



TRAFFIC COMMISSION - PUBLIC HEARING

City Hall—Council Chambers, 590 40th Ave NE

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

6:00 PM

UNAPPROVED 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
Sue Schmidtbauer, Administrative Assistant

Council Liaison: Amáda Márquez Simula (via Zoom)

APPROVE MINUTES

1. Motioned by Davis, seconded by Ciesynski, to approve the minutes of October 19, 2021 as presented.
Motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

2. REQUEST FOR MODIFICATION TO THE TWO HOUR PARKING ZONE IN FRONT OF 3932 CENTRAL AVENUE

Residents Present: Maria Davis, 3932 Central Ave Marla Dotson, 3932 Central Ave (via Zoom)
Fatemeh Rabon, 3928 Central Ave Ramona Anderson, 4132 Stinson Blvd

Commissioner Davis is requesting the two hour parking restriction in front of the apartment building at 3932 Central Avenue be modified or removed due to lack of tenant parking spaces.

There are 22 units in the apartment building and only 11 parking spots, one being handicapped. Two hour parking is posted on the west side of Central Avenue from 37th Avenue to 40th Avenue. Tenants are able to park in the parking ramp at 4025 Van Buren Street. However, when the ramp is closed for maintenance or other reasons, tenants are left in a difficult position.

Commissioner Davis stated that per city code rental properties must have enough parking for all their tenants. However, this apartment building is basically the only significant residence within the downtown district and when it was built in the 1980's the parking was to be shared as a zone. So the building has 22 units but only 10 parking spots and one handicapped spot. The parking lot is extremely cramped and does not have a turnaround. If you're in the last slot you need to back all the way out. The two hour parking zone in front of the building is for all the adjacent businesses. Several residents have been ticketed and he is looking for a better parking solution. Davis does live at this apartment building so is very familiar with the situation. Because the apartment building is located within the business district, the City has allowed use of the municipal parking ramp on 40th and Van Buren Street for additional parking, but there are no options for overnight parking.

Fatemeh Rabon has a hair salon at 3928 Central Avenue. She does not want “no parking” on her side of the street as this will cause even more parking problems for her business. Most of her clients are elderly and some are handicapped. She wants to make it as convenient and safe as possible for them to visit her business. She feels the two hour parking should remain. She has a small business and during the winter the businesses are responsible for cleaning and shoveling their front sidewalk. During a snow emergency cars are often left on the street causing snow buildup in front of her salon creating cleanup and liability for her. She opposes assigning parking space to the apartment building next door because it will take away parking for businesses. The street is public property. She also has safety concerns that she did not want to discuss at the meeting.

Maria Davis lives at 3932 Central Avenue and stated there is very little parking. She understands this has more to do with the apartment complex but agrees with Ms. Rabon that vehicles left on the street in the winter cause a hazard. The plows need to go around the cars, which leaves snow piles in front of their driveway and/or Ms. Rabon’s business. She questioned if this hearing is for the entire block of 39th Avenue or just in front of the apartment building. Young advised the entire block is two hour parking. The hearing is for modification to the two hour parking just in front of the building. Ms. Davis asked if it would be possible to modify the hours for parking to two hours during business hours and then to four hours after business hours. She wants to respect the local businesses and does not want to take parking away from them. Schluender asked if the city-owned municipal lot, which is closer than the ramp, is available for tenants--Davis advised it is not and this lot also has a two hour parking restriction. Ms. Davis asked about the library parking lot. Young advised that per the Public Works Director this would not be possible due to liability issues. Davis thought that the theater and the church had that agreement. Young advised there is an agreement between the church and the theater but it does not include the library. Ms. Davis asked about overnight parking. Young stated on street parking is limited to six consecutive hours per city ordinance; she’s unsure if this applies to Central Avenue. Ms. Davis would like to negotiate overnight parking in front of the apartment building. Ms. Rabon feels two hour parking is more than enough.

Marla Dotson is a tenant at 3932 Central Avenue and just moved in last year. She stated the limited parking has been quite an issue. She was recently presented with a large vehicle and the space in the lot is small with no place to back up, especially in winter. If you have an incident the barrier only comes up a couple feet and there is a 20 foot drop. She incurs anxiety wondering if she will get a parking space and knowing she could get a ticket if parked on the street. She’s already received a ticket and was almost towed. The stress of getting in and out of the parking lot without hitting anyone causes her anxiety. Maneuvering in this small lot also puts a lot of wear and tear on her vehicle. She feels the parking restriction in front of the building should be increased so tenants have the option to park in front of the building without fear of getting a ticket.

Schluender asked if the parking is assigned. Davis advised its first come first serve. Not all tenants have a car but when he comes home at night he doesn’t know if he’ll have a parking spot or not. There are quite a few residents with physical challenges that make travel to and from the ramp difficult, especially if carrying groceries. Schluender asked if the building owner has negotiated for overnight parking with other private property owners nearby, similar to the theater and church agreement. Davis advised they came to the public market first because of the zoning.

Davis asked Captain Markham about parking permits. He knows these doesn't apply to rentals because they are required to have adequate parking for tenants, but he feels this is an exception because the apartment building is in the downtown district. Captain Markham advised they enforce the ordinances that are set by council and there is no exception for rental property. Davis and Ms. Rabon stated there are cars parked for days at a time but they are reluctant to call these in. Ms. Dotson stated if you don't live at the residence it's hard to understand the situation. As a woman parking by herself, with her own physical challenges, along with it becoming dark earlier and winter on the way, makes parking in the ramp concerning. She feels it would be very helpful to have the option to park in front of the building after business hours. Schluender advised that due to the 6 hour parking ordinance, overnight parking is not allowed on any street. Captain Markham advised Central Avenue is a state highway and is plowed by MnDOT. He's not aware of any overnight parking allowed on this road. Young is also unsure of any restrictions on Central Avenue. Ms. Davis advised that Ms. Rabon's business is open every day of the week. Schluender questioned the benefit of the modified parking seeing there's no overnight parking. Davis stated it would be helpful when having guests over. Ciesynski asked about apartment parking only or business parking only signage. Young stated this is not allowed on public streets.

Captain Markham advised the city is in the process of repairing and upgrading the Van Buren parking ramp with surveillance cameras, LED lights, lighting going into the alley and pedestrian alley, new elevators, etc. The city does plan on using the ramp for overflow parking and is investing in it.

Young is unsure if overnight parking is allowed on a trunk highway; however, the city can modify the length of time for parking. Visitors and residents could then park longer after 5 pm. There would still be no overnight parking allowed. Ms. Rabon stated her business is open until 7. Young stated the entire block should be changed, not just part of it. One option is for the commission to come to a decision regarding the parking designation and then re-notify the businesses with their recommendations. Schluender feels longer parking after 5 pm should not affect the businesses. Changing the parking restrictions should solve some of the problem but will not resolve the overnight parking matter, which would require special treatment.

Captain Markham advised 41st Avenue to 39th Avenue has limited parking and businesses. Some businesses use up more parking than others, that's why parking is enforced by the police. They receive complaints but it's difficult to enforce parking restrictions to ensure equal parking in front of each business. People also forget that the ramp is available. The Police Department does not have an opinion regarding the signage; it's how to enforce it equally. Young advised 40th to 41st Avenue is signed one hour parking 8 am – 5 pm, so the commission could consider 2 hour parking 8 am - 5 pm from 39th to 40th Avenue. Schluender feels this would be a fairly modest change. It would also trigger a public hearing that would generate more feedback from other people in the area. He does agree with being consistent.

Motion by Davis to call for a public hearing on January 18, 2022 for modification of the two hour parking zone on the 3900 block of Central Avenue with proposed two hour parking from 8 am to 5 pm. Seconded by Schluender. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

3. REQUEST TO REVIEW YIELD SIGNS AT THE INTERSECTION OF 7TH STREET AND 41ST AVENUE

At the October Traffic Commission meeting, Commissioner Davis requested accident information for the intersection of 7th Street and 41st Avenue.

Captain Markham provided the requested accident information. There was one accident in 2017, one in 2018, and one in 2021. This particular intersection does not meet the guidelines for stop signs. Finkelson asked what signalized area means under the MUTCD guidelines. Young stated she considers a signalized area one with traffic signals, not stop signs, versus an uncontrolled intersection. For example: Central Avenue has intersections that do not have signals. If MnDOT were to consider putting signals at those locations and temporarily put up stop signs until the signals went in, this would be traffic control in a signalized area. She will look for more information that defines this better.

Motion by Schluender to close this item. Seconded by Nekora. Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

4. REQUEST FOR STOP SIGNS AT THE INTERSECTION OF 4TH STREET AND 46TH AVENUE
REQUEST FOR STOP SIGNS AT THE INTERSECTION OF 4TH STREET AND 47TH AVENUE

Residents Present: Shahzad Ali, 4621 4th St LaLa Michels (via Zoom)
 Ed Higgins (via Zoom) Dianne Hanson and Larry Weiser, 4615 4th St

Mr. Shahzad Ali has requested stop signs at the intersections of 4th Street at 46th Avenue and 47th Avenue. The concern is accidents at the intersections.

Staff reviewed the visibility at the intersection of 4th Street and 46th Avenue and found it to be somewhat limited because of the hill in the southeast quadrant of the intersection. Visibility at the intersection of 4th Street and 47th Avenue was found to be good. A moderate rise in ground elevation is present in the southeast quadrant of the intersection, similar to many intersections in Columbia Heights.

Mr. Shahzad Ali lives at 4621 4th Street. There is a stop sign at 45th and 48th Avenues and 4th Street but there is no traffic control at 46th and 47th Avenues. Residents in the area stop at these intersections even though there are no stop signs. Mr. Ali went to 23 houses in the neighborhood, 6 did not answer the door; the remaining 17 were all in favor of a controlled intersection at both 46th and 47th Avenues. Some of these people stated they have tried to get stop signs at these intersections before. He has witnessed two accidents on 4th Street and 47th Avenue, one in 2019 and one in 2020, both in the summertime. The last accident that occurred flipped a truck on its side and knocked out a fire hydrant, the summer before a car was T-boned.

Dianne Hanson and Larry Weiser have lived in Columbia Heights for 30 years and there have been several accidents during that time. In one a car was pushed up into the neighbor's yard. In another a car was T-boned so strongly that it was flipped on its top with the wheels spinning in the air. This accident prompted Ms. Hanson to write a letter to the mayor, but the stop sign request was denied due to there being too many stop signs in the area; which often causes drivers to disregard them. They have grandchildren and there are also a lot of young people and children moving into the neighborhood. There are no warning

signs. There used to be dip in the road on 4th Street that would slow traffic down but now the dip is gone and people charge through. She is worried that there will be a horrible accident someday. Mr. Weiser stated things have changed over the years and he thinks this is a good recommendation. He supports Shahzad and the other neighbors who are in favor of this. There are also two apartment buildings in the area so there are lots of visitors in the neighborhood.

Davis asked Mr. Ali what direction residents feel the stop sign should be placed. Mr. Ali stated from his research traffic should be stopped north and south.

Davis stated these are the only two intersections in the area that are uncontrolled, but unfortunately we need to follow the MUTCD guidelines and this intersection does not meet the guidelines. Schluender stated he would like to see a recommendation to the council to eliminate uncontrolled intersections within a year in the hopes that this may deter the number of accidents and provide a more systematic approach to traffic control. Finkelson would definitely like to see a more systematic approach to stop signs. He also feels having accident reports for adjacent intersections would be helpful. Nekora stated the commission receives more and more stop sign requests and it's hard to stay we can't do much about it because there have not been enough accidents. Young advised the City Council has more leeway, they can't change the guidelines but they do have the authority to put in stop signs.

Schluender advised Mr. Ali that unfortunately there have not been enough accidents for this intersection to meet the guidelines so the request will need to be denied. Mr. Ali questioned that being these are just guidelines can the Traffic Commission break them, his neighbors would all agree that the stop signs should be put in. Young advised the City Council has some immunity available to them that the rest of us do not. If the Traffic Commission denies the request, the petitioner has the right to appeal it to the City Council.

Motion by Schluender to deny the request for stop signs at the intersection of 4th Street and 46th Avenue and deny the request for a stop sign at 4th Street and 47th Avenue. Seconded by Ciesynski. Motion passed unanimously.

Schluender advised Mr. Ali this can be appealed to the City Council. Young advised Mr. Ali she will send him an email with the information.

REPORTS

CITY ENGINEER

None

POLICE CHIEF

None

COMMISSIONERS

Schluender stated he will send something out about the systematic approach to stop signs so it can be discussed at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Schluender, seconded by Ciesynski to adjourn the meeting at 7:27 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.