

ASTORIA TRAFFIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Astoria City Hall

October 27, 2015

CALL TO ORDER:

President Pearson called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present: President David Pearson, Vice President McLaren Innes, Kent Easom, Sean Fitzpatrick, Daryl Moore, and Frank Spence. Jan Mitchell arrived at approximately 7:10 pm.

Staff Present: Community Development Director Kevin Cronin, Special Projects Planner Rosemary Johnson, City Engineer Jeff Harrington, Engineer Technician Steve Ruggles, and Consultant Chris Maciejewski, DSK Associates. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

The Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (TSC) proceeded to Item 4: Approval of Minutes.

ENGINEER REPORT:

This item was addressed immediately following Item 4: Approval of Minutes.

Item 3(a): Traffic Safety Related Items Update

Engineer Harrington presented updates on the following:

- 3rd and Bond Streets - The installation of parking restriction signs will keep large vehicles away from the intersection and add sight distance. The work will be done soon, as Staff is backlogged with CSO work.
- Columbia Memorial Hospital (CMH) Access Management Project- Staff vacated 23rd Street to accommodate the project and helped CMH get funding from Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) through an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) between ODOT, CMH and the City of Astoria. ODOT will provide \$140,000 to close 23rd Street and widen 27th Street. The abandoned gas station will become a parking lot. Staff is reviewing the engineering designs for the project, but is unsure when funding would be received or when construction would begin.

Item 3(b): "Right Turn Permitting Without Stopping" Traffic Study

Engineer Harrington explained that Mayor LaMear and City Council directed Staff to study routes that allow right turns without stopping at the intersection of 8th and Irving. Staff hired Chris Maciejewski of DKS Associates, who completed Astoria's Traffic Safety Study, to conduct an evaluation within the context of work that had already been completed and consider how this issue would fit into the Transportation System Plan (TSP). The Police, Fire, and Public Works Departments have worked with Mr. Maciejewski on this study and they believe their recommendations will improve the situation while maintaining traffic volume flows through the corridor, which is a primary route for the Fire Department. The study considered emergency response needs and tourist traffic.

Director Cronin noted that Commissioner Jan Mitchell had arrived.

Chris Maciejewski, DKS Associates, said allowing a right turn without stopping can be confusing for visitors and Staff was concerned about possible safety issues. His first step was to review open house and survey documentation related to the TSP to see if this issue had come up or if the TSP process had missed something. However, he found no mention of this issue in the TSP documents. Safety was considered first. He reviewed crash records and found that all of the intersections along the corridor had crash rates low enough, less than one crash per million vehicles, that there were no significant safety issues to explore. Therefore, the study addressed potential driver confusion. He considered the following options as potential resolutions to the traffic issues:

- Option 1: Remove "right turn permitted without stopping" signs, requiring drivers to stop before proceeding. This would cause increased traffic delays along the key route up and over the hill and safety issues during inclement weather. The Fire Department opposed additional stops through the area as well.

- Option 2: Stop at all approaches at each intersection. This would add even more traffic delays than Option 1. The study found that volumes through this corridor are low. Drivers tend to ignore traffic controls when there are too many along low volume routes, so this option could create a more dangerous situation.
- Option 3: Remove some of the existing stop signs and use striping to regulate right and left turns. While this treatment is allowed in this situation, State laws are not clear about how the Police Department should enforce the laws.
- Option 4: Retain existing stop signs, replace the "right turn permitted without stopping" signs with "except right turn" signs, according to current standards, and add striping along through routes.
- He showed photographs of what Option 4 would look like at the intersections of 8th and Irving; 15th and Niagara; 8th and Niagara; 7th and Niagara, 14th and Jerome; 15th and Jerome; and 11th and Irving. Option 4 considers traffic flows, maintains the area as a through route through Astoria, and accommodates Fire and Police Department needs.

Engineer Harrington added that at 8th and Irving, the downhill yield sign on 8th Street would be replaced with a stop sign. An advanced warning sign would also be installed to prevent accidents. Staff has ideas about how to enhance signs along the route, so the details are still being refined. If this plan is implemented, the route would be striped with paint the first year, and then striped with thermal plastic.

Vice President Innes was concerned about the recommended striping for 7th and Niagara, which she believed could confuse drivers. Mr. Maciejewski explained that the area stripped with crossed yellow lines is an island that drivers should not drive on. The TSP suggests this corridor be narrowed in the future, so those stripped areas could become physical islands or be used for a different traffic control. Engineer Harrington added that a channelized island is a lot more forgiving than mountable curbs or a solid island.

Commissioner Moore asked if Staffs' goal was to make improvements. He wanted to know why Staff had not considered taking no action at all. Mr. Maciejewski explained that his objective was to determine if there was a way to make the traffic laws more clear in a cost effective manner. Low crash rates indicated no action was necessary for safety purposes. His recommendation is more of an enhancement, rather than mitigation. Engineer Harrington added that doing nothing is always an option. However, formally recommending no action is usually only included in reports when the ramifications of taking no action must be implicated, as in federal environmental documents.

Commissioner Easom said he supported Option 4. He drives almost the entire route two or three times each week. He believed the route was fine and had not seen anyone fail to stop at a stop sign, so he was glad right turns without stopping would still be allowed. However, he also agreed the signs needed to be clarified.

Commissioner Mitchell said Astoria is unique, but Astoria does what works. People do speed, but not so much in areas that are narrow or have on-street parking. She is familiar with all of the intersections on the route and believed no action could be a viable option. However, Option 4 is a very good solution for clarifying the signage.

Commissioner Moore asked if there was room for two lanes at the bottom of 7th Street where it intersects with Highway 202. Engineer Harrington said technically, there was not enough room to add a right turn lane. Each lane must be 12 feet wide, as measured from the center line to the curb. The road is about 3 inches too narrow to accommodate two 12-foot wide lanes. However, Staff will consider moving the center line to accommodate a right turn lane at that intersection.

Commissioner Easom asked why a yield sign would be added to the right turn headed north at 8th and Irving. Staff explained that drivers should be looking to the left at oncoming east-bound traffic. There is already a yield sign at this location that applies to drivers turning and passing straight through the intersection. The recommended application of the yield sign will clarify that it only applies when turning.

President Pearson called for public comments on the traffic study. There were none.

Commissioner Easom moved that the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee adopt Option 4, to be implemented at all studied intersections, as recommended by the consultant, and forward the recommendation to City Council; seconded by Vice President Innes. Motion passed 6 to 1. Ayes: President Pearson, Vice President Innes, Commissioners Spence, Moore, Mitchell, and Easom. Nays: Commissioner Fitzpatrick.

The TSC proceeded to Item 5: Reports of Officers and Commissioners.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

This item was addressed immediately following Roll Call.

Commissioner Easom moved that the Traffic Safety Committee approve the minutes of July 28, 2015 as presented, seconded by Vice-President Innes. Motion passed unanimously.

The TSC proceeded to Item 3: Engineer Report.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/COMMISSIONERS:

This item was addressed immediately following Item 3: Engineer Report.

Director Cronin announced there had been an accident at the intersection of Commercial and Marine, known as the Benoit Triangle. The City received an insurance payment and redesign of the landscape island at the intersection will be complete by October 28.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick asked how the new signs recommended in the traffic study would be enforced. On a daily basis, he sees cars heading north on 11th and east on Exchange that fail to stop at the intersection of 11th and Exchange. In the last year, he has almost been hit several times by drivers who do not stop. He had planned to state his concerns at a past City Council meeting, but there were concerns about selective enforcement and fines imposed upon people who could not afford to pay them. He preferred that existing laws be enforced rather than adding additional measures. He believed laws should be enforced without worrying about the ability of people to pay. Consequences should be imposed upon those who run stop signs.

President Pearson confirmed the Police Department had conducted two crosswalk enforcement events, one in July and one in August.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick clarified he was not suggesting the Police Department had not been doing their job. When a police car was parked in front of the Senior Center, every car stopped before proceeding through the intersection. He wanted the TSC and City Council to understand that the Police Department should be able to pull people over regardless of what their income level appears to be.

Commissioner Mitchell knew someone who had recently been hit and was out of work for a couple of weeks. One vehicle failed to stop, even though other vehicles had stopped to let the pedestrian cross. There should not be any leniency for this kind of traffic violation. Astoria has developed a reputation as a pedestrian community, but pedestrians need a higher level of safety. Most people do not need to get to their destination four seconds faster.

Sergeant Aydt responded to Commissioner Fitzpatrick's comments about fines imposed on people who cannot afford to pay them. The Police Department has not changed enforcement practices and issues citations whenever necessary. A judge decides what happens after a citation is issued. The Police Department believes drivers should be cited when failing to stop at stop signs or crosswalks and enforcement has not eased or increased.

Commissioner Fitzpatrick thanked Sergeant Aydt and said he would like to see more officers, more traffic enforcement, and more tickets written. There has been discussion from certain City Council members that it would be unfair to people of lower incomes. He wanted more traffic enforcement regardless of who might be running stops signs, speeding, or driving through crosswalks while pedestrians are crossing. Sergeant Aydt said the Police Department does not pick and choose who is stopped based on cars. A driver who runs a stop sign has just as much of a chance of being stopped, whether they are driving a Mercedes or a 1979 Datsun B210. No changes have been made. As winter approaches, call loads generally slow down and traffic decreases, which he hoped would allow the department to increase its traffic enforcement abilities. During the summer, officers become frustrated when they see violations that they have no way of getting to without causing a traffic problem. Now that tourist volumes are slowing, the residents will benefit from the officers' ability to get around better.

Commissioner Mitchell asked if the municipal court offers community service requirements in lieu of fines. Sergeant Aydt said currently, the municipal court does not have a community service component. The municipal court used to offer community service when they worked with the Clatsop County Sheriff's Department. The program was discontinued at some point and he did not know if it was back up and running. He believed the program may have ended because the department could not handle the volume of participants. He did not know if Astoria could join that program or begin its own program. Community service requirements could help the Parks Department.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

President Pearson confirmed there were no public comments.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:03 pm to convene the Planning Commission meeting.

APPROVED:



Director