on Central Ave. There have been five accidents in the last three weeks on Central Ave. A PEL study was done two years ago before knowledge of the new apartment buildings that does not reflect the new data. Davis stated the recent accidents seem to be concentrated within a 4-block area that has no additional pedestrian lighting. This area has dark zones outside of the LED lights making it difficult to see pedestrians, especially if they're not right at the corner. He feels the LED lighting we've added is brighter but is more concentrated making it difficult to see outside of that zone. He would like the Traffic Commission to ask the council to look into some type of additional lighting in this area. North of 45th Ave is so wide that having only mid-block lighting is not adequate, coupled with coming from a 40mph speed limit. He feels this is a big enough concern to address now and not wait for a grant for lighting. He also asked about the pedestrian bump outs and where these would be placed on Central Ave. He feels 45th Ave to 49th Ave would be the most beneficial but is unsure of the Metro Transit using the shoulders as bus stops. Finkelson advised there is a list in the presentation or the risk assessment, but it only goes up to 45th Ave. Ciesynski questioned that since Central Ave is a state road, would MnDOT let the city install more lighting. Young advised they would, but MnDOT would need to be involved.

Motion by Davis to request the City Council consider adding additional basic or temporary lighting on Central Ave between 43rd and 47th Aves to increase public safety. Seconded by Finkelson. Motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Finkelson to recommend the City Council adopt a 20-25mph speed limit on city streets. Schluender stated he is in favor of this motion but thinks it should be an agenda item for the next meeting and the commission should try to get citizen input for discussion. Davis agrees more public input would be helpful and more valuable to the council. He would like a tiered speed limit of 20-25-30mph for different types of roads. Finkelson and Davis asked how to attain public attendance i.e., publicize a meeting. The City Clerk advised she would need to follow up on this as far as restrictions, jurisdiction of the commission, etc.

Motion by Davis to direct staff to explore how the Traffic Commission can hold a public hearing regarding a potential tiered speed limit of 20-25-30mph on local roads. Seconded by Ciesynski. Schluender added that it would be useful to include in the agenda packet a synopsis of what the legislation passed down to local entities, including the state statute referencing the guidelines and ability of the Traffic Commission, so the public understands where this is coming from. Motion passed unanimously.

The City Clerk advised she needs to research if the Traffic Commission has the authority to call for a public hearing regarding this item. There is a difference between a public meeting and a public hearing. A public hearing must be posted to the City's website and published in the city's legal newspaper. A public meeting can be posted on the website, commissioners can also have conversations with residents. Mayor Simula

advised commissioners can promote a public meeting on social media, i.e., there is a meeting on Tuesday, we'd like input, and list what the meeting is about on the agenda. Commissioners can also talk to neighbors. Commissioners agreed to be more specific on the next agenda regarding the speed limit in hope of obtaining more public input.

Davis asked for any information regarding the 25mph in St. Anthony. Young spoke with Zach Lunderberg, the St. Anthony Public Works Superintendent. He stated that when they first made the change they received some negative social media comments, but nothing major that needed to be addressed formally, and operationally everything seems to be going fine. Captain Markham exchanged emails with the St. Anthony Police Captain. He didn't have any hard data but stated with the change to the interior streets there seems to be fewer traffic complaints. They also installed digital speed display signs on Silver Lake Road at 31st Ave and on 37th Ave by Wilshire Elementary School with no strong objections from residents. Captain Markham is unaware if St. Anthony is collecting any hard data.

NEW BUSINESS

None

REPORTS

City Engineer

The Central Ave traffic signals scheduled for painting are at 44th, 45th, 47th, 49th and 52nd Avenues. The signal at 50th Ave is fairly new and it's anticipated that the signal on Central and 40th Aves will be replaced within the next 10 years. MnDOT's new standard is to put up galvanized poles. It is up to the City if they want them painted and to provide the funding. The poles that are being painted are at the City's request and the City is funding this. Davis asked if the new signal on 40th Ave will have the flashing arrow, Young advised it will. He also questioned if there will be a longer walk time. Young advised studies are done prior to the signal replacement projects and we will know at that time. Davis also asked if the lighted street sign will be replaced. Young advised all new signals will have LED lights, so she anticipates when 40th is redone the new signal will have LED lights.

LRRB (Local Road Research Board) studies are underway. This shows that other cities are dealing with the same issues as the Traffic Commission, i.e., the impact of speed limits, factors that influence vehicles stopping for pedestrians, impact of warning devices. All these studies are underway; some will be done in 2023 and others in 2024. These studies are not specific to Central Ave, they're general.

Young asked what commissioners envision the May meeting to entail and what they are looking for from staff. Davis advised one item is the public meeting regarding the speed limit. He also wanted to provide some feedback on 37th Ave but needs more time to review. Ciesynski asked about the time frame for a public meeting notice. Young advised a public meeting notice needs to be posted three days before the meeting and does not require legal publication. For a public hearing, commissioners would need to formally call for a public hearing and a legal public hearing notice would need to be published a minimum of 10 days prior to the hearing date. Schluender suggested specifying this agenda item as lowering the city speed limit to 20mph so the public is aware this is coming up and if interested can attend the meeting. Commissioners can also assist with spreading this information to residents. After this public meeting commissioners can vote on the speed limit. If citizens know ahead of time from social media, etc. and are interested they will attend the meeting. Nekora agrees with this suggestion. Otherwise, commissioners will need to wait until

the June meeting and then it will be getting into summer. Commissioners agreed to put reducing city speed limits on the May agenda and to spread the word via social media and/or talking to neighbors. Young and the City Clerk will work together on what can be placed on the city website to publicize the meeting.

Police Chief

Captain Markham advised the Police Department is very much aware of the traffic issues on Central Ave lately and is undertaking extra patrol. They are concerned about the crashes.

Captain Markham asked the Traffic Commission to consider one speed limit throughout the city versus tiered limits. Currently if you're on a residential street you know it's 30mph. If you're on a residential street and you need to guess between 10-15-20-30mph it may create confusion for drivers and is definitely harder to enforce, i.e., if there are three different speed limits within a three-quarter mile stretch. Schluender advised Minneapolis and St. Paul put up entrance signs that say 20mph unless otherwise posted. From what he understands, it is the intent of the legislative action that a city can lower the speed limit to 20mph and then if wanted, can designate the speed limit on an arterial road to 25mph. Or cities can take the approach that St. Anthony did and have a citywide speed limit of 25mph.

Captain Markham agreed with Davis about the lighting on 47th Ave, it's very hard to see pedestrians, especially if they're dressed in dark clothing. Another thing that needs to be looked at is bus stops. Is it necessary to have a bus stop on every block or is better to control them. It would be better for bus stops to be located at controlled intersections so pedestrian must use the crosswalk at the light, making things safer and easier to control. Police is currently working on this in the background with MnDOT and Zero Death.

Ciesynski asked about Columbia Academy-- parents are taking up the only through lane for traffic. Captain Markham stated he has been dealing with this traffic issue all year and working with the academy to try to keep the loop drop-off moving. He has received numerous complaints but does not know how else to improve the situation. There is a high volume of car traffic, more parents pick up and drop off. Police has CSO's present mornings and evenings, and the school district has three officers directing. They continue to tweak the situation; the flow has improved but it's not ideal. They are doing the best they can.

Finkelson questioned enforcement of drivers that fail to yield to pedestrians. Captain Markham advised they have run a program for several years and used community outreach to educate pedestrians. Pedestrians and drivers are equally at fault, it's a combination problem. Before COVID they were carrying out enforcement of both vehicle and pedestrian traffic and providing educational handouts to each.

Davis questioned removal of certain bus stops to control pedestrian crossing. Captain Markham explained this was a goal prior to COVID but at this point it's at the control of Metro Transit; once they're on board they will try to move forward. Schluender advised the "10" line is being converted to the "F" line through the BRT and there will be less stops. Captain Markham stated the bus stop that's problematic is at 46-1/2 Ave. On Central Ave, 45th to 47th Ave is uncontrolled so a pedestrian can cross the street anywhere legally and there's also bad lighting. If a northbound bus drops someone off, that person may try to dart across Central Ave towards Hilltop. These are a couple of the west to east issues. There's definitely room for improvement in that area.

Finkelson asked about making the intersections at 46th and 46-1/2 Aves safer for pedestrians, even without a bus stop. There's still a lot of pedestrians that will using that area and he feels we should focus our energy

on making these intersections safe for crossing the street. Captain Markham advised that a pedestrian crossing at 43rd Ave is \$300,000. He's doing the best he can from the enforcement side with what he has to work with. We need to develop a relationship with MTC and try to get something done there such as lighting and traffic control devices, but this is a much bigger process.

Ciesynski stated that the bus stops were a big selling point when they built the multi-units at the old K-Mart site, as to quick access to the downtown bus line, so removing these may cause some discontent. Davis is concerned that removing bus stops and implementation of the "F" line may cause accessibility issues and increase the distance seniors need to walk to the bus stop, making it less feasible for them to use it.

Captain Markham advised that from 47th to 49th Ave some people use the 49th Ave walk bridge and others just dart across Central Ave if they're trying to catch the bus. If there were planters in-between this area it would make it more difficult to cross the street, so you would be controlling the pedestrian traffic which would reduce the likelihood of a crash. Mayor Simula added that if the bus dropped pedestrians at the traffic light they would cross at the traffic light, which would be the safest place, instead of in the middle of the block. We currently have two mid-block bus stops. It's not about removing the bus stops but relocating them to drop people off at the light. She is taking notes and reporting back to MnDOT with the BRT to ensure that the bus stop is at a safe place to cross. Davis advised people don't like to take the corners, they'll take the diagonal whenever possible, whether it's a bus stop or just crossing the street in general. Captain Markham agrees, they'll always take the shortest route. That's why he feels barriers on Central Ave would make it more difficult for pedestrians to just shoot across. Finkelson asked about the legalities of crossing the street. Captain Markham explained that at controlled intersections such as 44th and 45th Aves, you must cross at the light, but 47th Ave is not controlled so people can cross wherever they want. This is not much different than the Safe Systems program Minneapolis has run, Crime Prevention through Environmental Design; through environmental design you're trying to safely move people to an area where they're not going to get hit by cars. It's not about taking away accessibility. Finkelson feels we should use environmental controls to slow down traffic to make it safe to cross the street. Captain Markham advised that moving a bus stop one-half block and having a traffic light to cross the street is safer for pedestrians. Mayor Simula added this includes traffic speeds, the two work together. Finkelson feels that because of the restaurants and businesses on Central Ave people are still going to cross at 46th and 46-1/2 Aves. Mayor Simula advised all options will be discussed.

Commissioners

Schluender stated that draft of the website changes that includes links to the maps looks really nice.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Adams, seconded by Schluender to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.